



**EDUCATION CORNER PODCAST INTERVIEW WITH  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL - PUPIL DEVELOPMENT & WELL-BEING**

# Mr. Stuart Murphy

**FROM SURBITON HIGH SCHOOL, SURREY**

**Mr. Stuart Murphy speaks about how Surbiton High School supports both parents and children during exam periods, as well as the school's specialist pastoral care, their focus on positive psychology and developing human intelligences.**

**Children are increasingly under a lot of pressure to perform and do well academically. How are they supported through this at Surbiton High?**

It's partly about balance: I think one of the things we do well as a school is that we're well-balanced between academics and co-curricular activities in the various aspects of the school. Some schools are really good at one specific thing, and I think one of the things that makes Surbiton a good school is that we do a lot of different things and that benefits young people in the different areas they're interested in. I think the pressure exists, there's no doubt about that, and on the pastoral side of the school that's how we make our decisions to support them.

Regarding the idea of positive psychology, we have a Charter for Well-being at school, based on the work of Martin Seligman, on something



called PERMA, which is positive emotion, engagement, relationships, finding meaning and accomplishment. On the pastoral side of the school, we use that as our foundation for the decisions we make to support students. *Life is difficult, it has its ups and downs, and I think recognising that and making sure we have an ethos that sits behind all of our decision-making is one of the ways we help students get through things.* By acknowledging that it will get difficult, we've got support systems in place to make decisions that are in their best interests, that ultimately

help them to flourish - I think we see that as our goal. Someone once put it to me as: *"More days with smiles"* because it is hard sometimes. Being a young person today is harder than it's ever been, I think. I certainly know it's harder than when I was their age. Expectations are extremely high, particularly in our part of the world; we're a South West London independent school, it is a fast-paced environment, their parents are hard-working, that's our catchment. So then, there's that expectation that their children will be successful and will make the most of those

advantages. *But I think that foundation of positive psychology and making those decisions every single day - whether it's on a strategic level across the whole school or just a form tutor in a morning - is about finding the balance, it's about getting them to manage those expectations, and ultimately I think they flourish because of that, not in spite of it.* I think that's why we're successful.

**Girls can be highly competitive and grade focused, particularly as they enter senior school settings and face exams.**

**How do you use positive psychology to ensure that they do not let these issues affect them in a negative way?**

I think there's definitely some truth in that, I think 'competitive' maybe, but also they drive each other on - that's certainly what I see, it's not necessarily competition at the expense of another person. I think the best example would be more about our rowing boats than it would be about someone doing an individual competition. We're pretty good at rowing at the moment and that's a good sign of what we do well, it's everyone pulling together for the benefit of everybody. Beyond the positive psychology stuff, I think the idea of finding accomplishment and building relationships and meaning in what you do beyond your academics is really important. You know, we're achieving really good academic outcomes for pupils, but we also have a huge co-curricular programme with over 150 clubs running every week, so every



single pupil is more than just their grades. For me, I think that's probably the single most important thing about when it gets difficult and tough and they are being competitive: they are more than just the grades on the paper. So, if you're finding one subject hard or you might be better in another, at the same time you might be winning a national rowing title or a hockey competition. We're football champions at two different age groups at the moment and runners up at another, and that's national, not just independent schools. So, you've got an array of different experiences.

To be honest, the community have to get the most credit: young women can be quite mean at points when they're younger and finding their way, but it always amazes me that as they grow through the school and by the time our pupils are in Year 11, the atmosphere around the school is something to behold. The community they build is so positive because they're all in it together. Last year was a good example of that for us. I spoke to lots of people at other schools and their Year 11s were really struggling, lots of people were fraying at the seams, and I was surprised to be able to confidently say: *"Well, that's really strange, because ours are actually in a really good place! They are happy, smiling, talking to each other, encouraging each other."* The atmosphere was so positive around exam time in Year 11 last year. And then you see the results come through and all that value added and I truly believe it's a reflection of »

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that atmosphere, it’s to their credit. *They were bringing each other along, lifting each other up and doing it together rather than letting that competitive edge be the most important thing. They can all do well, it doesn’t have to be at the expense of the person sitting next to them.*

### Can you explain the work taking place at Surbiton High on developing ‘human intelligences’?

As a school we’re always trying to change the way we do things. I’ve mentioned our Charter for Well-being, we’re seven years into that now, that’s our foundation for how the pastoral side of the school works, and we’ve also got a really detailed strategy for

learning as well. The human intelligences part really comes from the way things change. From last year we started to look at artificial intelligence and the rise of AI and the use of it in schools and across society. That gave us the idea that we’re fairly secure in what we’re doing as a senior leadership team and staff. Our foundations, if you like, are secure, for example why we make our decisions. But, we also need to be forward-thinking, so we need to think about how we use artificial intelligence. Alongside that, we’re also looking at the World Economic Forum and their desirable

skills for the future, so also we’re looking to develop skills through classrooms, the classroom environment and the taught curriculum.

We’re also looking at how we can develop skills that will be important for whatever the world looks like when our students leave us - we refer to our current Year 7s as our ‘Class of 2030’.

And what will they be needing to do? *The human intelligence side is the pastoral balance to that, it’s the development of the whole person.* What

we’re really trying to do is add value to the things that we already do. So, we’ve already mentioned the co-curricular work and how big it is - everybody does it, but do young people value what it actually does for them as a person, how it helps develop different parts of their intelligence?

There’s loads of different ways of looking at intelligence, we’ve gone down the ‘multiple intelligences’ idea, which comes out of Harvard University, and the idea that we do so many different things that we want to try



and tie those things together, to help young people recognise that when you're doing a sport or co-curricular club, you're not just there because it's good for you and it's fun, but actually you're developing a different part of yourself that you don't necessarily access in the taught curriculum. The taught curriculum tends to focus on certain skills which are valued because of the education system and because of the way exams work. The taught curriculum values some skills over others and we want to go beyond that.

So, the big change this year is that in form time every morning, our pastoral teams - the tutors - have crowd-sourced amongst themselves different activities that they think might develop skills that aren't necessarily being developed throughout the rest of the school, sharing some of their wisdom. I walked into a Year 11 class last week and they're using the Pareto Principle, the 80:20 rule, to reflect on how they are using their time and the positive output of that. Are they directing their time into things that benefit them, or are they just doing the same thing over and over again? Where is their 80:20 split and what are they getting from it? So, that's happening across the whole school, using that time in form that could just be registration, notices or more traditional things that happen during registration, and instead trying to use it to get students to expand their horizons a bit and challenge and push themselves a bit to develop parts of their character that they have real strength in, but also to give them an idea of what they're good at. We're really at the beginning of that at the moment, but that's our goal for the next few years, to develop AI - artificial intelligence - alongside human intelligences and those key skills that will matter when they go past us towards university and the world of employment.

**We spoke yesterday to Dr. Kathy Weston from Tooled Up and Julia Martin, CEO of ISEB, who are now working together giving advice for parents with children taking entrance exams and supporting their mental health and well-being. Do you have advice**



### **for parents with children taking exams and how do you reinforce your work with parents at Surbiton?**

The advice I would always give everybody is that your child will end up in the school that is right for them. I think one of the most important things is finding the right school, not finding the right aspiration, and perhaps sometimes that's the parents' goal, the name and the brand of the school and what that means to them, and if we're being less negative, it's the vision, the outcome. You see the results of our school, you want your daughter to be in our school because you envisage that being the set of results your daughter will get when she leaves us in seven years' time. But I think that when it comes to exams, you just have to make sure that your child is confident. *As long as they have worked hard and have tried their best, they will be in the right place for them.*

*We would like to thank Mr. Stuart Murphy, Assistant Principal - Pupil Development & Well-being at Surbiton High School, for giving up his time to speak to us.*



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