

SPECIAL FEATURE: Autumn 2026

A Letter to Those Who Shape the Future Naveed Idrees

To Every Aspiring Teacher

Dear Teacher,

Welcome. Welcome to the most important profession in the world. Not the most glamorous, not always the most celebrated - but the most important. Because without teachers, there are no doctors, no engineers, no artists, no scientists, no leaders. Every person who has ever changed the world sat once in a classroom, in front of someone like you.

Doctors save bodies. You save souls. And a body without a soul - without purpose, without joy, without a sense of meaning - is not a life fully lived. Remember that. Carry it with you into every classroom, every Monday morning, every difficult afternoon. What you do matters more than you will ever be able to measure.

"You are not just a teacher. You are a guardian of the human spirit."

The Noblest of Professions

Teaching is the only profession in the world whose sole purpose is the nurturing of the human mind and soul. Surgeons work on the body. Architects shape space. But you - you work on something far more extraordinary. You work on a human being in the making. A child arriving at school each morning carries within them an entire universe of potential. Your task is not merely to fill them with knowledge. Your task is to help them discover who they are.

This is a privilege. And with it comes a profound responsibility. You can set a life on a course that leads to flourishing - or, if you fail to see the whole child, you can leave parts of them behind. Do not take that lightly. But do not let it paralyse you either. Let it inspire you.

A Crisis Hidden in Plain Sight

Look around at the children in your classrooms. Many of them are struggling - not academically, but existentially. The United Kingdom has the most unhappy 10-15 year olds in the developed world, according to PISA data. Rates of anxiety, self-harm, depression, and suicide among young people are rising year on year. These are not statistics. They are children. Your children.

They sit in front of screens, consuming endlessly, producing nothing. They are disconnected from nature, from each other, from themselves. Many cannot self-regulate; many have never experienced a moment of genuine awe. They are full of information and empty of meaning. And no examination result, no league table position, no Ofsted grade can fix that.

The Dangerous Question: What Are We Measuring?

Before you teach your first lesson, I want to ask you something that will stay with you your entire career: What does success in education actually look like?

We have allowed a particular answer to dominate. Success, we are told, is grades. League tables. Compliance. Children who sit still, recall facts, and perform under exam conditions. And there is a logic to it - what gets measured gets managed. But here lies the danger.

Imagine a metal detector on a beach. It picks up metal. That is all it can detect. Does that mean nothing else exists? Of course not. The beauty of the sand, the warmth of the sun, the sound of the waves - none of these register. But they are real. They matter. They are, arguably, the whole point of being on the beach.

We have built an education system that acts like a metal detector. It measures what it can measure, and has gradually convinced itself that what it cannot measure does not matter. Motivation does not matter. Joy in learning does not matter. The capacity to wonder, to imagine, to feel - none of it matters, apparently, if it does not appear in a data set.

You must resist this. Not recklessly, not naively - but with conviction. Because the things that cannot be measured are often the things that matter most.

"When we feel what we learn, we remember it forever."

The Spiritual Curriculum: Britain's Hidden Educational Heritage

Here is something many teachers do not know: the very first duty named in the Education Act of 1944 - and repeated in 1988, 2002, and the 2014 Curriculum- is spiritual development. Not academic attainment. Not examination performance. Spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development. In that order. Spiritual first.

The current curriculum review speaks of human flourishing. And we flourish - truly flourish - only when we develop body, mind, and soul together. This is not a new idea. It is, in fact, the oldest idea in education. We have simply lost our way.

Now consider: if science could build a robot that perfectly replicated the human body and mind - one that could solve equations, write essays, pass every exam ever devised - would that robot have a soul? Would it experience wonder? Would it love? Would it grieve? Would it create something that had never existed before?

No. And that is precisely why, in the age of artificial intelligence, the most powerful device in existence is not a computer. It is the human soul. The imagination. The capacity to hold the entire universe in a single act of feeling.

Your job is to nurture that.

A Pedagogy of the Soul

So what does it mean, practically, to teach the whole child? What does it look like to develop a pedagogy of the soul?

It begins with a shift in what you pay attention to. Start scanning for joy. Not just effort, not just attainment - joy. A child who is joyful in learning is a child whose soul is alive. That child will learn. The grades will follow.

Consider these practices as your daily craft:

- ◆ Build awe and wonder into every lesson. Find what is extraordinary in the ordinary. A blade of grass. A prime number. A metaphor. The fact that the atoms in your body were forged in dying stars. You are made from cosmic dust. So are your children. Never let them forget it.
- ◆ Develop curiosity and playfulness. Questions matter more than answers. Create space for 'I wonder...' Give children room to not-know, to explore, to be wrong, to try again.
- ◆ Cultivate the imagination. Ask children to hold an image in their mind and turn it. Lead them through guided visualisations. Invite them to improvise, to invent, to make something that has never existed before. The imagination is not a luxury - it is the engine of all human progress.
- ◆ Create stillness. In a world of noise, silence is radical. Give children time to go inward. Encourage them to notice their own thoughts and feelings. The inner world is where all meaning is made.
- ◆ Connect learning to lived experience. Children do not learn what they cannot feel. When understanding lands in the body - in emotion, in memory, in sensation - it stays forever.
- ◆ Take learning outdoors. Connect children with nature. Soil under fingernails, rain on skin, the scale of the sky - these are not distractions from the curriculum. They are the curriculum.

- ◆ Make children producers, not consumers. Build making and creating into every lesson. Writing, drawing, building, composing, cooking, coding. The act of making something connects a child to their own power.
- ◆ Develop care and compassion - for self and for others. A child who is kind understands something that no examination has ever been able to test. Teach them to see each other. To listen. To ask: how are you - and mean it.
- ◆ Create agency. Do not micromanage every minute. Let children choose. Let them fail. Let them recover. Agency - the sense that what I do matters and that I have power over my own life - is the root of all confidence and resilience.
- ◆ Encourage a hobby, a craft, a passion. Something that belongs entirely to them. Something they do not do for grades or approval, but because it feeds their soul.

What Is In Your Control

You will enter schools with limited budgets, packed timetables, pressures from every direction. There will be things you cannot change - the curriculum constraints, the assessment regimes, the expectations of accountability. Do not spend your energy fighting what you cannot move.

Focus, instead, on what is entirely within your power: the inner world of the child in front of you. You cannot give them a wealthier home. You cannot undo the difficulties they carry. But you can expand their inner world. You can show them that they are connected to something bigger than themselves - that the universe flows through them, that there are no limits on what a human soul can imagine or become.

You can build wonder into a Tuesday morning. You can pause before a poem. You can ask a question that opens a mind rather than closes one. You can notice a child who is struggling and sit with them in it. These things cost nothing. They change everything.

"You are an ocean in a drop. Help your children know they are too."

One Final Question

As you prepare for your first classroom, I want to leave you with this:

Would you like to be a child in your class?

Not a high-achieving child, not a compliant child, not a child who is easy to teach. Any child. The anxious one, the disruptive one, the one who stares out of the window, the one who has forgotten their lunch, the one who nobody chose in PE.

Would they feel seen? Would they feel that the learning matters and connects to something real in their life? Would they leave your classroom knowing - even if

they couldn't say how - that they are more than a grade, more than a target, more than a data point?

If you can say yes, then you are already the teacher they need.

The first word in our duty of education - in every Act that has ever governed schools in this country - is spiritual. Not because the metaphysical is being prescribed, but because the architects of our education system knew something profound: that children are not machines to be programmed. They are souls to be awakened.

Go and awaken them.

With deep respect for the work you are about to do,

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A Fellow Believer in the Power of Education