

# PSM

SCHOOL BUSINESS ADVICE

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Why leaders need to  
talk about ethics

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HOW TO BUDGET FOR THE UNEXPECTED

## Estelle Morris

"MATs don't hold  
all the answers"



## "WE DUG DEEP"

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If an individual's every professional decision and action is held up to intense scrutiny, what will motivate them? An innate desire to do the right thing by those they work with? Or a pressure to meet standards that have been set for them, by whatever means necessary?

On page 66 of this issue, headteacher Carolyn Roberts makes the case for the why the profession needs an ethical framework to inform and guide school leaders' decision-making, at a time when official guidelines are plentiful, but meaningful discussions of 'right' versus 'wrong' are somewhat thin on the ground.

Similar to the way many have questioned the frequency and testing of children at different stages of their educational journey, you don't have to look far to find misgivings about the accountability system headteachers currently operate within. Yes, school leaders should be able to demonstrate that they're doing what's expected of them – but what if we've reached a point where the monitoring of schools is itself starting to cause problems?

Some readers may find evidence of that in Catherine Carden's account on page 12 of a school that found itself in Special Measures, and opted to go with a different route to restoring trust in its governance than one prescribed for them from above. Every school is unique, of course – there may be similar cases out there with less happier outcomes – but their story shows how powerful maintaining a sense of professional agency can be.

Every teacher and leader should want to do the best by their pupils and improve over time. The process of identifying those who don't mustn't compromise the working lives of those who do.

Enjoy the issue,

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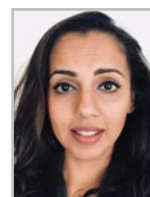
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# “The market doesn’t work in schools”

The former education secretary and Labour peer, Baroness Estelle Morris, explains why she’s trying to get more schools working together...

**You’re a co-chair of the Association of Education Partnerships, which aims to ‘Provide the local glue in a fragmented landscape’. In your view, what form does that fragmentation take?**

In one of my other roles as chair of the Birmingham Education Partnership, I’ve visited many parts of the country, talking to teachers, and have found that lots of partnerships are being built locally. Not in response to something that government or Ofsted have said, but because teachers have seen a need for it to happen.

Those partnerships are largely trying to solve problems related to fragmentation. Over the past 20 or so years there’s been a move towards autonomy, which I think is good – the notion of giving heads more power and allowing them to run their own budgets is the right thing to do. But it’s fragmented the system, so that there now aren’t many levers left that enable schools to work together, and that’s a problem.

There’s nothing wrong with competition, but educationalists know that independence and interdependence are both equally important. There is such a thing as a local school system; it’s how communities provide education for the next generation, yet we’ve arrived at a place where we’ve seen notions of locality disappear. LEAs have been pushed out of the picture in favour of MATs, which often won’t incorporate any notions of ‘the local’. Some schools’ MAT partners can be situated hundreds of miles away. I believe the government is now starting to recognise the error of that, and so are these teacher-led school partnerships, which are trying to restore and reinvent the local school system for themselves.

**What’s the AEPA’s role in this process?**

The AEPA is an organisation open to anyone to who’s formed a local partnership in order to raise educational standards in their local area. There’s no blueprint, nobody saying ‘You’ve got to do it this way’ – but there is a hunger out there among people who are keen to raise awareness of what different partnerships are doing.

**To your point about there being ‘nothing wrong with competition’ – does that not naturally give rise to a system of winners and losers?**

I mention competition because I don’t want people to think I support going back to the old days, when there was little rigour in education. I’m in favour of most of the changes brought in over the last 30 years; I don’t hold with this view that things were brilliant three decades ago and are now awful.

Competition is part of human nature, it’s something inevitable – but ‘the market’ isn’t, and it doesn’t work in schools. What the market depends on are organisations and entities that fail and get closed on the one hand, and those that are successful, grow and expand on the other. Governments can close schools which don’t improve within certain time frames, and ask other schools

to take over from them, but communities can’t lose schools without consequences. You can’t leave children in a school while it’s fading away; you have to intervene before that failure occurs, which isn’t how markets operate.

**Can you describe how some of these partnerships you’ve seen work in practice?**

Some areas have put in place fairly loose partnerships, while others have needed or wanted a much tighter arrangement. The partnerships are all school-led, but I haven’t seen any that comprise schools only – most also include an LA in some shape or form, but no one’s under any obligations. It depends on whether the LA is prepared to cede some of its power. The model works best when LAs are at the table and prepared to share some of their remaining powers with the partnership’s members.

**Does the AEPA see any prospect for MATs and LAs working together in new, more productive ways?**

We do. The government sought to address the issue of isolated schools by encouraging them to form MATs, but isolated MATs continue to present a problem. Some AEPA members are MATs which consist of between six and 10 schools, but still feel as though they’re not part of a local school system.

I’m favour of MATs, because they’re better than having schools standing alone by themselves, but they don’t provide all the answers. There has to be something in place across a community or geographical area which holds that education is a public good. If you genuinely believe that locality doesn’t matter, and that you can have a city the size of Birmingham with around 400 schools run by hundreds of providers who never talk to each other, then you wouldn’t support the AEPA. But if you believe that approach won’t work as well as having a good local school system, then I think you’ll see the AEPA as a good thing.







**You've previously spoken of the need for more pedagogical knowledge sharing throughout the system – have you been encouraged by any recent developments in this area?**

One of the good things the government did was set up the Education Endowment Foundation in 2010 – it's an organisation that's charged with finding out what works in education, but while maintaining an arms-length relationship with government, which is important. Another organisation I'm a great supporter of is researchED. It's teacher-led and teacher-run, and having been to a number of their Saturday morning conferences, I've seen how they're attracting hundreds of people who just want to know what the evidence says about what works.

**“There has to be something in place which holds that education is a public good”**

**If you could enact three major changes to the English education system tomorrow, what would they be?**

First, I'd redraw the line between politics and education, and concentrate more on the evidence of what actually works. Ministers didn't used get involved in pedagogy, and there was still plenty for them to do, but that's changed. Ministers now think it's all right to proscribe what reading scheme teachers should use – and we did it just as much as the Tories, so this isn't a party political point.

Secondly, there would be an

acknowledgement that the local matters. I'd devolve far more of the responsibilities for monitoring and raising standards from the centre to localities. I'm not a defender of LAs at any cost, but if they were good enough, I'd happy for them to do it.

Finally, I'd like see broad and balanced curriculums being delivered in really vibrant and exciting ways. Too many schools now feel that with the messages they're receiving, the pressures they're under and the resources they've got that there's no time for the arts, music, dance and sport, to say nothing of citizenship and other areas. I'd like to see parts of the curriculum be more valued than they are at present.

 [aepa.org.uk](http://aepa.org.uk)

## CAREER TIMELINE

1974	1981	1992	2001	2003	2005
Begins an 18-year secondary and sixth form teaching career	Becomes Labour Group Leader on Warwick District Council	Voted Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley	Appointed Secretary of State for Education and Skills	Appointed Minister for the Arts at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport	Takes oath of allegiance as a Labour peer

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# THE PSM GUIDE TO... School Improvement

## HOW GOOD IS YOUR INTERNAL MESSAGING?

If those email inboxes are getting out of control, try Julien Parven's suggestions for communicating with your colleagues in a smarter and speedier way...

Communications between teachers, parents and pupils will often be near the top of a school's priority list, for obvious reasons – but that can sometimes cause internal communications between staff to be overlooked. Face-to-face conversations are usually the best way of conveying important messages to colleagues, but it's not always practical to make time for them during a busy school day.

Email has historically tended to be teachers' go-to communication tool, but with increasing workloads and overflowing inboxes, important messages can remain unopened and even go ignored. However, there's now a variety of cost effective and user-friendly messaging tools that can make your internal communication more effective, while reducing your administrative burden.

### SIMS

Many of the primary schools we work with use the SIMS management information system for a variety of purposes, from streamlining their registration process to identifying vital details about their pupils. Most of its features can be accessed via downloadable apps on staff-issued tablets and smartphones, which helps keep processes organised and facilitates smooth, rapid communication between staff, wherever they are on site.



The SIMS Teacher app, for example, can display real-time pupil data and up-to-date pupil profiles. This allows teachers to communicate important information about pupils and their behaviours that day to colleagues without having to chase them up in person. SIMS' aforementioned simplifying of the registration process – whereby class attendance data is collected and automatically sent to office staff – can also enhance your safeguarding procedures. Staff can be immediately alerted to unauthorised absences and start helping locate the pupil(s) concerned far sooner than would previously have been the case.

Also useful is SIMS' InTouch service, which enables staff to send emails, texts and instant messages to each other via a single, unified interface. Staff can also set up alerts to automatically notify them of pupil lateness, staff cover and marking reminders.

## OFFICE 365

SIMS might be popular and flexible in use, but it's not necessarily for everyone – perhaps due to financial constraints. An alternative, and potentially more affordable solution is the Microsoft Office 365 suite of software applications, which schools pay to access via a monthly subscription. Depending on the options selected with your package, these applications may include Outlook, Yammer (which allows internal 'social networks' to be set up within organisations and companies) and Teams (group video and voice calling).

Yammer lets you set up persistent team conversations with access restricted to specific groups – such as SLT – while ensuring that relevant people receive timely updates, without the risk of important messages getting lost in their inbox.

If you need to schedule a quick meeting, Teams can give you a virtual and cost-effective means of doing so. Whether conducted via voice, video call, or even instant messages, staff can check who's online and whether they're busy via Team's 'presence' feature. It can also be accessed via mobile devices and desktops alike, giving staff the flexibility to participate in ad hoc group discussions from any location within the school.

*Julien Parven is marketing director at Daisy SMB Services*

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 [daisygroup.com/smb](https://daisygroup.com/smb)



# 10 STEPS TO BETTER SELF-EVALUATION

Self evaluations forms aren't compulsory, but you really should have one, says Grahame Smith – ideally while bearing the following points in mind...

## 1. BE HONEST

Effective leaders are open about both their school's strengths and areas for improvement, and will use a process of self-evaluation to inform their improvement planning.

## 2. BE CONCISE

Keep things sharp and crisp. Your SEF is a summary and distillation of all the information you've gleaned from your monitoring and evaluation. Avoid reproducing details and data already available elsewhere – the sharper your SEF is, the more effective it will be as an improvement tool.

## 3. INVOLVE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Have others contribute to the process of self-evaluation and agree the judgements made, but ensure there's a single 'voice' running through the document; provide any other contributors with a clear template and house style to follow.

## 4. BE ACCURATE

Ensure that your evaluation is informed by a range of internal and external evidence that's valid, reliable and quantified where appropriate. You should already have processes in place for regularly engaging with stakeholders and seeking their views.

## 5. EVALUATE

By definition, your self-evaluation should be evaluative – i.e. providing evidence of the impact of the provision. Resist the urge to be too descriptive!

## 6. BE CONSISTENT

Ensure your judgements are consistent and that there are no contradictions within the document. The judgements in your SEF should properly triangulate with other key evidence – if pupil outcomes are judged as 'Requires Improvement', can you really state that the leadership is 'Outstanding'?

## 7. ORGANISE IT

If you're writing your school self-evaluation using Ofsted criteria, make the Ofsted-based judgements for each section clear with key supporting evidence. Split the criteria into sub-headings, as per the Framework – by, for example, judging attendance separately within pupil behaviour, safety and welfare, and governance within leadership and management.

## 8. "EVEN BETTER IF..." / "TO FURTHER IMPROVE WE NEED TO..."

Include these in each section to demonstrate aspiration and signpost future action. If you're using Ofsted gradings, it's worth identifying from the grade above what the school needs to achieve to improve further.

## 9. SHARE IT

Make everyone aware of their role in the school's success and how they can contribute in future. Think about how to communicate your judgements (if you wish to) to pupils, parents, teachers, senior leaders, governors, Ofsted, the LA – will the one document be appropriate for all audiences?

## 10. REVISIT IT

Update your self-evaluation regularly – ideally at least once a year – and include information about the impact of actions taken on learners. You might want update key sections at certain times of year to fit in with your monitoring and evaluation cycles.

**Grahame Smith is school improvement manager at Havering School Improvement Services**

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# Stop the curriculum squeeze

Hilary Fine explains why schools' eagerness to track pupils' test readiness shouldn't come at the expense of curriculum breadth...

Following the 2017 Key Stage 2 National Tests, I was told of a teacher's lament that the word 'monarch' had appeared on the spelling test, despite not being included on the National Curriculum word lists. Yet seeing as both the word and the concept of 'monarch' are covered in the KS2 National Curriculum for history, it surely follows that children would have previously encountered and been familiar with said word, had the school included it within their wider curriculum.

We continue to hear of schools who are narrowing their curriculums to focus only on what's tested in the KS2 SATs, or starting to focus on GCSE knowledge and skills from Year 7, rather than the recommended Year 10. The intention, of course, is that such practices will improve outcomes for the schools concerned.

Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman, however, has spoken recently of there being too much emphasis on exam preparation at the expense of a wider curriculum, and teachers and parents appear to agree. According to two recent YouGov polls commissioned by GL Assessment, teachers and parents are becoming increasingly concerned that exam pressures are forcing schools to offer a limited, bare-bones education while prepping pupils for those exams from an increasingly young age. 90% of teachers think that too many schools are pressuring teachers to concentrate on an

exam-driven syllabus, to the exclusion of the wider curriculum; something that Ofsted is, of course, seeking to address through its new inspection framework.

Stephen Tierney, CEO of Blessed Edward Bamber Multi-Academy Trust and Chair of Headteachers' Roundtable, has pointed out that broadening the curriculum from primary through to Key Stage 3 particularly benefits disadvantaged pupils, by providing them with "The secure foundations – academic, personal and social – on which success in important GCSE exams and life beyond can be built."

According to our YouGov poll, 87% of teachers believe that teaching a more rounded curriculum from a younger age better prepares children for later academic success, while 91% feel a more rounded curriculum will equip children and young people more effectively for life after school – positions shared by 76% and 78% of parents respectively.

By their nature, national tests – be they KS2 SATs or GCSEs – can only ever assess a sample of what's been taught and learned. If a curriculum has been narrowed by teaching to the test, then the foundations on which to build

children's future success can't be established. The educational experience will be too thin and insubstantial for the purpose.


Ofsted's findings highlight the need for a well-constructed curriculum through which children are taught clearly defined knowledge and skills at specific stages, with planned, intelligent repetition of content or retrieval practices (such as quizzing) used to promote the acquisition of core knowledge and skills.

Good assessment should go hand-in-hand with this approach – helping schools to evaluate their curriculum, measure students' progress and identify those children needing more support or greater challenge.

Ensuring that children experience a wide curriculum of subject content and a broad range of life experiences (not least through school trips) further provides rich opportunities for developing vocabulary, which Ofsted has identified as critical for academic success. In this context, I'd hope the teacher quoted at the start of this article would feel less perplexed by a spelling test containing the word 'monarch'.

**Hilary Fine is Head of Product at GL Assessment**

**Download GL Assessment's new report, 'Closing the Gap: How a narrow curriculum disadvantages the disadvantaged', at [gl-assessment.co.uk/closingthegap](http://gl-assessment.co.uk/closingthegap)**

 @GL\_Assessment



# WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

One headteacher and a chair of governors reflect on the challenges they faced when taking their school from Special Measures to Good...

**W**hen I became a member of the IEB at Jo's school, I'd had experience of working in education but the challenges that lay ahead for the school seemed, at times, insurmountable. It was in Special Measures, had high staff turnover and struggled to recruit. It served a complex community with high levels of deprivation, and had poor outcomes with little sign of progress towards improvement.

Yet there was something special about this school. Jo was new to headship, and had taken on a challenge that many would have shied away from. There was a difficult, almost seemingly impossible job to be done, but to my mind it was one worth doing.

## ESCAPING SPECIAL MEASURES

Many believe that a school in Special Measures should look to remove its headteacher and come under the auspices of a MAT sponsor to ensure improvement. Despite pressures to do both, the IEB felt Jo needed to remain in post for the good of the school, and that academisation wasn't the right option at that time. Both Jo and ourselves thus began laying the groundwork for a re-inspection we hoped would lead to the removal of our Special Measures status within two years.

During this time we received regular HMI monitoring visits that involved lesson observations and book and data scrutiny, each of

which added pressure to the school's already pushed teaching and leadership teams. As a 'supportive measure', a succession of different headteachers were parachuted in by our LA, all offering different advice and opinions. Every headteacher that supported us worked with the best interests of the school in mind, but many of the approaches they suggested wouldn't produce the impact we needed in the time available. These constant changes of approach and direction resulted in confusion, paralysis and an overall lack of clarity.

Our lowest ebb – in hindsight, a watershed moment – came with the appointment of a new IEB chair and an HMI monitoring visit that deemed the school as not making sufficient progress to be removed from Special Measures. At around the same time, our LA decided to remove its support and let the school and Jo sink ... or perhaps swim.

## DODGING THE ACADEMY BULLET

In March 2016, 'the call' finally came. The whole school community dug deep, determined to show Ofsted just how exceptional our school was and how well it served its children and community. Afterwards, the school was duly removed from Special Measures and rated as Requiring Improvement. There aren't many who'd pop corks over such news, but for us it was a huge relief. It was now a case of proceeding onwards and upwards.

This, however, presented us with yet another challenge – forced academisation. A MAT had been identified for us, and

## TIMELINE

2012  
School opens

Feb  
2014  
Headteacher  
removed

Feb  
2014  
Placed in Special  
Measures

May  
2014  
Headteacher  
returns

June  
2014  
IEB instated

June  
2014  
HMI monitoring  
commences



## THE CONTEXT

- Two form entry with a growing nursery provision
- Formed from an amalgamation of two schools in 2012 – one in 'special measures' and the other deemed 'good'
- 54% of children in receipt of pupil premium; 26% of children identified as SEN; 27% of learners have EAL
- Mobility is well above the national average

after some brief correspondence and a single meeting, a DfE official instructed our governors to agree to an academy order and accept the preferred MAT. Despite this clear directive, however, we knew that academisation, especially with this preferred sponsor, wasn't in the school's best interests.

Our governors thus unanimously rejected the choice of preferred sponsor, and indeed the path of academisation itself. An email informing the DfE of the decision was sent, and there followed a long wait ... for a reply that never came.

## WE ARE 'COASTING'

Having received no response on the issue of converting, the school opted to look ahead and start making plans for further improvement, but then came the next knockback – a DfE letter that identified the school as 'coasting', which arrived on the back of the school's latest results showing it to be above the floor target for the first time ever.

We responded to the letter by highlighting significant evidence that showed the school's improvement, but this apparently wasn't enough. The school would receive a further visit from the DfE, but we knew the school's vision was strong and that we were making progress – and were therefore gratified when

the DfE consultant who made the visit commented to us, "It goes to show that there's much more to a school than its data."

Before long, the next and final challenge loomed before us – our RI to Good inspection. The school was now almost unrecognisable from its 2014 incarnation. It was a vibrant, exciting, and purposeful setting, offering excellent learning opportunities for all. We waited with bated breath for the call, which finally came in September 2018.

Staff morale at this point was as low as it had ever been, with many certain that we'd failed to shed our RI label. And yet, despite our KS2 data (proof that Ofsted is indeed placing less focus on outcomes alone), the school was graded Good overall, Outstanding in early years and RI with respect to outcomes.

## TIME TO REFLECT

Over the past six years, the school has been subject to immense criticism. Our headteacher's face has been regularly splashed across the local papers. We've received no fewer than 11 inspections and judgement visits. The experience has been a steep learning curve for us all, but it's also taught us the true meaning of resilience and the importance of doing the right thing for the school community.

In the process, we learnt a lot about leadership – how lonely it can be, and how important it is for leaders to not stand alone. Above all, we've learnt to be brave.

We see our story as one of overcoming barriers and standing up for what's right. We've proved that removing a headteacher and seeking academy sponsorship aren't the only answers for schools in the position we were in five years ago. We hope that our story can inspire other headteachers, governors and staff facing similar challenges of their own.



**Catherin Carden,**  
Executive board  
member, current chair  
of governors



**JO WARNOCK, HEADTEACHER**

As a first-time headteacher, I knew that leading this newly formed school would be a challenge with no quick fix solution for raising attainment. We support very complex families who require long-term interventions and the development of trusting relationships in order to move forward. I was, and still am, committed to these families and have a vision that the school will be the cornerstone of the community, making a significant difference to the lives of our families.

However, despite this commitment, I could not have envisaged how my first headship would play out...

In February 2014 the decision was made to remove me from the school, followed by an announcement from the LA that I was on authorised absence. The following day, Ofsted notified the school of an impending visit which subsequently put the school into Special Measures across all categories.

During the three months of my authorised absence I was guided by knowledgeable and principled people who could understand the challenges that I was facing. Eventually, having been neither formally suspended nor given a reason as to why I shouldn't be leading the school, I decided, with support from the governing body, to return from authorised absence. This governing body was then disbanded by the LA and replaced by a five-strong interim executive board in June that year.

Nov  
2015  
HMI monitoring  
concludes

March  
2016  
Rated Requires  
Improvement

July  
2016  
Academisation  
rejected

July  
2017  
Deemed 'coasting'

Oct  
2017  
Further HMI  
monitoring visit

Sept  
2018  
Rated Good

# DO YOU HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH PLAN B?

With access to local SEMH services becoming increasingly scarce, what alternatives should schools be looking into? Jules Daulby weighs up the options...

**T**here's no doubt that many children aren't thriving in schools. Access to external social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) services is in decline, just as headteachers are having to deal with more complex situations than ever before.

School leaders have already got plenty to concern themselves with, of course – league tables, Ofsted, ever-changing DfE goalposts, an ongoing funding crisis and persistent issues with staff retention and recruitment. A child with complex mental health concerns or social and emotional difficulties will likely need specialist support, yet there will be few resources available until things reach the point of crisis.

Teachers aren't trained to deal with a suicidal child, for example – but could the system at least be streamlined, so that those most in need get the support they require, whilst others with less severe needs are looked after by school staff? The continuing lack of local support services in some areas is a scandal, but there are some strategic questions leaders can start asking themselves in order to provide pupils, staff and families with better support and early interventions.

## IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS

The SEND category of SEMH was officially recognised for the first time in September 2014, when it replaced the old acronym, EBD ('Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties'). Areas that fall under SEMH include social and emotional functioning, wellbeing, self-regulation and mental health difficulties. The driving force behind the change was a desire to see behaviour as the physical symptom of deeper, underlying needs, such as mental health and adverse childhood experiences (ACE).

Has the 'SEMH label' ever been thought

through at the highest levels in your school? As a leader, how confident are you that staff even know what it means? Does your school build a holistic picture of the children? Have they been assessed to ensure there are no other unidentified, SEN-triggering behaviours?

One of the things that surprises me most when visiting an alternative provision setting is how often the children there come with a very patchy history of circumstances and need. The first priority for leaders must therefore be to ensure that these pupils' behaviours have been scrutinised, and that staff know them well.

Given the money spent on reactive measures for some children with SEMH, it's worth considering a shift in resources and prioritising preventative measures.

This could involve taking on counsellors who can dispense specialist provision, rather than maintaining supervised isolation rooms. Could your TAs be trained to provide targeted support for early intervention strategies? Emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs) can make a real difference,

especially when they're able to receive supervision from education psychologists. If properly trained and appointed where needed, ELSAs can help make the system more rigorous and better rooted in evidence and expert knowledge – see [elsanetwork.org](http://elsanetwork.org) for more details.

## DIG DEEPER

While mental health generally shouldn't be considered as a form of SEN, introducing a proactive and preventative mental health strategy in school may, in the long term, reduce the number of children labelled as having SEMH. This would allow targeted and specialist resources to reach those children most in need. What are the underlying reasons for their behaviours? A child that's quiet and compliant but with low attendance should be just as concerning as a pupil who's

regularly disruptive with 100% attendance.

Leaders should set themselves the task of devising system in which learning difficulties never go unidentified. Start with high quality teaching using the graduated approach (assess, plan, do, review). Then move on to targeted work, adopting an explorative approach and digging deeper to see if there are any traits and triggers that are repeating themselves.

If serious issues persist, specialist support, such as that available from CAMHS, will be required. Some schools have successfully set up drop-in sessions by partnering with their local CAMHS' service, which can be an excellent way of putting preventative measures in place.

Maintain an analytical approach when addressing the needs of children with mental health difficulties, and treat them as you would an important new arrival with no spoken English, or a child with a different category of SEND. Developing attachment- and trauma-aware schools will be a useful first step in carrying out preventative work.



## EXAMINE YOUR SYSTEM

How would you characterise your school's behaviour system? Is it broadly restorative, solution-focused, warm, strict? Whatever type of system it is, it should always be consistent and broadly understood. Stepped approaches which rely on joined up working between leaders, teachers, pastoral staff and SENCos must be clearly communicated to staff across the school. Early interventions and partnerships with parents/carers should be straightforward and quick to set up so that problematic behaviours can be nipped in the bud early on, thus saving resources later down the line.

Who is a teacher's first point of contact in the event of a behavioural issue? Will that person be able to react immediately, or will the teacher be left struggling in the classroom with their lesson disrupted? When will the family be contacted?

Will the student with SEMH understand how your system works?

Wherever possible, try to keep the child in the classroom. If removal is required, this should be addressed instantly and the student returned to class as quickly as possible. The process should be managed in such a way that the student and class teacher both feel supported throughout. Deescalation should form part of the response, though putting a child back in class before they're ready can have the effect of making the situation worse.

In my opinion, using isolation as consequence to make up for organisational difficulties is unhelpful. Students miss lessons, teachers have to find a way for them to catch up, and you run the risk of embedding a negative cycle. Unless required for safety reasons, use a different sanction – perhaps a centralised detention at lunchtime or after school?

We should also be wary of stereotyping. An educational psychologist I heard speak on this discussed how girls tended to receive 'nurturing' interventions while boys received anger management support. Could it be that some students are overrepresented in SEMH and underrepresented in other areas, such as dyslexia? Could it be worth auditing your detentions and behaviour points to identify common patterns?

## CAST YOUR NET WIDE

The process of building staff awareness starts in the classroom, but its success will depend on the school's culture. Fostering a culture of inclusion and diversity will encourage tolerance. Organising speakers who can share experiences of adoption and living in care and talk about their

subsequent successes can be a great way of showing children what's possible.

Charities such as ICAN and the National Autistic Society can help train staff in language and communication difficulties and provide teachers with excellent CPD on inclusive pedagogy and recognising behaviours that might indicate other difficulties. Equipping staff with this level of awareness will likely ensure that children's

opportunities are maximised within the classroom first, before external support is sought.

It's also worth being savvy about what these types of organisations can offer your school for free, since many are funded externally.

Outreach from PRUs and special schools can be another valuable source of support. One highly experienced primary school teacher recently told me of how she had a class of 30 with high levels of need and support from one TA in the mornings only. Having struggled under this arrangement, she took the step of asking for help and was able to receive support from an outreach service specialising in autism for a child with SEMH and ASD. This provided her with a series of 'quick win' tips and resources that enabled her to pursue more effective inclusive strategies for the child in question, while continuing to teach the rest of children in the class.

PRUs will often be willing to work with teachers so that young people with acute SEMH difficulties can transfer back into mainstream. Remember that from their perspective, prevention is better than reaction – if they can get 'in' with your school early on and embed helpful practice, that's helpful to them.

## HOLD ON

But, I hear some of you say, We do all these things and don't have access to CAMHS. 'Our' educational psychologists spend their time writing up EHCPs and attending annual reviews for complex children – we can't do it on our own.

Believe me, I hear you. The paucity of external provision available to schools is currently the worst I've seen since 1997, when I first began teaching. The years when schools could call on Children Centres, Sure Start, parent support advisors, teenage pregnancy services, wider CAMHS provision and a larger social services department seem very long ago.

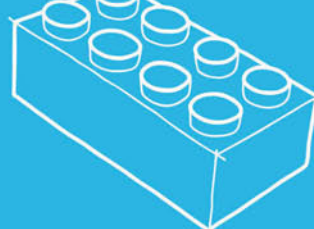
I'm not saying it's easy, but I hope some of the points above have either reassured you that you're doing all you can, or brought to light some practical ideas that may save you resources and frustration later on.



**Jules Daulby is an education consultant specialising in inclusion and literacy**

@JulesDaulby





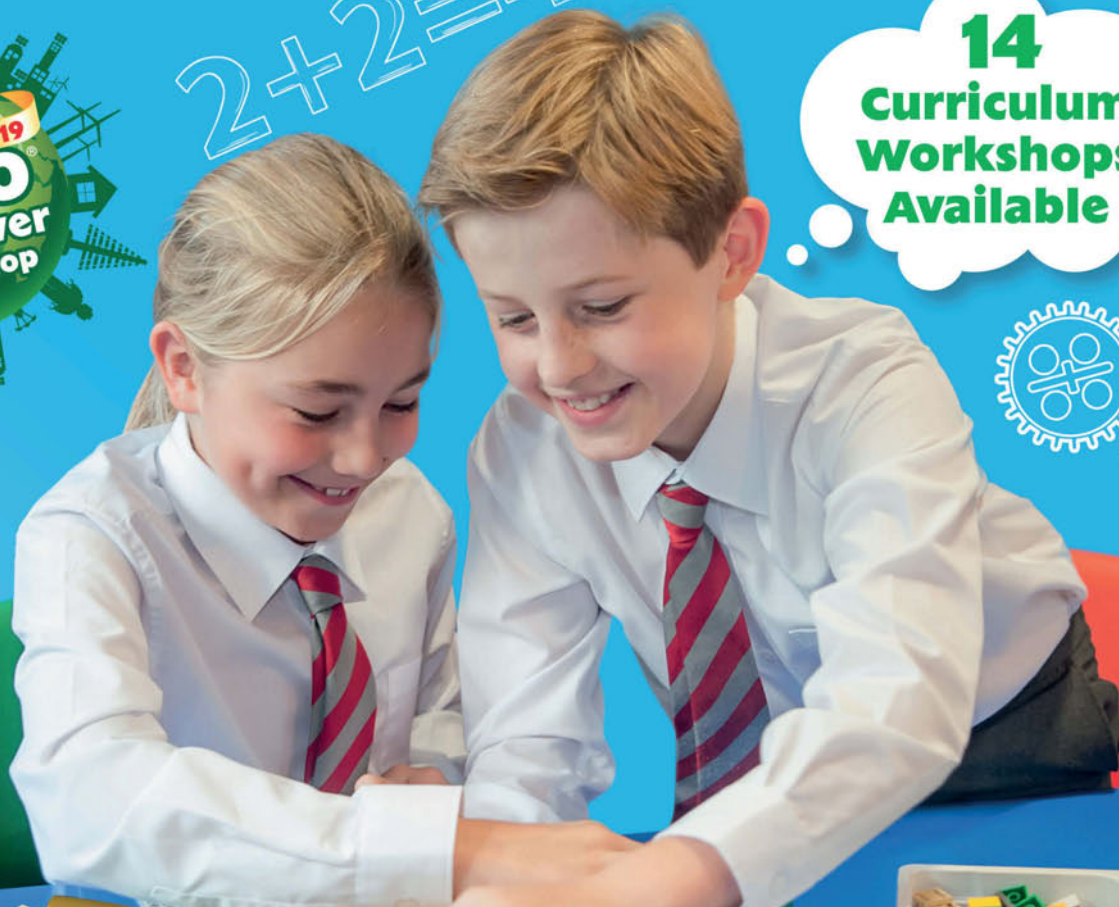
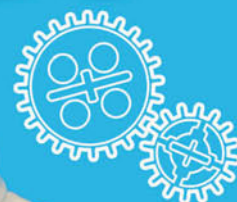
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# Elevator PITCH

Take two minutes to find out how the new, lightweight “Essentials” tool from Insight is helping schools and MATs simplify assessment tracking...

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Weekends and half terms shouldn't be lost to the process of 'doing data'. For schools seeking a more minimalist approach, meet Essentials – track termly, 'point-in-time' teacher assessments for core subjects, alongside test scores, benchmarks and statutory data. All the information you need gathered together in one place, with minimum effort.

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## 3 **Fast and future-proof**

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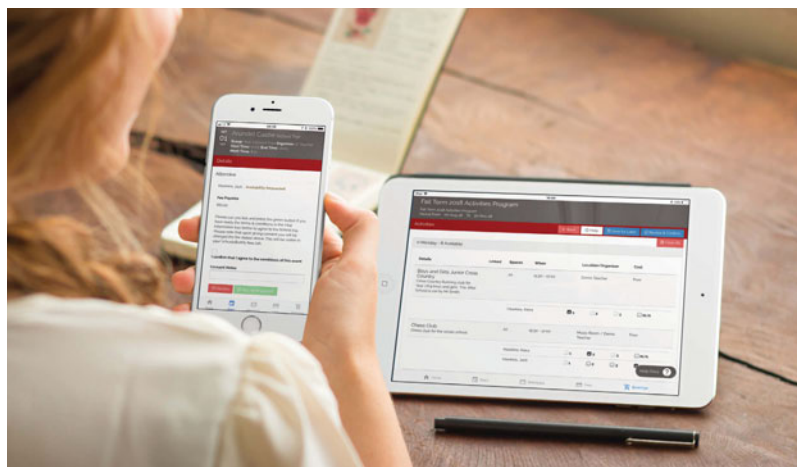


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# THE SMART *money*

A complete solution for school sign-ups from SchoolsBuddy



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### Take bookings, generate registers

Standalone payment providers aren't able to provide the perfect solution for many common sign-up problems. SchoolsBuddy can place limits on available places, automatically allocate places based on preferences and can accept bookings with or without an upfront payment. It can be used to take payments too, via a web browser or mobile app. Registers are auto-generated for each event, with built-in absentee alerts for safeguarding.

### SchoolsBuddy pays for itself

Switching to SchoolsBuddy is one of the best things you can do for your school – especially if you have a limited budget. By saving staff time and combining sign-ups, registers, team rosters, communications and payments in one place, you'll be saving money on multiple software solutions. As well as granting access to staff and parents on the move, SchoolsBuddy's mobile apps can also issue FREE push notifications, direct to parents' phones – say goodbye to costly SMS charges!

To find out more or book a demo, visit [www.schoolsbuddy.com](http://www.schoolsbuddy.com) or contact the company's co-founder at [david@schoolsbuddy.com](mailto:david@schoolsbuddy.com)

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**Head of English | Oriel High School, West Sussex**

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# Buildings & Facilities

## THE RECIPE FOR THE PERFECT PLAYGROUND

Design your school's playground so that no child misses out on its benefits, says Joanne Talbot

**I**t's well documented that play is hugely beneficial for children. Not only is it important for their physical health and development, but by enabling children, young people and adults to interact together, a play area can truly unite a school community. But how should you go about ensuring that such a space is fully inclusive and appropriate for your children's particular needs?

It can be a daunting task to create a

play area design while keeping inclusion in mind, whether making one from scratch or updating an existing facility, since there are so many different abilities and needs to consider.

The first step should be to partner with a play space designer who understands inclusion and is prepared to offer the school a flexible approach to the design. A school's teaching staff and business managers are the experts when it comes to the children; the designer's role is to interpret the brief, match suitable equipment to the stated requirements and create a

tailor-made solution. Work closely alongside your play designer, raising with them any specific features and activities you'd like to see included, and they'll be able to guide you towards the optimal solution.

Be clear in your brief. Some important points to consider are the outcomes you'd like the space to provide and the available budget. How and when will the space be used throughout the day? What age range do you need to cater for? Do you wish to include forms of sensory activity, dynamic play or a blend of both? How many wheelchair users will be accessing the space? Will quiet spaces be needed for children with autism or sensory processing disorders?

If the space is to be fully inclusive, remember that you may also need to consider integrating some more



challenging equipment for those that need it.

A request commonly heard by our team during the many school projects they've been involved with is for the children to have a safe space in which they can play independently, while feeling empowered and able to let off steam. Many schools will now utilise their play spaces throughout the school day, rather than just at break and lunch times. Playgrounds can serve as classroom breakout spaces during lessons, while dynamic and sensory equipment can facilitate helpful activities for children needing to burn off energy, clear their mind and/or regain focus before returning to the classroom.

These inclusion considerations equally extend to the layout of the area itself, with respect to how it's accessed, path networks throughout the space, the distances between equipment and how the children can be expected to interact within the space. Give some thought as to how many of the children's senses will be engaged when they're in a seated or standing position. We recommend a minimum of three, but more is better!

There's much to consider before embarking on the design and product selection stages, but this is a crucial phase if you want to ensure your new playground will be ultimately fit for purpose. A good play partner will guide you through each step, creating a bespoke solution in the process and ensuring that the final outcome is enjoyed by everyone at the school.

If we can eradicate social and physical barriers from the playgrounds in our schools and public shared spaces through the development of well-rounded, inclusive play spaces, then we can provide equal play opportunities for all children.

*Joanne Talbot is business manager at Inclusive Play*

 [@inclusiveplayuk](https://twitter.com/inclusiveplayuk)  
 [inclusiveplay.com](https://www.inclusiveplay.com)



## COULD YOU GET A BETTER DEAL?

The DfE's efforts at reducing ancillary costs for schools continue with the launch of a new website aimed at helping schools switch energy suppliers

If you suspect your school might be paying over the odds for its energy supply, then Education Secretary Damian Hinds' recent announcement of a new government-provided online price comparison service may well be of interest.

Overseen by the Crown Commercial Service and supported by the DfE, the School Switch website will enable schools to obtain instant quotes from a number of gas and electricity suppliers, in a manner not dissimilar to the price comparison websites used by households when choosing between domestic energy providers.

The DfE's stated aim with the site is to help schools avoid costly fees by enabling them to deal directly with suppliers, rather than having to go via an energy broker – some of which can levy additional costs of up to 5p per kilowatt hour, equating to four-figure sums over the course of a year. All schools have to do is enter the details of their energy use, and they'll instantly gain access to a series of tailored quotes that can be easily compared against each other.

The most recent figures available show that state-funded schools in England spent a combined sum of more than £584 million on their gas and electricity costs in 2016/17. School Switch aims to go beyond the energy deals previously arranged by the DfE – which it says have helped some schools save up to 14% on their energy expenses – and contribute to reducing schools' spending on non-staffing costs, currently estimated be around £10 billion per year.

According to Damian Hinds, "Many

households shop around for the best deal on their gas and electricity – and I want to help schools do the same. By saving money on their energy bills and avoiding high broker fees, the more money schools will have to spend on what really matters – getting the best teachers into classrooms and giving their pupils a great education."

The launch of School Switch is the latest of several money-saving initiatives kickstarted by the launch of the government's School Resource Management Strategy last year. Others we've seen so far include an online tool to help schools navigate the rates and fees charged by teacher supply agencies (see [tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-supply](https://tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-supply)); a regularly updated list of deals on frequently purchased supplies, equipment and services (see [tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-deals](https://tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-deals)); and the deployment of trained School Resource Management Advisors able to share impartial business advice with schools and trusts.

The initial launch of the School Switch service has seen a limited number of energy suppliers come on board, but the plan is for more to be added over time, including suppliers specialising in renewable energy. You can find out whether the service is likely to benefit you or not by using the government's online financial benchmarking tool ([tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-benchmark](https://tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-benchmark)) to compare your school's income and expenditure with those of other schools in your local area.

 [@gov\\_procurement](https://twitter.com/@gov_procurement)  
 [schoolswitch.crowncommercial.gov.uk](https://schoolswitch.crowncommercial.gov.uk)



# Get to where you want to go

If you've previously struggled to cover the costs of operating a minibus, it's worth exploring some other avenues that might be open to you, says Russell McCarten

**S**chools requiring access to their own form of transportation on a permanent basis usually have the option of either buying or hiring a minibus. A vehicle purchased outright can potentially last as long as the user wants, but there will inevitably come a point where the vehicle's upkeep becomes prohibitive when compared to the cost of replacement.

The typical ownership cycle for a purchased minibus can be around five to seven years. Following the end of the vehicle's working life, the owner will then be left with the choice of what to do with it next, and would be tasked with the responsibility for its disposal. Vehicle purchases can be done via Framework RM6060 (see [tinyurl.com/RM6060](http://tinyurl.com/RM6060)) and leases through Framework RM3710 ([tinyurl.com/RM3710](http://tinyurl.com/RM3710)).

Minibus contract hires can typically be agreed for a period of three years. This cycle will then often continue at the customer's behest for successive periods, with the vehicle being replaced with a new model whenever the arrangement is renewed.

Contract hire agreements tend to include maintenance provision, making

them a good fit for those preferring a relatively hassle-free option. This is referred to as 'SMR' (service maintenance and repair), and won't usually apply to outright purchases unless a special arrangement is agreed between the customer and supplier.

## *A third option*

Schools that have opted for, or been forced into, a more ad hoc approach can also arrange for a short-term minibus hire via ESPO Framework 271: Vehicle Hire – Self Drive ([tinyurl.com/espo-271](http://tinyurl.com/espo-271)). This can be especially useful when transport will only be required for a specific period of time, which under the framework can be anything from one day to six months.

ESPO pricing under this and some other frameworks can be acquired via either 'direct award' or 'further competition'. The former involves approaching a framework supplier directly, based on available pricing having established best value. The latter entails an exercise involving all framework suppliers to establish best value. Where both options are available, the decision over whether to go with a direct award or further competition approach rests with the customer. Longer-term uses would be better served by ESPO Framework 218:

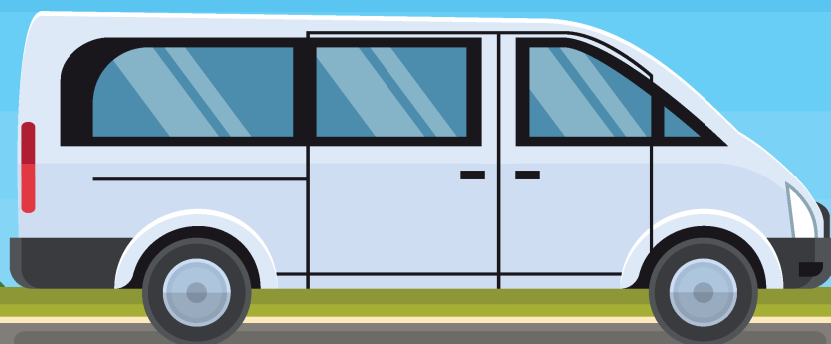
Contract Hire/Lease of Specialist Vehicles (see [tinyurl.com/espo-218](http://tinyurl.com/espo-218)), which is available via the further competition route.

Another factor worth considering is whether your needs could be met by a lightweight minibus. Minibuses are traditionally 4 tonnes and upwards in weight; vehicles weighing over 3.5 tonnes require individuals who acquired their driving licence after 1997 to hold a category D1 licence, rather than the category B licence required to drive a standard car. Lightweight minibus vehicles that fall below the 3.5 tonne threshold can be driven on a B licence without restriction, thus potentially saving costs on staff re-training.

A relatively commonplace option is obtaining a vehicle that's wheelchair accessible. More often than not, this will be a standard vehicle that's been converted to accommodate a single wheelchair through the removal of some rear seats and the installation of a tail-lift, ramp or hoist mechanism. This specification, along with various other vehicle types and options, is also available via the framework route. Further information on ESPO's fleet and highways framework options can be found via [tinyurl.com/espo-fleet-highways](http://tinyurl.com/espo-fleet-highways).

**Russell McCarten is a Category Manager at the professional buying organisation ESPO**

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# TOGETHER AT LAST

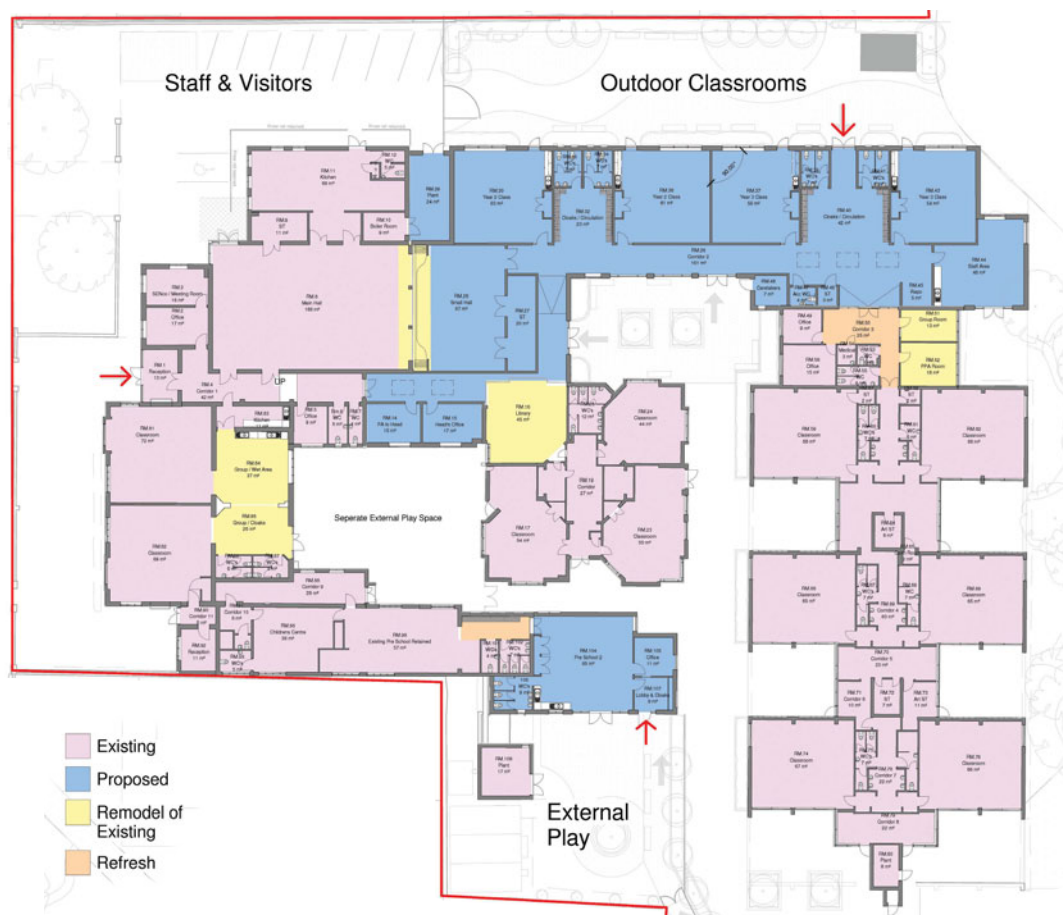
We hear how one Cambridgeshire primary was able to combine three architecturally distinct buildings into a unified whole...



**STEPHANIE WILCOX**  
Headteacher,  
Melbourn  
Primary School



**ANDY CRITOPH**  
Associate  
Director,  
Saunders Boston  
Architects



## PLANNING

**SW:** The project to expand the school came about in response to plans for a large new housing development in our village. At the initial meetings with our LA, Cambridgeshire County Council, we discussed potentially changing our pupil roll from 1.5-form entry to 2-form entry. We then met with an official assigned to oversee the project who visited the site and discussed with us what we'd want if we were to redevelop the site, and what was most important to us as a school.

**AC:** We became involved after a high-level feasibility study had been carried out, which formed the basis of the tender.

“The staff and children ended up using what came to be fondly known as the ‘Rocky Road’”

The first step for us was to review that proposal, examine the existing school buildings and see how viable it was. Cost played a part as well; we obviously had to ensure it was a buildable solution for the budget available.

**SW:** The school was first established in 1855 and still includes a very old part of the original building. It was later expanded throughout the 60s and 70s, to the point where it consisted of three separate buildings, plus a mobile classroom. That meant there was little cohesion, or sense of us being a unified school. There were no covered walkways between the buildings, which made for challenges on days when it was raining.

**AC:** The need to redevelop the adjacencies of those existing buildings posed an interesting challenge. It was originally proposed that the library be moved into another part of the existing school, away from an ICT suite in the central block, but ideally those two facilities work better when closer together. We therefore looked to locate the library in a more central position, positioned directly off a main corridor, which made it feel more like part of the school, rather than being tucked away.

## IMPLEMENTATION

**SW:** We had a project manager who acted as liaison between Kier, the architects and ourselves. At the building preparation meetings she led, there was very much a sense of ‘We’ll try to preserve your school life as much as possible.’ We proceeded to meet regularly





and discuss which parts of the site Kier needed access to and when, what it would mean for us and how we could work round the disruption.

**AC:** Kier appointed a landscape architect that worked alongside, which involved walking the site, coming up with ideas and essentially arranging the site to suit the building. That resulted in the addition of outdoor teaching spaces and the designing of a new playground.

**SW:** The biggest challenge for us during the build getting from one building to the next, which complicated simple tasks like visiting the main office. The staff and children ended up using what came to be fondly known as the 'Rocky Road' - a

shingle path that ran around the perimeter of the site.

**AC:** The school mentioned to us that one of their regular pupil surveys had shown the only place where pupils felt a sense of vulnerability was in the toilets, which prompted a review of our initial toilet layout design in the new extension. Following further discussions, the layout was amended and the doors from the corridor were removed, ensuring that basins and main circulation areas could always be observed from the adjacent circulation areas, thus providing a self-policing zone with natural surveillance of the toilet area from staff or pupils passing by.

## IMPACT

**AC:** I believe the end solution has worked well in tying the existing building and facilities together.

**SW:** The new build has meant that our buildings are now properly connected. If you imagine the letter 'E' - the top, middle and bottom 'prongs' were the old buildings, and the 'backbone' is the new addition. Our staff room and library have both moved, so that the library is now at the heart of the school and easily accessible to all year groups, which is wonderful.

**AC:** Getting the footprint of the building and the spaces' adjacencies agreed early, and having the school come on board and recognising the benefits of the design was our main positive takeaway from the project. The extension has brought a site-wide sense of connectivity to the school, which is the most satisfying thing - this bringing together of three differently-aged buildings via a solution that worked.

**SW:** It's brought us together in a way that I didn't imagine it would. It's great being able to get from one part of the school to another without having to go outside, and feeling this sense of connection, of being together again - It's really lovely.

## PROJECT TIMELINE

**June 2015**  
Initial meetings held between the school and Cambridgeshire County Council

**Dec 2016**  
Saunders Boston Architects appointed as lead designer for the project

**March 2017**  
Public consultation takes place

**Nov 2017**  
Construction work commences

**Sept 2018**  
Main primary teaching block completed and commences operating

**Oct 2018**  
Completion of the school's expanded preschool provision



# Why I Love...

Site manager **Simon Kellett** explains how Fireco's Freedor helped him improve pupil safety and avoid some troublesome maintenance tasks

Newport Junior School in Aldershot has 300 7- to 11-year-olds on roll and is based in an old Victorian building known for its unique character. It's the job of Simon Kellett, the school's site manager, to oversee maintenance and repairs, hire contractors for site work and ensure that Newport remains compliant with health and safety regulations. On occasion, however, different areas of Simon's responsibility can run into each other and present some tricky challenges...

**“Our pupils were having problems walking to class.**

On the school premises we have fire doors situated in corridors which are immediately adjacent to the classrooms. Since these are routes carrying high levels of foot traffic, the doors would be constantly opened and moved through, leading to noise issues caused by the doors being regularly slammed and kicked open, which in turn caused disruption and damage.

**“To try and address these issues, the fire doors would sometimes be wedged open.**

I then began searching online for a product that would allow everyone to walk through the corridor more easily and resolve the issue of the doors slamming, while maintaining compliance. I came across the Freedor – a wirelessly controlled, battery operated overhead door closer – and found that it suited our needs perfectly.



It's now possible for everyone to traverse the school's corridors easily, with no disruption to any classes from noisy doors.

**“I'm also the school's Fire Safety Coordinator, so I have to look for solutions that are fully compliant with fire regulations.**

Freedor absolutely fits the bill. The new doors are no longer heavy, but instead feature gentle resistance that allows them be easily opened and closed. The doors are transom-mounted, and therefore beyond the reach of little fingers and feet, which is also very reassuring.”

**“The installation was painless and the service has been fantastic.**

If there's an issue, it's resolved straight away. Our account manager, Alastair, is always available on the phone and ready to answer any questions. I test the products myself each week and have found them to work 100% of the time. Freedor does what it says on the tin. It's not disruptive, it's easier to use than other door products and

reassures us that our fire doors can be relied upon to close in an emergency situation – as they should.

**Fireco can assist schools with a range of compliance issues, including the following:**

- Restricted access caused by heavy fire doors
- Compliance oversights, such as wedged open fire doors
- Risks of injury stemming from the movement of fire doors
- Alerting deaf and hard of hearing people in the event of an emergency

## Fireco

Compliance Made Easy

For more details, visit  
[fireco.uk](http://fireco.uk) or contact  
01273 320 650





# RETHINK YOUR KITCHEN LAYOUT

The time-consuming task of designing a school kitchen requires taking heed of several key considerations, says Mike Hardman

**K**itchen design can cause enough headaches in your own home, let alone the school you manage. As a supplier of catering equipment to the public and private sectors, we at Alliance understand that it can often be a daunting task that involves overruns. As such, we've put together the following guide to help when deciding on the layout of a primary school kitchen.

## STEP 1: KNOW YOUR AREA

Every design starts with a blank canvas, or in this case, a floorplan. When generating a floorplan, be sure to clearly mark the locations of utilities in and out of the kitchen. It might seem obvious, but when coming up with design ideas you'll need to consider the positioning of water inlet fittings, valves, waste pipes, gas supply points, power cabling and other elements – some of which may need upgrading to support more modern equipment.

## STEP 2: DESIGN FOR EFFICIENCY

Once a floorplan has been created, give some thought to the design's level of efficiency and ability to promote natural flow. This is best achieved by dividing the kitchen into 'zones' (i.e. food prep, cooking, serving, washing) and letting staff operate within specific areas, thus reducing the risk of accidents..

## STEP 3: PERFORM CHECKS

Carry out a hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) check to ensure the layout doesn't risk cross contamination. This is important, as you'll be regularly serving large volumes of food to young students, and becomes even more essential given that pupils typically study within close proximity of each other.

## STEP 4: HYGIENE

It's best practice for schools to install plenty of handwash zones that are easily accessible from all areas. Handwash stations should include removable basins and antibacterial soap dispensers (preferably wall-mounted options, like the Alliance-distributed Tork liquid soap dispenser). Handwash zones should also contain a blue roll dispenser for drying hands.

## STEP 5: THINK OF THE CHILDREN

The final key area schools should consider when designing a kitchen is the servery. Most restaurants will have waiters who transport food to the customers, meaning the servery doesn't need to consist of much more than a flat worktop from which food can easily be collected. Schools don't have that luxury.

Instead, the servery needs to be able to accommodate pupils of different ages and sizes. All cooking appliances should be positioned away from this area, with the only heat generating equipment present being food warmers that can be fitted with appropriate heat guards to prevent students touching any hot surfaces.

If these steps are used as guidelines when designing a primary school kitchen, we at Alliance are confident it'll make the process a little more bearable and less intimidating.

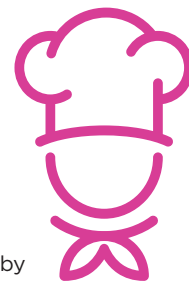


**Mike Hardman is marketing manager at Alliance Online**

 @allianceonline  
 [allianceonline.co.uk](http://allianceonline.co.uk)



The Lead Association for Catering in Education (LACA) has launched an expanded version of its Host a School Chef programme, whereby school chefs are given opportunities to join the catering teams at high-end restaurants and establishments around the country; among those taking part last year were London's Ritz Hotel, Rick Stein's Marlborough Restaurant and Fortnum and Mason.



Formerly organised as part of the annual National School Meals Week, the now standalone programme will run for a year – further details can be found at [hostaschoolchef.co.uk](http://hostaschoolchef.co.uk)



The government has indicated that that a 'no-deal Brexit' – which remains a possibility at the time of writing – may have implications for the provision of school meals. According to a 'no deal' technical notice published by the DfE (see [tinyurl.com/dfe-no-deal](https://tinyurl.com/dfe-no-deal)) "The government, including the Department for Education, will continue to work with food suppliers to prepare for a no deal departure from the EU ... local authorities and schools must exercise their power to provide meals to all registered pupils who request one. Where the pupil meets the criteria for free school meals, the meal must be provided, free of charge."



# Manage your PARENTAL TRAFFIC

Your powers might stop at the gates, but schools can still take steps to reduce the impact of the school run on local residents...

1

## ENGAGE YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL

Your local councillor may already be actively involved with the school. If not, then it's worth engaging them to discuss how parking and traffic other issues are affecting your school and local residents.

Try arranging an on-site meeting during a school drop-off period so that they can observe the extent of the problem.

2

## CARRY OUT RESEARCH

Online maps can be a very useful tool for identifying the location and root causes of any parking or traffic management issues in the vicinity of your school. Checking satellite imagery and layers that clearly display road routes and layouts may help you identify where improvements could potentially be made.

3

## TALK TO RESIDENTS

Assess the impact that traffic levels and parking problems are having on residents living near the school. Issues to watch out for can include blocked driveways, traffic congestion at busy times of day, and in some extreme cases, aggressive verbal exchanges or even physical assault.

4

## CAN RESIDENTS HELP?

Could local residents cut back hedgerows, overhanging trees and shrubs on garden boundaries to help clear pedestrian thoroughfares? If you raise the issue with them, they may be willing to help restore pavements and footpaths to their full width by removing any obstructions that might be forcing pedestrians onto verges and roads.

5

## BE PROACTIVE

Put in place campaigns and policies that foreground the interests of pupils to help influence the actions of parents and carers. These could include a 'pollution-free week' or 'cycle to school week'. Pupils could maybe help canvas local residents for their views, or monitor parking behaviour outside the school.

6

## INVOLVE THE POLICE

Local police may already be active in your area and generally encouraging drivers to be more considerate. Their presence near your school could help consolidate any new proposals you're trying to put in place, and they may be able to circulate and direct parents towards alternative parking facilities.

7

## WHAT'S NEARBY?

Check whether there are any schemes or parking solutions in the wider locale. Are there any car parks that aren't being used? Might a local council-run community centre have a locked car park that you can use? See if you can meet the key holder and discuss opening up the space at peak times..

8

## EXPLORE YOUR FUNDING OPTIONS

Is there a local residents' association? If so, they could be influential in helping to secure extra funding to improve the situation. For example, some LAs charge development projects a Community Infrastructure Levy, the proceeds of which are then used to fund public infrastructure improvements.

9

## WHO NEEDS WHAT?

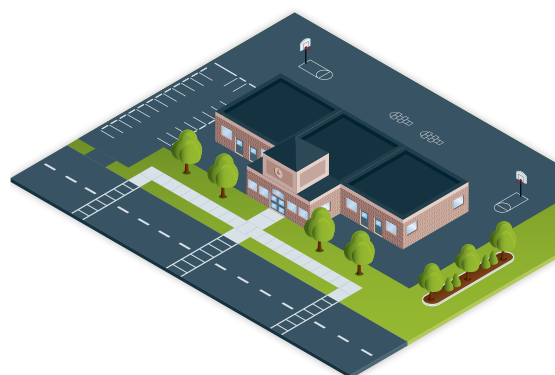
Parents and carers want their pick ups and drop-offs to be as quick and smooth as possible. Local residents become frustrated with high volumes of traffic. Pedestrians would rather not walk through plumes of smoke. Try to balance people's concerns and see if a solution can be found that's right for everyone.

10

## PEDESTRIANS FIRST!

The solution you decide on should ultimately put pedestrians first, and not involve eroding or reducing existing footpaths. For instance, it may be possible to turn a roadside grass verge into a parking space – though pedestrians would then obviously need to watch out for the risks presented by vehicles encroaching on to the pavement.

**Matthew Thirsk is a landscape architect within JBA Consulting's landscape architecture and urban design team; he can be contacted at [matthew.thirsk@jbaconsulting.com](mailto:matthew.thirsk@jbaconsulting.com)**







## “THERE WERE PHYSICAL ALTERCATIONS”

*Iona Rogulski, transport planner at Kent County Council, describes why collaboration is crucial for resolving parking issues*

### IDENTIFICATION

When it comes to problematic parking outside schools, there's no magic wand or 'one size fits all' approach. Attempts to address inconsiderate or unsafe parking can often strain relationships between schools and local residents, parents and businesses; it's only when all parties work together that a solution can be found.

As Kent County Council's Transport Planner within the Transport Innovations team, my role involves supporting schools in creating and maintaining their School Travel Plan documents (see [jambusterstpm.co.uk](http://jambusterstpm.co.uk) for further details) and awarding Capital Grant Funding.

I recently became aware of a rapidly growing hostile parking situation in the vicinity of two school sites within the Dartford area – Joydens Wood Infant School and Joydens Wood Junior School.

### MEETING

I visited the site to observe the issue and spoke with both headteachers. They told me that they'd received regular complaints – sometimes of an abusive nature – from local residents regarding the parking situation around the school site at peak times, and were aware that physical altercations had taken place between parents in front of pupils.

Both headteachers felt weren't receiving enough support from the local community with what was effectively an issue of parent behaviour outside the schools' grounds.

In my experience, adopting a holistic approach is necessary for resolving such issues and finding appropriate resolutions. I therefore arranged a meeting at the school where the attendees included parents, residents, both headteachers, a local councillor, two PCSOs and myself.

### COLLABORATION

The meeting considered a number of possible solutions, including educating the schools' children so that they could talk about their travel arrangements with their parents, and applying for grant funding of up to £5,000 that could be spent on infrastructure to support active or sustainable travel. It was also proposed that the schools receive resources to support parental parking information campaigns, and making parking facilities a short walk from both schools available for use by parents.

Though the situation has yet to be resolved at the time of writing, the attendees all agreed that achieving a positive change in driver behaviour at peak times would require a collaborative approach.

## GET CAMPAIGNING

Enlist pupils and parents in making the mornings and afternoons safer for all with these helpful resources...

### Responsible Parking

Kent County Council's Responsible Parking initiative provides schools with a website for sharing ideas and best practice and a selection of freely supplied physical resources, including A5 leaflets, A6 'report cards' and weatherproof banners requesting that motorists park responsibly and legally, any of which can be replaced when needed. Acknowledging that leaving the car at home isn't practical for everyone, the initiative also promotes car sharing and enlisting local car parks for 'park and ride' arrangements. [responsibleparking.co.uk](http://responsibleparking.co.uk)



### Modeshift STARS

A national awards scheme that's free to join for schools outside London, which aims to encourage efforts at boosting sustainable and active travel. Upon joining, schools can begin using the Modeshift STARS portal to create a travel plan, and start logging and recording sustainable travel activities they've undertaken to advance through bronze, silver and gold accreditation. Accredited schools will then qualify for entry in the Regional and National School Travel Awards. [modeshiftstars.org](http://modeshiftstars.org)



### Roadwise

Schools in North Yorkshire, or indeed any other schools seeking tips on producing their own

classroom resources and campaigning materials, should take a look at the 'Teachers Area' section of the Roadwise website – a road safety initiative developed by LAs across the county. There they'll find posters, leaflets and other free downloads highlighting the benefits of cycling, the risks of parking near school entrances, safety guidance for child pedestrians and various cross-curricular learning activities. [roadwise.co.uk](http://roadwise.co.uk)

For more information, visit [kent.gov.uk](http://kent.gov.uk)

# WHAT LEARNING IMPACT ARE YOUR CLASSROOMS HAVING?

Guy Claxton and Becky Carlzon describe how the organising and shaping of classrooms can help pupils to become more confident and capable learners

**H**ow do we configure our classrooms so that they are effective incubators of children's learning power? Take a look around. What is your environment like right now, as you read these words? Are you reading on a computer or tablet?

If so, does that make it easier to look things up – references to research, the meaning of unfamiliar words, and suchlike – as you go along? Does the internet challenge your concentration by making an alluring little noise when an email arrives?

Are there other distractions? Are you too hot or too cold? Are there books within reach? Are there other people around to talk to about ideas that spark your interest? Does your environment provoke thought and stimulate thinking? Or does it interfere with your learning?

## WHY DESIGN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Wherever we are, our physical environment impacts on our learning through the distractions and resources which it contains. And this is especially true of

classrooms. Many features of the classroom affect the kinds of learning that the children will engage in, and the kinds of learning strengths and behaviours which they will draw on.

For example, some classroom layouts facilitate collaborative conversation, while others inhibit it. Some classrooms have displays and anchor charts that act as reminders to the children to continuously work on and strengthen themselves as learners. Some invite imagination and concentration. Some invite silent reading or encourage competition. Some encourage the children to be resourceful and independent, while others encourage dependency and helplessness.

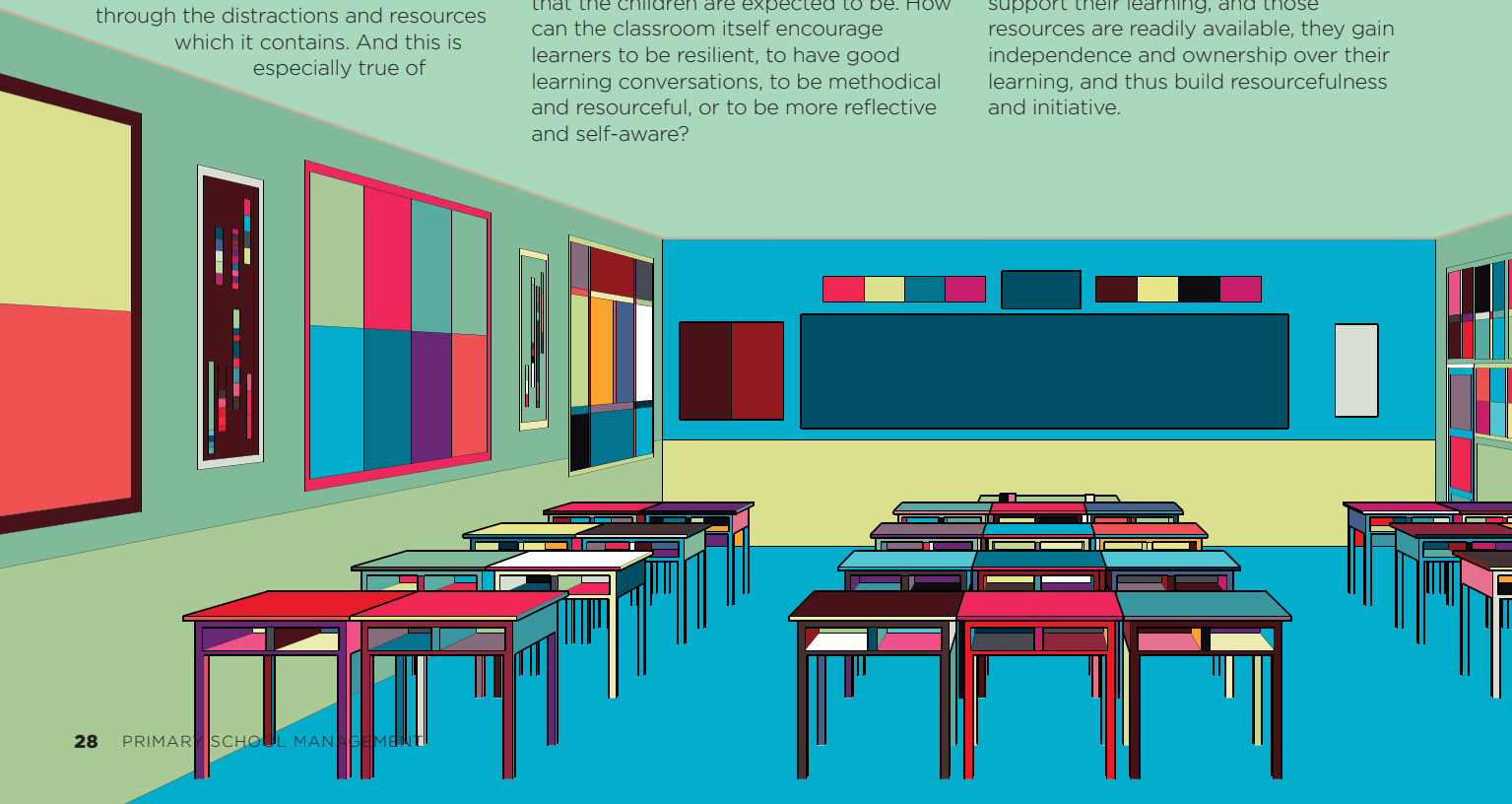
When teachers realise that they are inevitably in the 'cultivating attitudes' business, they have to pay attention to every element of the classroom that carries messages about learning, and about the kinds of learners that the children are expected to be. How can the classroom itself encourage learners to be resilient, to have good learning conversations, to be methodical and resourceful, or to be more reflective and self-aware?

Before we get into the how, let's take a moment to talk about the *why*. There are a number of good reasons why purposefully designing the learning environment is a good idea. The early childhood teachers behind the famous Reggio Emilia approach describe the learning environment as the 'third teacher' – the other two being the actual teacher and the relationships and interactions between the children. If this is true, then obviously we want to configure the environment to make the third teacher as effective as possible.

Furniture can be arranged purposefully to foster the kind of learning you want, and to develop the learning muscles which you are targeting. For example, you can think about how to arrange the tables for group learning,

*"Some classroom layouts facilitate collaborative conversation, while others inhibit it"*

paired learning, individual learning, or a mix of all three. When children understand how to use resources to support their learning, and those resources are readily available, they gain independence and ownership over their learning, and thus build resourcefulness and initiative.





## WHAT THE ENVIRONMENT CAN DO

Now to the how. Think about the layout and use of the furniture. Take a moment to reflect on how your classroom is presently laid out. Think about what kinds of learning behaviours are made easier or more difficult by this layout. What implicit messages does the classroom send to the children about how responsible and independent you want them to be?

Are the tables in rows facing the front, or are children in groups around tables? What effect do you think this has on the learning in your classroom? Who decides who sits where? Do the seating arrangements change, or do the children always sit in the same place? What are the pros and cons of you deciding, or of the children having a say? Do you rearrange the furniture in order to facilitate different kinds of learning?

Do you tend to group children according to ability? Do you try to disguise this by inventing what you think are neutral names for the groups – for example, ‘the Yellow Table’, ‘the Elephants’, and so on? Do you think the children see through this? What effect do you think it has on the children’s attitudes to learning if they know they are in the top, bottom, or middle group? Do you have your own desk? Do you tend to hide behind it when you are anxious? What message do you think this sends to the children?

When you have considered these questions, think about what might happen if you changed things around and do a ‘plus, minus, interesting’ on each idea. This is a

thinking routine, originally developed by Edward de Bono, which asks you to separate out the pluses, the positive effects, and the minuses – the risks or disadvantages – and consider any interesting questions that arise.

Once you have reflected, why not try out some new ideas? See what happens when you put all the chairs in a big circle, or put the chairs to one side so children have to stand, sit on the floor, or lie down. What happens when you move your own desk, say from the front to the back of the room – or get rid of it completely? Could you create a classroom layout that is easily adaptable to individual learning, group learning, and paired learning without causing too much of a fuss?

## PROVISION OF RESOURCES

In order to be resourceful learners, children need to a) understand what resources can help them learn at any given time, and b) be able to easily access those resources. Is your classroom currently enabling the children to do this? If not, how can you encourage them to be more resourceful by gradually increasing the demand that they select and collect their own resources?

Alongside making resources more accessible to the children, you could create ‘unstuck’ posters as a class by discussing different ways in which they could solve problems in their learning without having to rely on an adult.

Inspirational quotes can emphasise the learning habits you are aiming to develop and create opportunities for you to structure class discussions about them. There are lots of quotations on the Internet, attributed to various famous

people, that emphasise the necessity and importance of making mistakes if you are trying to achieve anything novel or worthwhile. For example:

*“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”*

– Samuel Beckett

*“I look on losing not as failure but as research.”*

– Billie Jean King

*“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”*

– Thomas Edison

See if the children can find new ones to display, or ask them to make up good quotes about the power of failure.

## THE LEARNING POWER APPROACH

**The learning power approach is a way of teaching for teachers who value politeness and success, but who also value other outcomes even more. They want to see children do as well as they can on the tests, to learn to read and write and do their maths, but – more than that – they also want them to grow in their independence, resourcefulness, creativity, curiosity and capacity for thinking about and exploring important matters deeply – for themselves.**

Another way to make mistakes sound positive rather than negative is to create a display which celebrates the most interesting or intelligent mistake made that week – by a child or an adult. The one in Becky’s classroom is titled ‘Mistake of the Week’.

See if you can talk the children into volunteering their own mistakes for consideration, or ask them to nominate each other. Make this the most exciting display in your classroom by talking about it regularly and building anticipation with the children by saying things like, ‘I wonder who will make it onto the ‘Mistake of the Week’ wall this week?’



**Professor Guy Claxton** is a cognitive scientist specialising in the expandability of human intelligence

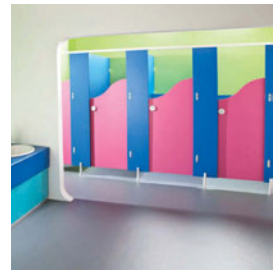


**Becky Carlzon** is a primary teacher and Learning Power Approach practitioner with international

teaching experience spanning 12 years

The article is an edited extract from the book *Powering Up Children*, which is available now, published by Crown House Publishing

# Top of the class in school washrooms



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## SHOULD YOUR PUPILS BRING **THEIR OWN DEVICES?**

Having parents help spread the costs your edtech provision might seem like an attractive idea, but it's a policy that should be pursued with care, says Terry Freedman...

**A**ccording to a 2017 Ofcom report (see [tinyurl.com/ofcom-cap-2017](https://tinyurl.com/ofcom-cap-2017)), 5% of 5- to 7-year-olds now own a phone, rising to 39% of 8 to 11-year-olds. In terms of tablet devices, the same report states that 21% of 3- to 4-year-olds possessed one of their own (up from 16% in 2016), and that this ownership figure rises rapidly to 35% of 5- to 7-year-olds and 52% of all 8- to 11-year-olds.

With numbers like these, would it therefore not make sense for schools to adopt 'bring your own device' policies? The advantage of such a move is that pupils gain access to powerful devices in lessons they're already familiar with as part of a cost-saving exercise for the school – but there are a number of important considerations schools should bear in mind before rushing into it.

### PEDAGOGY FIRST

The most important thing is that schools should start with the teaching and learning, rather than the device. Think more in terms of a '1:1 policy', rather than an 'iPad policy'.

The next issue concerns ownership. Should parents buy the device, and if so, should the choice be solely left to them? After all, the only way of ensuring every child has a device of equal capability is for the school to actually buy and own the devices itself.



Schools must also ensure that parents who can't afford to buy a tablet device are somehow supported – perhaps by allowing parents to pay off the cost of the device in monthly instalments. More broadly, the introduction of a BYOD policy should be done *with* parents, not *to* them. This will involve outlining the policy and why you think it's needed, and providing parents with opportunities to voice any concerns and have their questions answered.

## NETWORK CAPACITY

Some schools have previously made the mistake of adopting a 1:1 policy without considering the capacity of their wifi network. Enabling 100 pupils to access the internet simultaneously is very different to enabling 20 or 30 to connect at once. Think also about how pupils will be able to save and retrieve their work – the obvious solution here being to use a cloud storage solution such as Microsoft's 'Office 365 Education' or Google's 'G Suite for Education'.

There are also two key security aspects to consider. One is the need to make sure pupils can't use their devices to bypass the school's online content filtering policy, and the other is the risk of theft, particularly as pupils travel to and from school. If the devices in question have been purchased by parents in accordance with specifications set by the school, the case could be made for the devices to be locked away at the end of each day and kept in school overnight.

As should be clear by now, a BYOD policy isn't something to be hurried. Some schools have opted to introduce such policies gradually by having them apply to smaller groups first, before rolling them out to the whole school. This can be done by appointing a small set of 'digital pioneers' made up of staff and pupils and equipping them with basic knowledge and training, so that they'll be in a position to flag up teething problems and help the next tranche of colleagues and peers when the time comes.

*Terry Freedman is an independent education technology consultant and writer*

 @terryfreedman

 [ictineducation.org](http://ictineducation.org)



## “PEOPLE GET TOLD TO COMMIT SUICIDE”

If we're to tackle the recent trend of online self-harm bullying, we first have to know what's actually going on, says Mark Bentley

**S**chools and parents hear lots about bullying and about self-harm, but you may be less aware of 'self-harm bullying' – a process by which children and young people are encouraged by others to harm themselves, or worse. It sounds awful, but it's important for schools and parents to be aware of this trend and provide appropriate guidance.

Self-harm is traditionally more associated with secondary students, but it's something that's now affecting younger children too; NHS Digital reported last year that 107 children between the ages 3 and 9 were taken to hospital due to self-harming between 2016 and 2017.

To find out more about children's online lives and devise appropriate guidance for teachers, LGfL DigiSafe carried out its own online safety survey of around 40,000 pupils across the UK; half of those surveyed attended primary school, with the majority of respondents (80%) made up of pupils in years 5 to 9.

We asked pupils 'Have you ever seen anything that encourages people to hurt themselves?', which highlighted the striking statistic that yes, almost one in six pupils (primary and secondary alike) had seen something encouraging self-harm.

Against a background of headlines concerning 'self-harm epidemics' and GPs and schools reporting major increases in cutting, overdosing on pills and burning, we expected to hear about online material from groups encouraging cutting or eating disorders (the latter known as 'pro-ana' and 'pro-mia'). Whilst both issues did feature, there were more prominent concerns for school staff.

We found that one in four pupils had been bullied online, while one in 13 admitted to having been the bully. More surprising was our discovery from pupils'

free-text responses of how closely self harm and bullying now seem to be linked. Again and again, we'd read comments along the following lines: "People get told to commit suicide and sent pictures with the 'correct' way to do it."

It's been common for bullying to include calls to 'go kill yourself,' but recent evidence indicates that such incidents are now often followed by instructions, images, or even videos on how to do so. Given the existing links between bullying and self-harm or suicide, this is especially troubling.

The key technology players must do more to actively remove self-harm material from their platforms, via both human moderation and automated means. At LGfL, we've welcomed the government's efforts at building on its previously published Internet Safety Strategy (see [tinyurl.com/gov-iss-gp](http://tinyurl.com/gov-iss-gp)) and addressing some of the issues identified in our own Hopes and Streams report ([tinyurl.com/lgfl-h-s](http://tinyurl.com/lgfl-h-s)). Another positive move has been the introduction of 'Education for a Connected World' ([tinyurl.com/ukcis-ecw](http://tinyurl.com/ukcis-ecw)) – a digital resilience framework developed by the UK Council for Internet Safety.

It's vital that school management teams continue to understand and respond appropriately to the current trends that surround these challenging issues. Increasing awareness of 'self-harm' bullying and other forms of online harm is the first step towards combating their effects.

**Mark Bentley is online safety and safeguarding manager at The London Grid for Learning**

 @LGfL

 [digisafe.lgfl.net](http://digisafe.lgfl.net)



# Distribute your tech know-how

With schools now so dependent on IT, here's how to bring your less tech-savvy members of staff on board with the modern way of doing things...

**T**he key to bringing tech-sceptical staff up to speed is to not focus on the technology, but on the benefits the technology will have on learning for the children they teach. After all, isn't this the reason for teachers entering the profession – to make a difference, open up opportunities for children and leave the world in a brighter place than when they found it?

## *The right conditions*

Before supporting a member of staff with their use of technology, take a moment to examine the conditions they're working in. Do they have the tools they need to be successful? If the answer's no, and they're working with technology that's outdated, try to rectify this as much as you can.

It never fails to surprise me how those teachers that use technology the least are typically given the oldest hardware to work with. Is it any wonder that their confidence in technology is so poor when they've not been given a fair shot?

If the conditions are right, then I'd advise starting small by modelling how to do just one thing which will benefit the children they teach. This could be as simple as playing a video on YouTube, or sharing a piece of work in Google Classroom. After the modelling, revisit the task with your colleague a week later and ask them to repeat the process, offering support where necessary. Be sure to master the simple things before moving onto something more challenging. Don't look to show off yourself, and above all, be patient and sincere.

You can then take things a step further by modelling experiences with

technology that provide some form of connection. If you can model to a colleague how to write a blog post, or engage in social media in a way that benefits them professionally, the impact can be transformational.

## *Build a network*

One thing I've found that never fails to connect a teacher and their children with the transformative power of technology is a 'Mystery Skype' (see [tinyurl.com/psm-myst-skype](http://tinyurl.com/psm-myst-skype)). This is an easy, free and engaging way for classrooms worldwide to interact and find out more about each other using the Skype videoconferencing platform. Typically, two classrooms will arrange to contact one another via a Skype video call. By asking questions, giving clues and listening to each other, students use their map-reading and communication skills to discover the geographical location of the other class.

As your colleagues become more confident and engaged with using

technology to support learning, try building a network of people who are prepared to share their skills. I've found it helpful to make collaborative CPD a regular feature of meetings, allowing successes to be shared and challenges to be faced collectively. If possible, try to make video and/or audio recordings of this CPD so that less confident members of staff can revisit the training at their own convenience.

You'll soon find that those colleagues who were previously sceptical about using technology become your biggest advocates. Just remember in that early phase that you must be patient and sincere – and that no one likes a know-it-all!

**Gary Spracklen is headteacher at The Prince of Wales School, Dorchester, a former Digital Educator of the Year and a member of the government's Educational Technology Action Group**





# DOES YOUR CLASSROOM HAVE ‘CHEAP SEATS’?

Screens have become an essential part of the modern classroom – but as Ross McGill notes, pupils might not be getting the full benefit from them...

**W**hen I first became a teacher back in 1993, I'd teach using a blackboard. These were graphic design lessons, with 30 kids in the classroom, which would involve isometric drawing, where the children would be required to follow lines and instructions laid out on the blackboard one stage at a time. It was a difficult thing to achieve.

From there, we moved to using OHPs and whiteboards, and eventually transitioned to interactive whiteboards in the early 2000s. I remember our first one – at the time I was a young head of department at a brand new school, and duly put it in our biggest and shiniest classroom. From around 2008 onwards we then started seeing a shift to using wall-mounted projectors – but through all those changes, not once did I consider how the size and positioning of the screen might have implications for pupils' learning.

## TROUBLING FINDINGS

Research conducted by Epson with over 300 teachers across different settings has shown that 40% perceive a correlation between children being unable to clearly see a screen and lower test scores. Epson published that statistic and others in a report (see [tinyurl.com/epson-cheap-seats](http://tinyurl.com/epson-cheap-seats)) that uses the term 'cheap seats' to describe the phenomenon – which I find quite troubling.

I've given lots of thought to where my pupils are seated, of course, but never to how the impact of the visuals I'm using will vary as a result.

I've been very active on social media over the last 10 years, partly because of how it's helped me access educational research much more quickly, and become more immersed in fields like cognitive science. We're still working out how our brains enable us to learn as adults, and

the ways in which we can struggle to retain information. How tough must that process be for a seven-year-old, when you can't even comprehend or articulate what's happening to you in class?

## IMPACT ON LEARNING

I need to check with my learners to see whether they know what I've asked them to do and can comprehend the information I'm teaching them. One of the easiest ways for a teacher with a class of 30 pupils to navigate this is to quiz – 'How do you spell 'volcano?'' Hands may be raised, answers could be written on mini whiteboards.

But how should that question be conveyed via a screen? We might display the text of the question -ideally not at a miniscule size – alongside a nice, big picture of a volcano. If I also say the question out loud, I've given the pupils



## THE 4/6/8 RULE

To determine how large the screens in shared rooms, lecture halls and other public spaces should be, audiovisual specialists will use the 4/6/8 rule. This rule holds that ideal viewing distance, in correlation with room size, should be 4, 6 or 8 times the height of the screen for analytical viewing, basic viewing and passive viewing respectively.

three ways of accessing the information. If 12 hands go up, I can then evaluate what to do next.

If I fail to check what the kids can see and read quickly or effectively enough, that's going to have a big impact on how they learn – and as the aforementioned research shows, their educational outcomes, behaviour, engagement and participation in class.

## TIME CONSTRAINTS

Good quality teaching will often utilise dual coding – I'll show a picture of a volcano on the screen, followed by slide with the word 'volcano' written in a large font. Meanwhile, there may be a pupil in the corner who's visually impaired, completing a worksheet on which the vowels of the word are missing so they can learn how to spell it.

Primary teachers have got various 'ins', but will need to prepare, plan, rehearse and test them in the context of multiple subjects that will be taught to 30 kids at a time. Teachers and school leaders therefore have very little time to spend on assessing the learning impact of a particular item of edtech and how it should be used.

In my own experience, I've not had the time to immerse myself in this sort of information. I think back to the projectors I've used over the years, and how the school would often purchase one device

and install it in every classroom. A company might customise each projector's location and distance, but these were secondary school classrooms. A maths teacher might be using theirs to write equations on a screen; as a D&T teacher, my screen would be located in a much larger classroom with machinery and workshop areas – yet there would be little differentiation in terms of the visuals seen by students.

That's the reality in many schools, because we're not experts. We rely on companies like Epson and others to provide us with research and expertise. I've visited well over a hundred schools, and from what I've seen, primary schools largely operate with interactive whiteboards, while secondaries will use a mix of whiteboards, touchscreens, projectors, and interactive boards that vary in size and scale according to department, room size and many other factors.

## CONTEXT IS KEY

The headline features of one device or display won't apply in every situation, so what I'd say to edtech companies is that their products have to be both affordable and offer a long-term solution. The former can be addressed through site licences and other ways of covering costs that are more affordable over time, rather than large, one-off purchases. The latter should entail more in the way of support than 'There's your product, here's the support number, see you later.' Someone should be able to attend the site where the equipment will be used in order to check, test and if necessary, update it.

Teachers also need training, but with the current high stakes accountability system through league tables and exam performance, schools won't typically use their Inset days in a way that lets teachers learn more about using classroom screens and displays. Even if they do, it'll usually be to show how a brand new product works, and the content will rarely be revisited.

We could start addressing the 'cheap seats' issue by giving schools access to



online materials – perhaps a 10-minute training video that highlights recent edtech impact research, graphics that clearly show how the 4/6/8 rule applies to classrooms [see panel], short presentations – information that schools would value.

Among the people I've worked with, I've rarely encountered considerations of where screens are positioned, whether the 4/6/8 rule has been observed or if we risk cognitive overload through the way we present photographs and decide on the size and colour of text. For all we know, that seven-year-old child at the back can't decode the information we're providing.

We all have different sensory needs, and the challenge teachers face in having to meet those needs can be highly complex. We're still working out how the process of learning works, which directly applies to how we use our projectors, how our classrooms are arranged, where the kids are sitting and how our lessons are taught. What edtech companies can do is support teachers in using their tools in the most effective way possible.

# 76%

OF TEACHERS BELIEVE CHILDREN ARE MORE DISENGAGED WHEN THEY CAN'T SEE THE SCREEN PROPERLY



# 40%

OF TEACHERS NOTICE A PATTERN BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH LIMITED SCREEN VISIBILITY AND LOWER EXAM SCORES

Source: Epson research published in January 2019, based on interviews conducted with a nationally representative sample of 300 primary and secondary school teachers



**Ross McGill is a teacher, author, speaker and the director of TeacherToolkit**

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# Community Engagement

## WHY FOOD EDUCATION SHOULD INVOLVE EVERYONE

We look at how one East London primary sought to include parents and families in its efforts to improve pupils' awareness of healthy eating and nutrition

**H**oly Trinity Primary School is a two-form entry, voluntary-aided Church of England Primary School with a pre-school and nursery located in Hackney, East London. It's one of eight schools belonging to the Primary Advantage Federation, overseen by executive head Sian Davies, with headteacher Yvonne Barnett leading Holy Trinity's teaching and learning.

An average-sized primary with 279 pupils on roll, nearly half of Holy Trinity's pupils receive Pupil Premium, just under 60% have English as an additional language and 20% of have special education needs and disabilities. Its last Ofsted inspection was in 2013 and saw the school rated as Outstanding, with inspectors noting pupils' above average performance in maths and English by the end of KS2.

One of the school's key ambitions has always been to try and build on pupils' daily learning by offering them opportunities to develop their existing talents or try something new, whether it be a type of sport, a craft or indeed a life skill of some sort.

As part of these efforts to empower pupils, Barnett opted to introduce a new, more holistic approach to how the school promotes mealtimes for pupils and educates them about food. The process began with consulting pupils, parents and carers, governors and external consultants on the school's existing catering provision, before taking a closer look at the food education pupils received and considering ways in which they could be taught lifelong positive eating habits.

Consequently, there's now a 'healthy eating thread' running throughout the school that begins with the ready availability of fresh



fruit and water in nursery, and culminates in Year 6 lessons where pupils study a wide range of ingredients before learning how to create balanced meals. Lunchtimes at Holy Trinity also saw major changes, and now resemble restaurant or family dining experiences. The adults and children eat lunch together seated at round tables, using proper cutlery and crockery, which has enabled informal interactions between staff and pupils and helped build trust and foster constructive relationships outside the classroom.

The parental engagement part of the process was introduced via parents' evenings, which saw staff speak to parents of pupils who brought in packed lunches to ensure said parents were making informed choices. This was intended as a preventative, more consensual approach to avoiding the issues that might arise if the contents of pupils' packed lunches were to be actively 'policed.'

As Barnett explains, "Educating families as a whole is a key priority for us, and that starts with cooking healthy meals from scratch. We want to do more work with parents, and we have plans to bring small groups of parents in for cooking clubs and to visit certain places where they can learn more and spread that message to other parents. All of that has a positive knock-on effect for both the school and the community."

The school is planning to further develop these efforts by inviting groups of three or four parents to spend some time in the school's kitchen, where they'll get to find out more about the physical and mental health benefits of healthier eating for young children.

"Eating healthier is vitally important because the by-product of a healthier, better educated primary school child is lower obesity, stronger family bonds, better eyesight, better teeth and attitudes towards alcohol and smoking, and much more," concludes Barnett. "It has to start somewhere – and we think the best place to start is at school meal times."

*Schools can download a series of free, cross-curricular teaching resources as part of the Change4Life campaign; for more details, visit [tinyurl.com/change4life-schools](http://tinyurl.com/change4life-schools)*

 @change4life



## SHOULD SCHOOLS KNOW MORE ABOUT PUPILS' EYESIGHT?

A new EEF study will find out whether sharing the results of pupil eye tests with schools can prevent visual impairments from impacting on academic outcomes

**D**o you know how many of your pupils require glasses? They may receive an eye test during their first year of school as recommended by the NHS, but at present schools aren't told the results. It's estimated that between 10% and 15% fail such tests, and that a third of those won't attend optician appointments to receive treatment.

Making matters worse is the fact that the results of those tests aren't shared with schools. The result? Children with visual impairments aren't identified as such, potentially leading to them presenting issues with reading and numeracy that prompt schools to put in place erroneous and ineffective interventions.

An Education Endowment Foundation trial launched this month hopes to change that. The EEF has partnered with the University of Leeds and Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in the rollout of Glasses for Classes – a programme that aims to distribute glasses to children aged 4 and 5 who need them.

The EEF trial will see the results of first year eye tests shared with staff and parents at 100 schools. Staff will then receive training in how to support pupils requiring glasses and their families, advising families on how to obtain the glasses and encourage their children to wear them. Participating schools will also receive funding to ensure that pupils can keep a second pair on school premises, and appoint members of staff to co-ordinate relationships between the school, families, opticians and health services.

It's hoped that The Glasses for Classes programme will be able to build in prior work carried out by Born in Bradford – a long term health research study tracking the lives of 13,500 Bradford children born between 2007 and 2010 and their families. Its director of vision research, Dr Alison Bruce, previously found that eye conditions such as short-sightedness, or astigmatism could slow the development of literacy skills if left undiagnosed and untreated.

Pupils with such conditions experienced difficulties in learning to read, since they lacked the vision needed to distinguish between letters or follow visual cues for their teachers. The issue was particularly pronounced among children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who less likely to have received a proper diagnosis.

According to Professor Mark Mon-Williams, lead academic from the University of Leeds, "We believe this project shows great promise and could help the large number of children with visual problems across the country to have a more positive educational experience."

Dr Bruce in turn noted, "There is currently no mechanism to ensure vision screening results are actioned. This can leave the condition untreated throughout a child's early school years, with known potential to impact on their future educational attainment. This new research provides the opportunity to influence national policy in the future."

 @EducEndowFoundn

 [educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk](http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)



# Forget fines - let's try apologies

Is a £1,000 fine really the best way of discouraging term time pupil absences? Emma Banister Dean suggests an alternative approach...

**T**he problem with levying financial penalties on parents taking children out of school in term time is that it can make the council or school out to be 'the bad guy.' Matters aren't helped when the savings families can make by booking trips outside of the school holidays are so significant – sometimes as much as 100%. Even if a fine's set at £1,000, as recently proposed by Lancashire County Council, a family of four can still make a saving that's more significant than the fine itself by booking their holiday during term time.

The head of a school where I was previously the chair of governors referred to such incidents as a 'theft of education'. By taking a child out of school during term time, what you're effectively doing is depriving that child of education that will directly benefit their future.

## The hardest hit

The standard term time absence fine is currently £60 if paid within 21 days,

rising to £120 if not. Aside from being far less than the amount families can expect to save on their holiday costs, there's another issue in that families who are less well off tend to be hit harder by financial penalties. Affluent families are better placed to budget around the financial cost of fines – and it may well be that wealthier families are more likely to remove their children at times when it's advantageous for the parents to take time off work, which may or may not coincide with the school holidays.

In the course of my legal practice I've come to understand the effectiveness of a particular sanction encountered in defamation cases, where an individual who's defamed someone must make an apology – usually worded by the person making the claim – in open court for their behaviour. I've found that individuals in these cases are typically quite intimidated by having to attend court and apologise before a judge. I can picture this as a far more effective way of dealing with people who have taken their children out of school during

term time; requiring them to either make an apology, or provide an explanation for their actions in open court.

It's a sanction that wouldn't disproportionately penalise the less well off, and would fall harder on those willing to be dishonest about their reasons for taking their children out of school during term time. At the moment, if people are prepared to make up a sympathetic reason, schools will be more likely to authorise a term time absence. If those families had to provide that explanation in open court and it was false, they'd be in contempt. People would be compelled to reflect on the value of their decision, the justification for it and whether they'd be willing to perjure themselves.

## Active prevention

The state has to decide on the value it's willing to place on children receiving education during term time. When children truant, the state will try and chase them down in local neighbourhoods and eventually return them to school, as it's deemed to be of crucial importance that they don't miss a day of their education, yet we have some children missing two weeks of school at a time.

This alternative sanction would stop people short and make them think. There could be all sorts of implications – parents would need to ask employers for time off, for example – but it would be less about the adult's punishment, and more about actively preventing the children involved from losing out on their education.

**Emma Banister Dean is a partner at  
Royds Withy King solicitors**

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# “You can be part of the solution”

Scarlett Lewis explains how the loss of her son in one of the most harrowing incidents in modern American history led to her advocating for better social and emotional learning in schools...

**O**n the morning of 14th December 2012, something happened that was to change the lives of Scarlett Lewis, her family and her local community forever. In a calm, level tone she explains that “My six-year-old son was murdered in his first grade classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary School, alongside 19 of his classmates and six educators in one of the worst mass murders in US history.”

Perpetrated by Adam Lanza – a 20-year-old local resident and former pupil at the school, who took his own life at the scene – the shooting prompted nationwide mourning and a period of soul-searching over the country’s gun laws and provision of mental health support.

Recalling her feelings in the immediate aftermath, Lewis remembers how “On the day of the shooting I was waiting outside the school with my other son, JT, to see whether Jesse was going to be coming back dead or alive. JT was 12 at the time, attending the nearby middle school. As I was being questioned by the police I came to realise that JT was watching my every move; that he was learning how to deal with this tragedy in our lives by watching me.

“I quickly recognised that his reaction was going to depend not on how I told him to handle it, but on how he’d see me handle it. That made me mindful about my reaction – which isn’t to say that I showed no emotion. I miss Jesse every day, but as a lesson to JT, I wanted to show others a model of how it’s possible to go through such tragedy.”

## RAGE AND FORGIVENESS

Lewis’ response to the events of that day subsequently took on a form that some might find difficult, if not impossible to contemplate. “There were actually 28 victims in the Sandy Hook tragedy,” she says, “because I include Adam Lanza, and his mother. She was a single mom doing the best that she could, without any help. She had a son who was diagnosed with Asperger’s – that had nothing to do with what happened, but he had social issues, he’d been bullied.

“The tragedy began with an angry thought in his head, which grow into rage. He had been neglected, he was in pain. I actually feel compassion for him, and have forgiven him – almost from the very beginning.”

Feeling intuitively that what transpired could have prevented, Lewis set about researching those factors and issues that might have contributed to Lanza’s actions and soon found herself exploring the background to a range of mental health affecting

not just schools in the US, but others in countries throughout the world. In the course of her research, Lewis came across the work of Dr. Chris Kukk, a professor of political and social Science at Western Connecticut State University, who introduced her to social and emotional learning (SEL) – a form of intervention that seeks to impart a series of essential life skills around maintaining relationships, developing deep and meaningful connections with peers, managing emotions and building resilience.



## THOUGHTFUL RESPONSES

“Kids who are able to access it have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, less stress and anxiety and exhibit fewer behavioural issues,” says Lewis. “It’s statistically shown to be an effective way of reducing bullying. Research shows that children who have received it from kindergarten through to becoming young adults are better off physically, mentally and emotionally. When I saw all this, that SEL’s been around for decades and that we know so much about its benefits, I thought, how come every child doesn’t have access to this?”

As Lewis discovered, the answer to that question lay partly in the cost of existing SEL programmes and their requirements for extensive teacher training. Lewis thus began working with a group of educators, childhood development specialists, child psychologists and counsellors to create an accessible programme that could help schools overcome the barriers to getting SEL into classrooms.

The resulting Choose Love Enrichment Programme seeks to go beyond the five core components of SEL [see panel] to encompass elements of emotional intelligence and mindfulness, while taking on board recent developments in



SCARLETT LEWIS - "THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE"



### THE FIVE CORE COMPONENTS OF SEL

- Self awareness
- Awareness of others
- Responsible decision making
- Conflict resolution
- Emotional management

question. Given the polarised tenor of the times, and the apparent determination of some to sow as much division as possible, has it been difficult for her message to cut through and reach people? Has she encountered any active hostility?

"Nobody's ever come up to me and said 'Choosing Love? That's a pretty stupid idea,'" she replies. "How we respond to difficulties is up to us. When we respond with kindness, caring, concern and compassion, we're taking our personal power back and making the world a better place. When we react with anger, hatred and resentment, we're giving that personal power away, in effect becoming victims ourselves."

### DOING WHAT'S RIGHT

Giving individuals the tools to develop and internalise this process of active decision-making in the face of difficult emotional challenges is a core part of Choose Love movement, though as Lewis herself concedes, the pathway there isn't necessarily a smooth one. "Even now, it's not like I don't sometimes fall into anger and resentment – but it doesn't feel good. Love does. I don't feel good when I fall into anger, which is what makes me choose love."

For all that Lewis might not have personally encountered any pushback to the ideas she's putting forward, she does acknowledge that, "There's a whole industry dedicated to treating the symptoms of anxiety and social issues, and people out there who won't be happy with me for talking about proactively reducing and preventing the suffering before it even starts."

"I see it as my job to cultivate the courage it takes to step outside of all that and to do what's right. I use Jesse as an example of courage. He stood up to the shooter, at six years old, and saved nine of his classmates' lives before losing his own. We all have Jesse's courage. He was a 6-year old boy, but courage is like a muscle – it has to be practised."



JESSE LEWIS

20-minute lessons on a daily or weekly basis.

Lewis' plan now is to take the Choose Love Enrichment Programme further afield to the UK and elsewhere, with January having seen Lewis address the Bett Show and attend meetings in Parliament. The interest seems to be there, with the Programme's freely available online resources having been downloaded in over 60 countries.

### SPREADING THE MESSAGE

It remains to be seen whether the Choose Love Enrichment Programme finds a foothold in the UK, given how schools here are just as time-pressed as their American counterparts – but in the meantime, I'm interested in what sort of feedback Lewis has received. How have people taken to the message of empathy at the centre of the Programme and Lewis' broader Choose Love Movement? Lewis politely corrects me. "The goal isn't to spread empathy, it's to spread compassion. Compassion contains both empathy, the identifying of an issue, but also a call to action for everyone to take responsibility for what's going on in our world."

"Overall, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. The Choose Love Movement is a place where everyone can come together. Regardless of what your politics are, or your view on guns, it doesn't matter – you can come together in the Choose Love movement and be part of the solution."

The factionalism she hints at prompts me to ask what seems like an obvious

neuroscientific research. As Lewis puts it, "We want kids to understand what's happening to them when they lose their temper, and that they can control their response. The aim is to give them the skills and tools they need to respond thoughtfully in any given situation, circumstance or interaction."

The Programme currently includes a branch aimed at practitioners working with toddlers and infants that focuses on attachment, plus 20- to 30-minute activities for younger children that involve structured conversations aimed at developing peer-to-peer communication skills. With time more limited at middle and high school level, the Programme's provision for older children and young people typically consists of 10- to

# Where should you go for your end of year school trip?

If you're planning to give your pupils a year-end treat, here are several experiences well worth considering



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## **JULIE BROOKS**

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## **JAMIE LAWRENCE**

**Schools Executive, LEGOLAND®  
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The LEGOLAND® Windsor Resort's ethos is all about allowing pupils of all ages to engage and explore through creative and imaginative play. The Resort's offer of theme park rides and attractions combined with interactive educational workshops makes it a strong contender for school teachers seeking somewhere engaging to take a school trip.

The resort is an exciting venue for learning outside the classroom. While most suitable for Key Stages 1 to 4, there are also experiences available for pre-school and younger school pupils. Schools can use a National Curriculum Map to navigate their way around the resort, making sure to tie in all of their learning objectives whilst enjoying over 55 rides and attractions.

Top attractions for visiting school groups at the LEGOLAND® Windsor Resort include Miniland, where model scenes feature nearly 40 million LEGO® Bricks, and the LEGO® 4D Movie Theatre – a 4D film experience with wind, snow, fire and lighting effects. A LEGO® Brick Submarine underwater adventure ride is also bound to attract the attention of pupils, so don't miss experiencing the Atlantis Submarine Voyage.

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## A FIRST CLASS TREAT

**Why London's newest attraction, The Postal Museum, can provide your pupils with an engaging day to remember**

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Take your class on the Mail Rail, and journey through the original tunnels that once formed the famous Post Office

railway. Elsewhere, there's 'Sorted! The Postal Play Space' – a miniature mail-themed discovery space for children aged 8 and under that promises sackfuls of fun.

School visitors can take advantage of several services designed to make their day easier, including a dedicated lunch room and lockable bag and coat storage facility. After your visit you can build on the experience during class time with the aid of our free online learning resources.

**Nicola Rowell**  
**Year 1 teacher, Gospel Oak Primary school, London**

Gospel Oak Primary school has repeatedly visited The Postal Museum – it's always a great day, and the staff and parents enjoy the trip immensely.

The Postal Museum has loads of engaging, hands-on exhibits and very friendly staff; the workshops are excellent, and perfectly tailored to Year 1. Each visit

is an exciting opportunity for a class of children to really engage with the history of the post.

Our PTA, the Gospel Oak School Association, contributes to the cost of the visits, so that each child and their family pays just a minimal amount for the trip – usually £1 or £2. Letters are sent out a few weeks before each trip, parents reply and we make up for any shortfall in contributions.

**Kaylee Hopkins**  
**Head of Year 1, Beavers Community Primary school, London**

The Postal Museum fit in very well with our class topic. It was a fabulous day out for our school because it was very interactive and engaging. The workshops were so exciting for all the children.

Our group took part in museum's Jolly Postman literacy learning programme, and the children visited the 'Sorted!' indoor play area. The facilities are great. We budgeted for the trip with help from parental contributions, and gave ourselves a few months to collect the money.

**To find out more and book your visit, see [postalmuseum.org/for-schools](http://postalmuseum.org/for-schools)**

# £10m

GRANT FUNDING ANNOUNCED BY DEFRA TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO GREEN SPACES, INCLUDING VIA SCHOOL VISITS

# 64%

THE PERCENTAGE OF THOSE PARENTS ORGANISED SCHOOL TRIPS UNAFFORDABLE

Source: a November 2018 survey of 1,803 parents carried out by price comparison Idealo



According to DfE guidance, state-funded schools can choose to charge parents for certain activities, on the condition that charging

and remissions policies are in place and communicated to parents. However, schools cannot exclude children from participating in activities that form part of the national curriculum solely due to families' inability or reluctance to pay; schools must decide in such cases whether an activity's costs can be covered by fundraising efforts or must be cancelled. For more details, see the DfE advice document 'Charging for school activities' via [tinyurl.com/dfe-school-charges](http://tinyurl.com/dfe-school-charges)

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\*Learning Away Final Evaluation Report, York Consulting 2015.

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## ARE YOU ON TOP OF YOUR **INFECTION CONTROL?**

Emma Hammett highlights the measures schools can take to limit the impact of contagious infections

**T**he best way of preventing infection within a school is to ensure everyone has received appropriate immunisations, while maintaining a clean environment and observing the highest possible standards of personal hygiene and practice in the following areas:

### HAND WASHING

Hand washing is crucial for controlling the spread of infections, especially those resulting in diarrhoea, vomiting and respiratory disease. The recommended method is to use liquid soap and warm water, rubbing the hands all over and paying attention to frequently missed areas, such as around the thumb. Washed hands should be thoroughly dried with paper towels or a hand drier. Any cuts and abrasions should be covered with waterproof dressings.

### COUGHS AND SNEEZES

A cough or sneeze can project germs over three feet; if those germs carry a cold virus, it can survive on a hard indoor surfaces for up to a week. Flu viruses can survive on hard surfaces for up to 24 hours and for 15 minutes on a tissue. Always cover the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. In the case of norovirus, the winter vomiting bug, the germs in the vomit are projected in the same way as a sneeze, only further – 10ft to the front and 7ft to the side.



## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Disposable gloves and aprons should always be worn when changing pads or following contact with any bodily fluids. Appropriate PPE should also be used when handling cleaning chemicals and clearing up spillages of blood, faeces, saliva, vomit, nasal and eye discharges. When spillages occur, use a cleaning product that combines both a detergent and a disinfectant as per the manufacturer's instructions.

## CLOTHING

Wear disposable gloves and aprons whenever handling soiled linen. Children's soiled clothing should be bagged to go home and never rinsed by hand. Laundry should be dealt with in a separate dedicated facility. Soiled linen should be washed separately at the hottest wash the fabric will tolerate.

## PUPIL ATTENDANCE

Children with rashes should be considered infectious until assessed by their doctor. Note that extra care should be taken if pregnant women are exposed to certain medical conditions which could harm the foetus – further details concerning this and other risks can be found in a poster summarising the Public Health Agency's advice on containing infection within schools, which is downloadable as a PDF via [tinyurl.com/psm-pha](http://tinyurl.com/psm-pha)

## VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Children with medical conditions that reduce immunity, including leukaemia and other forms of cancer, may be especially vulnerable to infections such as chickenpox, measles and parvovirus B19. In the event of exposure, parents/carers should be notified immediately and further medical advice sought. It may be advisable for affected children to receive additional immunisations, such as pneumococcal and influenza.

*Emma Hammett is a registered general nurse and the founder/CEO of the first aid training provider First Aid for Life*

 @firstaidforlife

 [firstaidforlife.org.uk](http://firstaidforlife.org.uk)

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## TAKE THE LEAD ON MENTAL HEALTH

Senior leaders have a duty to be cognisant of both their own and their colleagues' mental health needs, writes Dr Margot Sunderland

**T**he current state of mental health among senior leads is poor. According to a recent survey undertaken by the Education Support Partnership (see [tinyurl.com/esp-twi-18](http://tinyurl.com/esp-twi-18)), 80% of senior leaders suffer from work-related stress and 40% from symptoms of depression. 63% are considering leaving the profession altogether. Left unaddressed, this could leave the profession without enough school leaders capable of properly leading staff and supporting pupils.

Senior leaders should therefore put their own psychological needs first. One possible approach could see leaders take part in twice-weekly counselling sessions, where they can offload in the presence of an attentive and understanding listener. Research has shown that counselling can reduce toxic stress (chronic, unrelieved stress that's dangerous to the immune system and a key trigger for mental and physical ill-health) to a form of manageable stress. Toxic stress leaves heads ill-equipped to ensure that they're leading a mentally healthy school.

At the same time, senior leaders should be able to oversee a school culture that values all staff, while removing the psychological hazards of shame and blame. An NASUWT teacher survey carried out in 2017 (see [nasuwt-bq17](http://nasuwt-bq17)) found that 52% of recipients felt disempowered in their roles, with 59% of this group attributing those feelings to a culture of blame and criticism. A further 75% of respondents felt they were being constantly judged and evaluated.

Being able to feel valued is key to maintaining mental health. In practice, this will involve senior leads being attentive to

staff successes, such as calming an angry child or providing emotional support to colleagues. Bookending the working week with talking circles, in which staff can discuss their feelings while led by a teacher trained in group facilitation, could be a further way of fostering a more empathetic whole-school culture.

There's a great deal of scientific research that shows triggering oxytocin in the brain reduces stress levels and fosters a sense of wellbeing (see [tinyurl.com/uvnas-moberg-11](http://tinyurl.com/uvnas-moberg-11)). If resources allow, it would therefore be beneficial for all staff to have daily scheduled access to an oxytocin-boosting environment. This could be a 'reflect and restore room' reserved for staff – a work-free sensory zone that includes a combination of coloured lighting, soothing music, pleasant smells, comforting fabrics and an external heat source, such as an electric blanket.

Mental health within schools is an issue that has to be tackled from the top down, with the DfE, Ofsted and regional schools commissioners all working to balance the need for good academic outcomes with the wellbeing of school staff. There should be national recognition of how important it is to monitor the mental health culture within schools – so let's see staff wellbeing become a key performance indicator.

**Dr Margot Sunderland is director of the non-profit mental health training provider Centre for Child Mental Health (CCMH) and co-director of Trauma Informed Schools UK**

 @TISUK\_

 [traumainformedschools.co.uk](http://traumainformedschools.co.uk)



# Difficult conversations ... around hygiene

Don't shy away from highlighting unpleasant smells stemming from colleagues' hygiene habits, says Sonia Gill

If the thought of telling someone they smell makes you want to run and hide, here are some tips to help tackle what can be an especially tricky conversation topic...

## You're being kind

Despite how it feels, you're actually being kind – not to mention brave – for raising the issue and having this conversation. There's a good chance that the person involved doesn't realise they smell – yet people around them do, and no-one is telling them. How awful is that? Think how you'd feel if you smelt and weren't aware it while everyone else was – wouldn't you want someone to tell you?

So, as awkward as it might be to say so, remember that you're doing this to help the person concerned and give them a chance to change matters. You're the one who's been brave and kind enough to tell them.

I know of many people who've needed to have the 'smelly' conversation, and thus far the responses of the 'smelly people' has been gratitude. Yes, they've been embarrassed – who wouldn't be? – but also extremely grateful to have been told. One woman once told me of how she was forever on someone's Christmas card list as a result of having had such a conversation.

## Be specific

Be specific about what it is about the person that seems to be causing the smell. Is it bad breath? Smelly feet? A sweaty odour? Unclean clothes?

You might wince at the thought of being so specific, but this will let the other person know exactly what smell they need to tackle (if indeed they choose to). If you simply talk more generally about them 'smelling', it could describe any of the above. The risk could then be that the person goes into overdrive attempting to tackle smells that don't exist, or worse, the wrong area altogether!

Being specific makes the problem

smaller. 'Bad breath' is a tangible issue that can be addressed in a very particular way; being 'smelly' can potentially mean anything and everything.

## How to phrase it

Below is a sentence that can help you broach the topic and get straight to the point. I recommend taking a direct approach, as engaging in chit-chat will only prolong the pain:

*"I've noticed <specific smell> and I want to make you aware so that you can address it and remove it."*

You can adapt the wording to your own situation, since it might not be appropriate for every conversation about smell – use your own judgement.

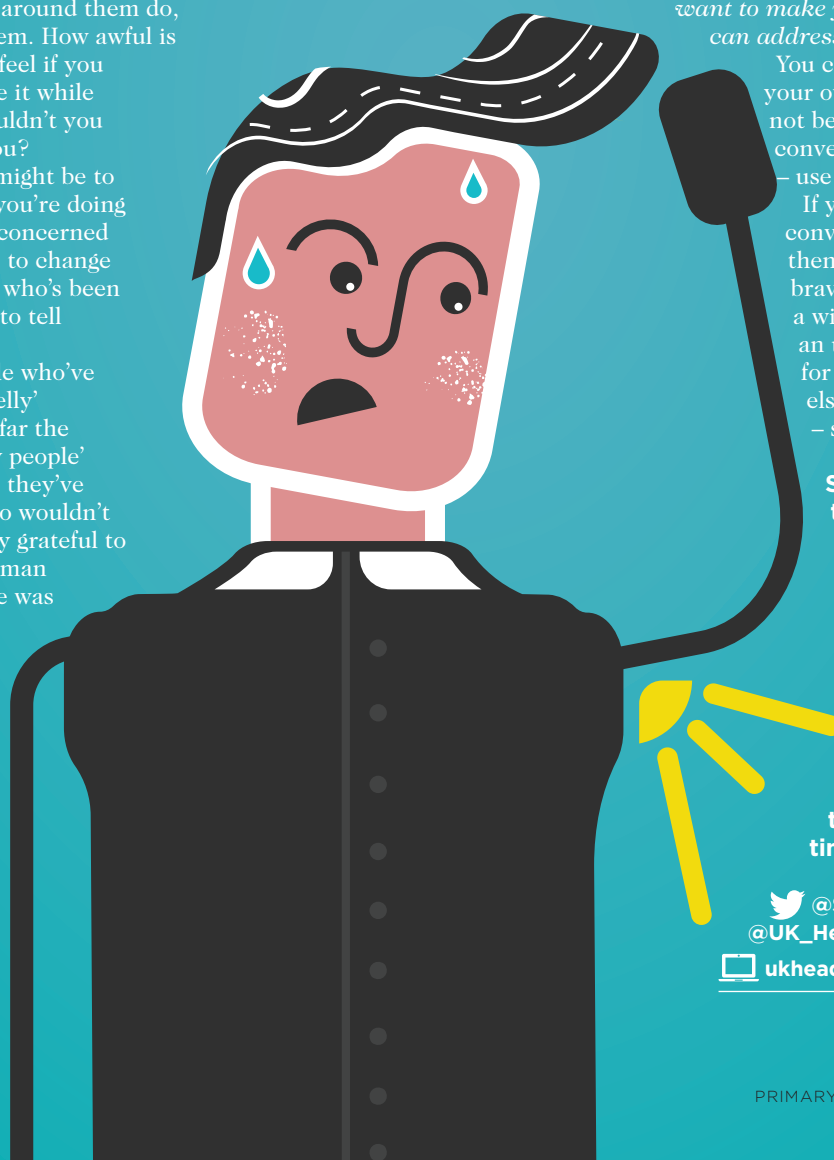
If you've resolved to have this conversation with a colleague, then I salute you for being both brave and kind. You're showing a willingness to put yourself in an uncomfortable situation for the benefit of someone else when others won't – so go, you!

**Sonia Gill is founder of the consultancy Heads Up, which specialises in making schools outstanding, and author of the #1 ranked books *Successful Difficult Conversations in School* and *Journey to Outstanding*; a supporting video on this topic can be seen via**

**[tinyurl.com/psm-hu-smell](http://tinyurl.com/psm-hu-smell)**

 **@SoniaG\_HeadsUp, @UK\_HeadsUp**

 **[ukheadsup.com](http://ukheadsup.com)**



# FIND THE RIGHT SCHOOL FOR YOU

Zoë Paramour offers middle leaders some advice on what to bear in mind when moving from one school to another...

**S**earching for the right school is much like searching for a partner online – we tentatively enter what we're looking for and scroll through the results, rejecting those that are too far away or have a dodgy profile. Once we think we've found a potential match, we make contact, trying our best to appear educated and interesting with a GSOH.

And just like in dating, sometimes, in our eagerness to make a good impression, we forget that this is also our opportunity to assess whether this is the right match for us. When it comes to choosing a school, how can you be sure you're making the right decision?

## 1. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

Knowing what you want will make it much easier to identify a school you'll be happy in. Think about whether you work better in a large school or a smaller one, rural or urban. Do you want a school with a particular focus such as the arts, science or sports? Do you lean towards a more traditional approach to education, or are you happier in a progressive environment? There are no right or wrong answers to these questions – each setting will have its advantages

and disadvantages. Decide on what's important to you and what you'd be willing to compromise on.

## 2. THE OFSTED GRADE ISN'T EVERYTHING

As I'm sure you know by now, a school's Ofsted judgement is just one piece of the puzzle so don't get too hung up on it. A school that's Outstanding isn't automatically a happy or easy place to work at, while a Requires Improvement school can be perfectly lovely but may have had a couple of years of poor data. It's also worth bearing in mind that at present, a school graded Outstanding may not have had an Ofsted inspection in almost a decade. When you're applying for a middle leader role, it's ultimately the management team that will have the most influence over what the school will be like as a place to work. Which is why you need to...

## 3. MEET THE HEADTEACHER

A headteacher can make or break a school. It isn't always possible to meet the headteacher before the interview, but if you get the chance do so, take it. Listen carefully to what they

have to say and then ask yourself, 'Can I imagine myself working for this person? Is their vision one I could see myself sharing? Do I like them as a person? Are they welcoming and approachable?' You'll never find a headteacher whose every decision you agree with, but your day-to-day working life will be vastly improved by working for a headteacher you like and respect.

You can be the most effective middle leader in the country, but if you're unable to buy into the headteacher's vision – or if your own beliefs about education are completely at odds with the ethos of the school – then it's harder to have an impact. Obviously, some level of compromise is necessary in any professional working environment, so pick your battles. I've yet to work for a headteacher whose every decision I agreed with, and it's unlikely that I ever will. But as long as you agree with the headteacher's vision and overall approach (that you basically agree with what they want to do and how they want to do it), the rest will come out in the wash.

## 4. READ THE POLICIES

As a middle leader, you're expected to set an example, follow policies and model best practice – all of which is much easier to do if you





agree with those policies in the first instance. If you can't see yourself giving detentions to pupils for talking in the corridor, or conversely, if you don't believe in 'restorative justice' approaches, don't work in a school that pursues those strategies.

In the past, you might have had to wait until the interview, or even starting at a school before finding out what its policies actually are. However, since 2014 it's been a statutory requirement for schools to publish certain forms of information on their websites, including Ofsted reports, recent data, core policies and so forth. As a teaching professional you might not necessarily have the time to read through it all, but a quick skim of the relevant behaviour, monitoring and marking policies should give you a good idea of what the school is like. Ultimately, what you're trying to establish is what your day-to-day working life will be like as a middle leader. A school's policies information should shed some light on the following:

## MONITORING FREQUENCY

How often does monitoring takes place at the school and what does it entail? Are these informal observations made via learning walks throughout the year? Or are they weekly 'book looks' and formal observations conducted at six-week intervals? Is teachers' planning monitored? As a middle leader you're likely to be involved with the school's monitoring quite closely, so it will have an impact on your workload.

## BEHAVIOUR

Is the school's behaviour policy agreed, managed and enforced centrally in its entirety, or are elements of it left to individual teachers and phase leaders to administer for themselves?

## MARKING AND PLANNING EXPECTATIONS

It's worth remembering that school policies get updated every few years, so check the date or timestamp of the school's publicly available policy information if you can – if a policy is more than three or four years old, that could mean it's due to be updated and renewed soon. Of course, that might also mean there'll be an opportunity to revise existing policy and shape what it looks like in future.

This list is by no means a step-by-step guide to finding the perfect school. You won't know for sure if a school is right for you until you start working there, but hopefully with the above pointers in mind you'll at least be able to start narrowing down your search. Happy hunting!



**Zoë Paramour is a middle leader in a North London primary school, as well as a freelance writer and journalist specialising in education and politics; her book, *How to be an Outstanding Primary Middle Leader*, is available now, published by Bloomsbury**

 @ZoeParamour

## A QUICK RECAP

- Have an idea of what sort of school/role you're looking for before you begin your search – this will help you narrow it down.
- Build up a picture using information about the school that's available online, such as its data and latest Ofsted report, but keep an open mind – this isn't the whole story, but rather a snapshot. A visit will give you a better feel for the place.
- As a middle leader, it's particularly important you're on the same page as the leadership team. Ask about their plans for the school and decide whether you share similar ideas and values. This is also your chance to sound out what their vision for your role would be.
- Stay positive and don't give up. Finding the right school can be exhausting, but it's worth taking the time to do – you just have to keep going!





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## MANAGEMENT ACCOUNT TIPS FOR HEADTEACHERS

Bamboozled by those latest figures from your SBM?  
Laura Williams has some advice for making sense of it all...

**M**onthly management accounts are the most useful financial tool a headteacher has at their disposal. However, when presented with a spreadsheet full of numbers it can be difficult for some to know where to start, or what questions they should be asking of their business manager. Here are the top five things you should be digging into each month:

### 1. MONTHLY PERFORMANCE

Your management accounts should clearly state your actual expenditure for that period (month) against the forecasted expenditure for the month. The forecasted expenditure is usually the annual budget distributed evenly across 12 months. By comparing

this information, you should know if you're behind, on track or ahead of budget. You should know whether a variance is planned – i.e. an annual invoice – or if there's an issue that will require monitoring (such as an unplanned overspend). Your SBM should provide you with details of any significant variances for the month and outline any mitigating action, if required.

### 2. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUDGET

Looking at the year to date expenditure against the full year budget can indicate whether any significant issues require attention. Quality management accounts provide a full-year forecast based on year to date expenditure, working on the assumption that current spending patterns will continue. This data will highlight how any overspend may impact your planned year-end position, while also flagging up cost centres that require additional control or indicate significant underspend.



An in-year budget reforecast based on this information is considered good practice and should be undertaken by your SBM in consultation with yourself and your governing body or MAT.

### 3. STAFFING COSTS

Depending on the structure of your management accounts, your core staffing and agency costs may be lumped together. Ensure that you receive expenditure, forecast and budget figures for these areas separately to gain a concise picture of staff costings. Ask your SBM to further break down agency costs into vacancy cover, sickness cover, planned absence and training cover. That way, you'll gain further insights into your agency costs, whether any overspend can be offset against any underspend in areas of your staffing costs, or whether you're heading for an overspend.

### 4. KEY EXPENDITURE LINES

Ensure that income and expenditure lines for areas such as catering, uniform and school trips are accurate and regularly reviewed to determine whether there's a profit or loss in those areas. Ensure that any loss is forecasted and factored into the bottom line. Also ensure that if any expenditure is to be recharged to departments or teams (i.e. reprographics, hospitality or stationery), that this is undertaken on a regular basis and that departmental expenditure is reviewed and communicated with heads of department.

### 5. PLANNED EXPENDITURE

Odds are that since setting the budget you've had to purchase some items you hadn't planned for, or needed to pay some unforeseen maintenance costs. Sit down with your SBM to check that your planned budget is still realistic, and determine whether any of your plans might need to change to accommodate your financial position.

*Laura Williams is a former MAT chief operations officer and school business manager, and the founder of LJ Business Consultancy*

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## HOW MUCH HELP CAN YOU AFFORD?

Caroline Collins asks whether it's practical for schools to subsidise families unable to cover the full costs of school trips...

**W**ith the education funding crisis showing little signs of improving, schools are increasingly having to tackle spending challenges they previously didn't have to consider and start reviewing what they pay for. One of these will almost inevitably be the extent to which their school trips for pupils are subsidised – if at all.

Schools are only too aware of the immense benefits trips can provide for pupils, particularly those with SEND. To make these experiences possible, schools will usually have no choice but to ask parents for voluntary contributions to help cover the costs – though the voluntary nature of such revenue obviously won't guarantee that enough money will be received overall, potentially forcing the trip to be cancelled.

A good way of calculating how much to ask parents for is to first decide how many – if indeed any – free trips each class might have, with a cap on the total cost. Once that free trip has been used, the school might then decide to use Pupil Premium money to subsidise the costs for Pupil Premium children, and divide the total expense of the trip by the number of children attending.

Most schools will hold fundraising days, or have a PTA that helps organise regular fundraising events. Using funds from those to subsidise trips is a good way of ensuring that enrichment experiences can still go ahead without having to depend on voluntary contributions. At the start of the year, identify how much you want to raise for trips over the following three terms and then look at what can be done to reach that figure.

Even if some funds have been raised and some pupil places have been successfully subsidised, too often the contributions you receive just won't be

enough. When that happens, the headteacher may cancel the trip – at which point the SBM must ensure there's a record of who's paid what, so that refunds can be organised. Remember that some cancellation policies incur a 'late cancellation' fee, which might equate to what the school would have paid for subsidising the trip in the first place. One hard and fast rule for all schools to bear in mind is that no child should be excluded from attending a trip just because their family didn't make a contribution.

Another thing to consider is whether it might be possible to arrange an in-house visit. You could look into booking a mobile farm, for example, which all classes would be able to visit. The cost could then spread across all classes in the school rather than one, allowing the individual contributions to be lowered. There are also lots of travelling theatre companies out there – the cost of having one class travel to a theatre performance will be roughly the same as having a travelling theatre visit the school and stage a show that all classes can see.

Finally, your visits co-ordinator must consider the location of venues. If a destination is sufficiently far away to warrant coach hire, they might want to seek out a similar alternative that can be reached via public transport, which schools can sometimes access for free, as with TfL's School Party Travel scheme (see [tinyurl.com/tfl-schools](http://tinyurl.com/tfl-schools)).

No school likes asking parents to pay for trips, but the reality is that we can't carry on doing what we've always done without making some sacrifices.

**Caroline Collins is head of school business strategy and resources at Miles Coverdale Primary School**

 @caroline\_261



# Your hall could earn you revenue

Hiring out your premises can give your revenues a much needed boost – but it's not an activity to be undertaken lightly, says Jemma Phibbs...

I co-founded School Space with James Lloyd seven years ago when we were both in still in secondary school. It began as a school project, looking at how we could better utilise the school's spaces by renting them out at evenings and weekends to businesses and community groups. Since then, we've expanded the business and now offer a fully managed service – which includes marketing, event supervision, cleaning and invoicing – to primary and secondary schools across Oxfordshire and London.

There's a social mission locked into our company articles, which is to help schools generate more income. This means that regardless of whether a school is interested in using our services or not, we're always available for advice or guidance on how to make lettings safe and effective for SBMs. Below are the tips I'd recommend, based on our experiences.

## Lettings success involves three key factors

The nature of your facilities, your geographical location and marketing reach will make the biggest difference to how much you're able to earn. Other important factors include how safely your lettings are run and how your customers are managed, and it's worth noting that most lettings will approach your school reception. If you want the bookings, train your receptionist to take email addresses and pass them on to you – failing to copy details down is the easiest way to lose a booking!

## Be mindful of what can go wrong

The three main concerns for schools to bear in mind are risk of damage, bad debts and whether bookings are appropriate (i.e. nothing that will contravene the Prevent agenda, films of a certain nature being shown, or even made, and so forth).

## Lettings may imply endorsement

Meetings of radical groups are obviously best avoided, but political parties fall into an interesting space. We've previously had requests from the three main political parties; our usual response will be to flag them on our systems and let schools decide whether to grant approval. After all, it's their premises and their call as to whether they want to be seen as allowing certain groups to meet in their venue.

## There's a spectrum of opportunity

There's a big difference between what a village primary school with one hall can offer versus a London primary with seven-form entry. With the caveat that every school is different, it makes more sense for a village primary to manage their lettings in-house, since the amount they can charge for their facilities likely won't be enough to warrant the cost of an external manager.

Smaller rural primary schools could conceivably generate between £10,000 and £20,000 annually from lettings, depending on their in-house staffing arrangements, while a town or city

primary should be aiming to generate around £40,000. Most of the lettings customers we seek are regular bookings who will use the same schools week in, week out.

## Check your security

Make sure your offices are lockable, particularly with GDPR rules now in force, and keep lettings restricted to a single entrance – preferably with an automatically closing and locking door, so that the site isn't left open and unsecured to the public. The route to the meeting space should be as simple and non-wearing (on carpets, floors, furniture) as possible

## Keep it clean

A nice floor can make a big difference to the type of bookings that come in, so keep yours bright and revarnish them if needed. Don't forget to give groups access your toilet facilities.

These are very basic tips, but all concern areas that business managers will have a say in, and might make a huge difference to how successfully your premises can be marketed.

**Jemma Phibbs is the co-director of School Space**

 @schoolspaceuk  
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# SHARPEN YOUR BOOKKEEPING SKILLS

Every SBL is required to demonstrate a certain level of expertise when it comes to bookkeeping – here, Hayley Dunn outlines some ways of handling the task more effectively...

**F**inance is a key part of the business leadership and management function in schools and MATs, from processing day-to-day transactions to completing consolidated year-end accounts. It's essential to get the basics right in order to enable provision of quality information, which will in turn allow for effective management of finances and timely reporting.

As I wrote in *The School Business Manager's Handbook*, "The key to good financial management is leading and delivering a service to provide the resources needed for the organisation's strategic objectives. It is essential to have a clear set of financial policies and a procedures manual that is followed, and which includes a scheme of delegation that is simple and easy to follow."

## BE THOROUGH

Unlike some other areas of school business management, finance can follow a set schedule of tasks. Being organised, methodical and having an attention to detail are key attributes for good financial management.

Creating a checklist can help formalise a standard process for the whole team to follow. Splitting financial tasks down into a daily, weekly, monthly and annual timetable will help make the functions more manageable. Setting out key deadlines and who is responsible for which tasks in advance will help with workload planning and identifying potential pressure points when compared to other team planning schedules (see 'Keeping things in check').

If monthly management accounts are being produced, it's useful to set cut-off dates for processing. This will ensure each period can be closed down and prevent back posting, which could distort the figures and help you and your team set out clear expectations for any other staff involved in the process.

If you're using a separate software system for recording daily income receipts – for trips, visits or wraparound

provision, for example – ensure that a reconciliation of the two systems is completed regularly to ensure consistency and accuracy. Always check your payroll reports thoroughly, as errors and omissions can be costly and cause considerable stress for those staff affected. If you do spot any mistakes, advise your payroll provider immediately.

Carefully checking draft run reports for new starters, leavers, changes in contract, deductions and additional payments should reduce the possibility of errors occurring. Keep a paper record of any correspondence to show the audit trail and provide specific details in the event of a query. Complete a month-end

reconciliation, clearly identifying the month-end creditors.

## STREAMLINE YOUR WORKFLOW

Time and cost efficiencies can be realised in financial processing by reviewing the workflow of each process. Your aim





should be to identify and address any 'waste' in the system (when there's duplication of effort, for example), ultimately smoothing the workflow and creating a leaner process.

In these times of financial austerity, we're all looking to make the processes within our organisations as efficient as possible. The aim of the business finance lead is to make these processes more smooth and create steps that are easy for staff, customers and suppliers to follow. One way of achieving this is by automating processes where possible and reducing the need for manual intervention. Working in this way, underpinned by strong financial management policies, can also help reduce the potential risk of fraud, by reducing the opportunities by which fraud can take place.

A common frustration for suppliers can be the process of ensuring documents reach the right person. A bottleneck can be created following changes in staff, or when key people are absent due to illness or parental leave – particularly when personal email accounts are used in

dealings with suppliers. One way of addressing this is to have all members of the team use a shared email account, which will help alleviate issues caused by absences, different team allocations and job share arrangements.

Using a generic email account such as 'purchaseledger@...' or 'accounts@...' can also allow for other efficiency improvements. Within Outlook, for example, it's possible to categorise emails once they've been read by assigning them different colours and allocating them to specific team members. Alternatively, you could split your purchase ledger and assign different team members to certain sections of the alphabet or specific document types, whether that be purchase orders, goods received notes, invoices and statements. You could also use Outlook's 'flags' function to indicate different stages of processing.

## SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

Dedicated software solutions will allow you to further automate parts of your financial processing. Take your purchase ledger workflow – a purchase order requisition can be posted by one user, then approved by the budget holder via the system. Once the goods have been received they can then be receipted and automatically matched to an electronic invoice. Since the transaction was approved at the point of ordering, with a segregation of duties put in place for each successive stage, the invoice can be automatically matched and paid within a minimum and maximum matching range to the value of, say, 5%. Keeping manual intervention and processing to a minimum can therefore provide a more streamlined and workflow efficient process.

Some of you may work in a small team or setting in which one person effectively does the majority of all finance processing as the school's sole SBM or office manager, or you might deal with finance as part of a diverse role. In this instance, allocating specific times for finance work and setting deadlines can help manage the workload involved and others' expectations. When I worked as an SBM I found that Fridays were often a good day for doing finance tasks, as there tended to be fewer meetings and interruptions. Perhaps it's time for you and your team to introduce a Finance Friday of your own...?

## KEEPING THINGS IN CHECK

HERE'S WHAT A SCHOOL FINANCE TEAM'S REGULAR CHECKLISTS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

### DAILY CHECKS:

- Cash in hand
- Cash inflows and outflows

### WEEKLY CHECKS:

- Process sales invoices
- Record income received
- Update payroll file
- Process orders, goods received notes, purchase invoices
- Check supplier statements
- Review forecasted cash flow
- Reconcile bank account(s)

### MONTHLY CHECKS:

- Review aged creditors and debtors
- Review and process payroll
- Make payroll payments
- Record and reconcile charge card payments
- Review month end reports
- Review month end balance sheet
- Produce and review a budget vs. actual outturn report
- Complete VAT or VAT 126 return (if applicable)
- Review spending for the month, identifying transactions that should be recognised as fixed assets
- Run month end reports; these should include a trial balance, nominal ledger report of all income and expenditure and a balance sheet (AKA statement of financial position)



Hayley Dunn is a school business leadership specialist and author of *The School Business*

*Manager's Handbook*, published by John Catt, which was recently shortlisted in the Specialist Book category at the 2019 Business Book Awards

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# HOW RELIABLE IS YOUR EMERGENCY BUDGET?

If a sudden drop in revenue necessitates 'breaking out the emergency budget', what should that mean in practice? Sue Birchall takes a look...

**S**ome readers may feel that the term 'emergency budget' is something of a misnomer, given the education system's fortunes under a continuing state of financial austerity. When set against the reduced real-terms funding many schools face and the need for monies to be spent within a year on current pupil cohorts, the notion of schools being able to build an 'emergency fund' seems more fantasy than reality.

However, as a practising SBM for more years than I care to count, I'm very conscious of the need to develop an emergency plan. The very act of spending money within schools calls for dynamic financial management skills and a good knowledge of not just the current budget, but also the landscape of the school's future plans versus its available finances. My own approach to devising an emergency plan has been honed over time via experience, learnt knowledge and by working through some very uncomfortable financial situations...

"Our schools and academies remain open to risk from numerous areas"

## TOOLS, NOT WANDS

A key constant throughout the process of devising your emergency plan should be an awareness of your school's strategic priorities and an appreciation of its direction of travel. By this, I mean the school's standing in the community in terms of popularity and parental preference. You need to be aware of your school or academy's improvement plan, any broader trust plans and the potential impact of external influences, such as government policies. Be aware that a school's finances will also be subject to influence by any and all of its stakeholders.

At this stage, I should point out that the objective I'm outlining here isn't necessarily for the school to be left with a hidden 'pot of gold', or reserves of cash significant enough to be classed as an 'emergency budget' (though if you're lucky enough to have some, guard them well!)

For me, it's more about the need for there to be an element of conservative budgeting within your financial planning. Even schools experiencing

financial hardship – a very real situation for many – can make use of the concept, though it shouldn't be seen as a magic wand. Emergency plans should be seen more as useful tools that will give you a forward thinking, realistic view of your school or academy's particular situation. In order to work, they require a certain degree of preparation and a form of management which recognises that it's sometimes important to take risks.

## THE STAFFING CHALLENGE

For all of us, staffing will be the single largest area of spending we have to manage. When planning my staffing budgets, I'm always careful to cite 'posts', rather people in my budget predictions.

Using a staffing structure when building your initial budget will give your colleagues confidence that the in year staff plan is affordable. This, of course, won't necessarily be the same structure that you end the year with, but costing the posts in this way allows for discussion throughout the year if the initial structure proves unaffordable or in need of change.

In many cases, you'll find that contingencies previously put in place aren't actually required, giving you a bit of wiggle room and perhaps creating the first element of your 'emergency fund'.





Following a set of contract management protocols and procedures helps me ensure that I never waste money by continuing a contract that's run its course or is no longer required. Re-negotiating a contract during your financial year can create immediate savings, adding a little more to your 'pot'. Try to identify any opportunities for increasing funds in year through match-funding projects and activities; by keeping abreast of the funding opportunities available to you and maintaining best value, even small savings can soon add up.

## A DYNAMIC APPROACH

Benchmarking areas of spend and the cost of your classes can sometimes result in efficiencies or alternative strategies that might not be your first choice, but which could provide alternative sources for your emergency pot. Your emergency fund could also be boosted from other areas – if you're a maintained school needing to make redundancies,

for example, your LA may well offer a fund you can apply to if there are financial factors behind the decision. Some MATs may keep money in reserve for academies in similar circumstances.

Adopting a dynamic approach to budget management means always being on the lookout for value opportunities and potential cost savings. If this can be extended to the whole school, it can have a significant impact on your ability to manage any pending financial issues.

So, having secured an element of contingency within my budget, what would trigger the decision to use it? With the best will in the world, and even the most informed level of financial planning, our schools and academies remain open to risk from numerous areas. If you're part of a large MAT, you'll at least have a level of security in your financial risk management from the knowledge that there's an economy of scale model backing you.

## THINK LONG-TERM

Maintained schools and standalone academies, however, have historically been able to call on support from LAs and the DfE that's increasingly no longer there. As a maintained school, for example, it's no longer possible for us to take out a revenue loan; we now have to apply for a licensed deficit and put a recovery plan in place.

A costed school or academy improvement plan that's regularly reviewed and updated will assist with your ongoing essential monthly monitoring and help flag up any concerns on the horizon. It's important that any identified concerns are shared with other stakeholders, such as SLT and governors, as soon as possible. The earlier a conversation can be had, the quicker it will be for contingency plans to be put in place and for priorities to be changed, if necessary. Ideally, you'll want to combine long-term planning with long-term financial forecasting.

That's where the 'emergency pot' comes into play. This involves taking non-essential elements of your spending and using them to plan your strategy, without shying away from more unpalatable areas. Be aware that a willingness to embrace 'risk management' isn't the same as being 'being risk averse'. There are always going to be occasions when a risk taken in year one delivers welcome benefits in future years. In conclusion, an 'emergency pot' may or may not consist of actual cash – but it will have value.



**Sue Birchall is a consultant, speaker, writer, trainer and**

**business manager at The Malling School, Kent**





# Why I Love...



**Lianne Blackburn**, deputy head at St Ethelwolds CW Primary School Flintshire, explains how The Prince William Award character and resilience programme has had a positive effect on her pupils

**“Pupils are given rich, integrated experiences”**

At St Ethelwolds, we work hard to give our pupils a range of rich experiences that can be integrated into the curriculum in order to deepen learning, in line with the Welsh Government's 'Successful Futures' report. That's exactly what The Prince William Award is – a programme for developing character that complements the school's approach to learning, delivered by an inspiring instructor who can serve as an additional role model for the children. We've found it to have an impact on children's learning that extends beyond the classroom, teaching them exciting and even profound lessons that they can apply to all aspects of their lives.

**“It boosts confidence and supports transitions”**

We decided to take part in the Prince William Award after the school received a grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales' 'Reaching Wider' initiative. We initially offered the programme to 30 children in a mixed class of 7- to 9-year-olds, which proved to be an ideal group. Not only did they confidently engage with the challenges presented by the programme, that confidence also helped some of the pupils with their transition from the Foundation Phase into Key Stage 2.

**“We're proud of the progress our pupils have made”**

I'm so proud that our schoolchildren have had opportunities to explore the importance of confidence, resilience and self-belief through the Award. At the beginning of the year, their ability to work in groups had identified as a weakness, with many pupils having difficulty agreeing actions without dispute. The barriers to learning were predominantly emotional and social behaviours, but weekly sessions of the Prince William Award allowed pupils to develop qualities that inspired them to do their best. As a result, they developed a significantly higher level of resilience and the capacity to keep trying in order to reach a goal, whether as part of a team or as individuals.

**“The Award includes innovative activities linked to wider learning”**

The Award's diverse range of activities provide quality opportunities for supporting the social and emotional aspects of learning. Through innovative problem solving activities led by an inspiring and engaging instructor, pupils are encouraged to make connections across their learning. They learn to transfer their knowledge in authentic contexts and form positive relationships, whilst working together and evaluating both their own and others' performance.



As a teacher, I appreciate how the programme is designed to allow everything the pupils gain from the sessions to be referred to and used in classroom practice throughout the week.

**“Reflective learning that supports a positive mindset”**

This combination of experiential and reflective learning enabled my pupils to think more deeply about their capabilities and recognise failure as an opportunity to learn. The Award also teaches pupils to be positive and supportive of others' achievements. These changes in mindset aren't seen immediately, but the frequency of the programme, combined with the participation of the class teacher, means

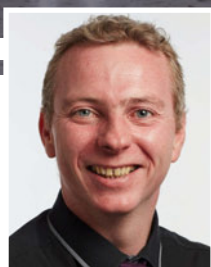
that a positive mindset is encouraged and reinforced throughout the school week. I feel that character development programmes like this should be a core part of the curriculum. The Prince William Award is yielding positive impact data across the UK, and I'm pleased that our pupils have been able to experience its benefits and transformative effects for themselves.



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# How to buy... seating



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*Choosing the right seating be tricky, particularly on a tight budget. John Healey, YPO's category buyer for furniture, highlights a few areas to consider before placing those orders...*

## START FROM SCRATCH

One of the biggest deciding factors when selecting classroom furniture is whether to buy new, make do or repair. Many schools will be extremely wary of repairing broken chairs in case the repaired item fails at some point in future, potentially causing injury. Given the relatively low cost (typically below £15) of quality classroom chairs, ordering a new chair would be preferable to using repaired chairs. Before ordering, make sure you've obtained the correct size information. Classroom chairs come in six sizes, generally ordered by the measurement from the floor to the seat height – but people come in all different shapes and sizes, of course. It's therefore important to make sure every child in the class will be provided for, since one size may not fit all. Always check when buying chairs that they conform to the British Standard BS EN 1729.

## TRY ONE-PIECE CHAIRS

Schools have traditionally tended to buy classic polypropylene two-piece chairs, which consist of a shell seat and a metal or plastic frame. These types of chairs generally come with a guarantee of three to five years. An alternative to this approach is the polypropylene one-piece chair design, which is much stronger and requires little in the way of maintenance. One-piece polypropylene chairs have the further benefit of being anti-tilt, which can be helpful for those children who have a tendency to rock back and forth in their places. One-piece chairs can also be specified with seat pads, which are often purchased as an add-on for chairs that will be used by teachers or TAs which aim to replicate those used in the rest of the classroom. These chairs are typically guaranteed for up to 21 years and are currently very popular, due to their price and durability.

## CONSISTENT AND MODERN

When deciding on which type of classroom chairs to purchase for your school, try to maintain consistency across different areas of the building, since chairs can be liable to 'walk themselves' into other classrooms. Consider using the same colour scheme across all the classrooms within your school – there will usually be the option to buy smaller or larger chairs in the same colour scheme, making them suitable for all year groups. It's also worth considering the growing popularity of modular furniture, which can be positioned in multiple ways to create focal points where children can connect, collaborate and concentrate. At the same time, some staff rooms and reception areas are now being used as wellbeing spaces, which the furniture industry has responded to by offering a wider choice of designs that feature sleek lines and a greater emphasis on comfort.



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## HOW TO BALANCE LEADERSHIP & PARENTHOOD

It's not easy managing the pressures of a school leadership role with family responsibilities, but some simple daily strategies can be a big help, says Fariyah Anwar-Simmons



**M**eetings, reports, self-evaluation, budgeting, data analysis – an endless list we're all familiar with. As a school leader, it would be easy to spend all your waking hours working through the multitude of tasks involved in running a school.

But there's another set of recognisable tasks that can consume entire days – school and nursery drop-offs and pick ups, mountains of laundry, food preparation, homework supervision, cleaning and tidying up...

As a deputy headteacher married to a headteacher, with three children under the age of five, I regularly find myself reflecting on how to balance leadership and parenthood. There are many theories and articles highlighting the power of believing in one's own potential, such as Maslow's theory of self actualisation and Carol Dweck's growth mindsets, but how can school leaders who are also parents successfully manage the juggling act?

### LEAN ON YOUR NETWORKS

As the African proverb reminds us, it takes a village to raise a child. Building and maintaining a support network can help keep you afloat, whether that be grandparents helping with occasional childcare, selecting a childcare provider you trust and putting your whole-hearted faith in them, leaning on friends and family, or using virtual networks and social media when face to face contact just isn't possible.

### PRIORITISE

As your mental load expands, lists can become crucial when dealing with administrative essentials such as scheduling appointments and keeping up with communications from your children's school or nursery, while also maintaining pace with your own school priorities and professional development. It can be helpful to identify some items as 'non-negotiables' for completion and consider the others as 'aspirational', thereby alleviating some pressure and building in a greater sense of accomplishment.

It's exhausting trying to maintain all elements of work and home life at a consistent level of 'perfection'. A more sustainable outlook would be to concede that there will be times when the balance shifts towards work – for example, when late meetings or deadlines are looming – and other occasions when home life must take precedence, such as when your child is unwell. Learning to adopt a more flexible approach without associated feelings of guilt will take discipline, but ultimately allow you to focus on your most urgent priorities.

- Use those odd moments of peace and quiet to keep up to date with reading or make a start on tasks that can be completed later. Make notes as you go on a phone or tablet to make cumbersome undertakings more manageable.
- Find ways of lightening the load, such as batch cooking, having groceries delivered or occasionally employing a cleaner, that can enable you to eke out some valuable time.

It's important to find opportunities for slowing down and savouring special moments. Chat with your pupils in the playground during a stressful work day; switch off your emails at home and play with your baby to regain a vital sense of perspective. Reframing your mindset can help you deal with the many demands on your time.

- Identify strategies for switching off to prevent overload. A quiet drive, relaxing bath or refreshing walk could be all it takes to reinvigorate yourself.

*Farihah Anwar-Simmons is a deputy headteacher*

62 PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

# BE READY FOR ANYTHING

A collection of emergency supplies including a red backpack, a yellow radio, a first aid kit, a lantern, and various containers.

**Jill Berry is a leadership consultant, author and former headteacher**



# Help your SLT become better

SLTs can develop new skills through doing, but it takes more than just delegating tasks to drive real improvement in your senior colleagues, says Nick Hart

Leaders need to keep learning, and great headteachers will enable that learning to build capacity in school in order to secure the best outcomes for children. A surplus model of improvement involves building on known strengths, while a deficit model involves honing in on areas of weakness and addressing them. Whether headteachers aim to build the capacity of their SLT with a surplus or deficit model, these three strategies can help identify what to work on:

## Don't just delegate tasks

Great headteachers distribute leadership among their team. They can't be directly involved in all aspects of school improvement work, so will instead rely on and trust others to lead various projects. Some headteachers, however, will only delegate tasks, perhaps perceiving this to be safer in that they retain control – but doing so can actually stunt professional growth and signal mistrust.

If we instead delegate leadership, by establishing a set of principles for the SLT to stick to and keeping a keen eye on what happens, we can gain a clearer picture of our SLT's strengths and areas for improvement, since they'll be exercising a wider range of leadership knowledge and behaviours.

This is incredibly useful information and can have a transformative impact on leadership learning for senior leaders, as it allows us to provide incisive feedback for improvement across the full breadth of leadership. We can delegate leadership whilst retaining strategic oversight by ensuring that we're crystal clear on how a project contributes to the overall school improvement plan.

## Clarify intended outcomes

If we're unclear about what we expect the outcomes of leaders' work to be, we can't be surprised if those outcomes are then found to be lacking. By stating from the outset what a project's expected outcomes are, how they fit into the broader school development plan and co-constructing the process of leading change, we can ensure that energies are directed appropriately.

If areas for improvement then arise from a leader's work, we can rule out 'not knowing' as a cause and thus intervene with appropriate guidance. Headteachers can work with leaders on planning for change using the Education Endowment Foundation's guide to implementation ([tinyurl.com/eef-implement](http://tinyurl.com/eef-implement)), which can help identify gaps in an SLT's knowledge before the project commences.

## Question and test

Just like great teachers in a classroom, headteachers can gauge what their leaders know and can do effectively by engineering low stakes testing of particular leadership behaviours. The first check should focus on leaders' understanding of leading a change process. Have they understood the intended outcomes? Have they understood the model of leading change and the time frames involved?

Ensuring that projects are understood from the outset will establish a firm base and set leaders up for success. Want to see how a leader feeds back after some monitoring? Give them regular opportunities to show this. Want to see how a leader responds to proving questions about the impact that they've had? Build quizzing time into your leadership meetings. Want to see how well leaders know the quality of teaching in their area? Ask them to show you around the school and back up their judgements.

**Nick Hart is a junior school headteacher and a provider of consultancy and staff training services for primary schools**

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# STAY ON YOUR 'A' GAME

Divorce, bereavement and other personal issues can impinge on anyone's job performance, but for headteachers the impacts can be profound. Anthony David suggests some helpful management strategies...



**Anthony David is an experienced headteacher, executive headteacher and educational writer and speaker**

**T**here are few jobs where it's critical that you're on your 'A' game each day. Whenever a headteacher makes a decision, there will often be a high risk associated with it. Get it wrong, and the resulting publicity will be far more high profile than anything a teacher would be exposed to, since the buck stops with you. Heads receive generous salaries because they're the ones exposed to the highest risk. We have to be on our 'A' game every day.

So what happens when we're not? More importantly, what happens when we don't even realise that we're not on our 'A' Game? Just to be clear, I'm not referring to long-term depression, psychosis, or unresolved mental health issues, such as alcohol addiction. What I'm looking to explore here is what happens when your personal 'balance space' is eroded by external issues and how to react. Specifically, I want to look at the two life-changing events most likely to have an impact on the typical 40+ headteacher - death and divorce.

## FOCUS AND LISTENING

In November last year, my mother was diagnosed with stage three bowel cancer. This was, as I'm sure you can imagine, an intense and often surreal experience. She was in a great deal of discomfort and pain, and I soon found myself spending an hour each night talking to her and her husband and travelling from London to Durham on as many weekends as I could manage. This naturally had an impact on my family and my interactions with colleagues, but I was fortunate enough to be in a well-established school with good routines that I could rely upon while this took over my life.

I do, however, remember my first parental conversation minutes after my mum had first told me she had cancer. It

was 5.30pm in a Friday when she called me. Halfway through this crucially important conversation the line suddenly cut out - and at that very moment a parent appeared at my door. The parent was clearly upset, yet I felt it fair to briefly describe the nature of the call I'd just received, adding that if my phone should ring, I would have to answer it.

It was then that I was truly struck by just how focused parents can be. She seemed to ignore my comments and proceeded to spend the next half an hour talking about a particularly challenging situation in her life. There were tears.

Yet at that moment I was as far from my A-Game as it was possible to get. Though every bone in my body was desperate to close this meeting, I didn't. I carried on listening. After those 30 minutes had passed, I gently reminded her that I needed to return a call, briefly adding why. At this point she suddenly became embarrassed, saying that she hadn't realised I meant *my* mother, but thought I'd been referencing 'a mother'. Having talked for half an hour, it seemed by this point that she was now in a position where she could 'hear' what the other side was saying.



## UPFRONT HONESTY

That incident clarified my thoughts; we can weather intense dips in our lives if we're clear and honest, but being honest is hard. We don't want to expose difficult personal circumstances any more than we need to, yet we all have key colleagues who will need to be made aware if they have to step up and fill our drop in capacity.

Last summer a head I work with lost her mother. It was deeply moving watching this colleague handle the challenge of a dying parent, but her approach was both mature and sensible. She made a point of being upfront and honest with her governors and immediate colleagues. She took time away from school in a way that was manageable, but also realistic – frankly, there were some days she wouldn't have been up to the job in any form.

Half a year on, and she's now back running the same successful school she always has. It was interesting to hear her say afterwards that she felt she could morally defend the decision she took to share her personal circumstances, while acknowledging that her response had to be time limited, despite grief being a powerful and unpredictable emotion.

At around the same time, another head I was working with experienced a sudden parental death and chose not to share her situation with anyone. Aside from taking time off to attend the funeral, she otherwise spent no time away from work, and the vast majority of her colleagues remained completely unaware of what she was internally trying to process – the loss of a beloved mother.

Sadly, she subsequently missed something that then led to a formal complaint being made against her.

Having worked with this colleague for many years and having a great deal of respect for her, I can only conclude that the error in question was due to her personal circumstances at the time. The impact, however, was that she had to then endure a complaint which, while not upheld, was arguably unnecessary. Whilst it can be argued that this oversight would have happened in any case, my own knowledge of the head suggests it was an uncharacteristic oversight.

“Being on your ‘A’ game, and recognising when you’re not, requires a great deal of self awareness.”

## SHOW HUMILITY

The vast majority of headteachers are in their forties, which is the demographic that exhibits the highest rates of divorce and separation. Nothing drives couples apart like a demanding job – even the most secure relationships can be irreparably eroded. I've met too many heads who have had relationships collapse upon them taking on their first headship. I know of one recent case where a new head found herself overwhelmed by the demands of the job as a direct result of pressures stemming from a divorce she was going through at the time. She took the last month of term off as sick leave, later returning in a phased way. The period has since had a

significant impact on her, both professionally and personally.

Being on your ‘A’ game, and recognising when you're not, requires a great deal of self awareness. There are times during the year – end of term, for example – when you'll be aware of having less energy than usual, but deep, personal losses will challenge you far more than the usual end of term fatigue. In those situations you have a duty to your organisation to both share your circumstances and listen to advice. By their nature, heads will often tend to be quite headstrong, but in my own experience, heads that can demonstrate some humility during difficult personal circumstances find that they can be gently managed. When they don't, they can risk long-term damage to their reputation and capacity as a leader.

A missed decision or overreaction as the result of personal circumstances can erode a leader's credibility, further adding to their sense of stress and anxiety. Whilst there's no magic wand for preventing this, I hope the case studies cited above show that honesty on the part of school leaders about what's happening in their lives can better support the immediate leadership needs of their school. It's something that takes maturity, and a willingness to ‘let go’ of the tight grip many heads prefer to have over their schools.

# ARE YOU AN ETHICAL LEADER?

We can look to official guidance for the ‘what’, but not the ‘how’ or ‘why’, says Carolyn Roberts – and that needs to change...

**S**chools are complicated institutions. They’re where society looks after its young until they’re old enough to take on the role of adult citizens – thus, we perform a very important social function for children of all ages.

On the one hand, we’re diligent public servants, but on the other, we’re also role models to the young. It’s not just a matter of what we do; how we do it will inevitably have an impact on the kind of citizens we’re generating for the future.

Having been a member of the ASCL executive for four years, something we’d

grown concerned by was the publicity surrounding some school leadership decisions and their potential to undermine the respect in which school leaders are generally held. Rather than examine specific issues or apportion blame, however, we wanted to highlight the way in which school leaders constantly make decisions under very tough, competing pressures. Our feeling was that developing a shared language leaders could use to navigate the moral maze had to be useful.

There’s plenty of guidance available concerning management responsibilities, styles and techniques. The National

Standards of Excellence for Headteachers, for example (see [tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-hs](http://tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-hs)), talks about leadership

attributes and the way people lead institutions, but contains no guidance on the right decisions to make. The Teachers’ Standards (see [tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-ts](http://tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-ts)) similarly offers lots of detail on how teachers should do their jobs properly, but under ‘Personal and professional conduct,’ it simply states that teachers should ‘maintain high standards of

“We didn’t want to turn ethical behaviour itself into another tick box”

ethics and behaviour’ without meaningfully expanding upon what that might mean.

We believed it would help devoted, yet busy and distracted decision makers if there were a framework, a common

language of ethics that we could all share – something that would help us talk about the difficult decisions we all make each day. I therefore campaigned for the formation of an Ethical Leadership Commission within ASCL and subsequently chaired the 18-strong Commission that was appointed.

## MORAL PURPOSE

It’s common now for people to talk about leading their schools with ‘moral purpose’ – which sounds great, but doesn’t actually mean anything. It merely assumes a shared sense of right and wrong and understanding of morality. As a profession, that’s something we may well have, but we wanted to give language to that notion and share it more explicitly.

In the Standards of Excellence for Headteachers, for example, there’s talk of how a headteacher should be ‘astute’; we prefer the word ‘wise.’ The advice mentions headteachers modelling

**THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND VIRTUES OF LEADERS:**

### TRUST

Leaders are trustworthy and reliable





'entrepreneurial' approaches, but entrepreneurialism isn't a moral trait – it's an action. We'd prefer the word 'service'. It says that headteachers should provide environments that are focused on 'safeguarding', but doesn't highlight the combination of kindness, justice and honesty required to make good safeguarding decisions.

The Commission initially began with the idea of putting together an ethical code, but by the end of our second meeting we'd decided this would be counterproductive. Leaders' behaviour has become increasingly motivated by the need to meet performance indicators, and we didn't want the same happening with considerations of ethical thought. We wanted to formulate a language with which people could intelligently discuss the ethical dimensions of their decisions. We didn't want to turn ethical behaviour itself into another tick box.

## SETTING AN EXAMPLE

From the outset, the Commission avoided commenting on particular forms of organisation, qualifications or standards. We agreed that there are many successful ways of running schools, and instead wanted people to think more about the scope, depth and implications of their decisions – about what they might mean for our sense of right and wrong and for society as a whole. We didn't want to proscribe a 'right way' of managing behaviour, admissions or finance.

The Framework consists of 14 words (see opposite), the first seven of which are derived from the Seven Principles of Public Life (see [tinyurl.com/psm-7-principles](https://tinyurl.com/psm-7-principles)) and changed very slightly to be more appropriate to education.

The latter set of words (below) are those personal virtues against which we want people to consider their actions. When you encounter a really difficult decision, the kind that keeps you awake at night, instead of thinking 'What must I do according to regulations?' think about what you *ought* to do. What's the best way of setting an example to our young people?

## EMBEDDING THE FRAMEWORK

The Ethical Leadership Commission has now ended, but the work of embedding

# THE FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

### 1. SELFLESSNESS

School and college leaders should act solely in the interest of children and young people.

### 2. INTEGRITY

School and college leaders must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. Before acting and taking decisions, they must declare and resolve openly any perceived conflict of interest and relationships.

### 3. OBJECTIVITY

School and college leaders must act and take decisions impartially and fairly, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias. Leaders should be dispassionate, exercising judgement and analysis for the good of children and young people.

### 4. ACCOUNTABILITY

School and college leaders are accountable to the public for

their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

### 5. OPENNESS

School and college leaders should expect to act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from scrutiny unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

### 6. HONESTY

School and college leaders should be truthful.

### 7. LEADERSHIP

School and college leaders should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles, and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. Leaders include both those who are paid to lead schools and colleges and those who volunteer to govern them.

the Framework within leadership practice will continue via the Pathfinder Project – a series of optional training sessions and reflections for governors, leadership teams and trust boards that's being run by the National Governance Association.

We're also seeking to influence the way teachers and school leaders are trained by working with Chartered College of Teaching, which is currently putting together a chartered leader programme and will soon be setting up an Ethics Forum. The latter will hold open meetings several times a year, which will discuss issues raised through the Pathfinder Project and any developments in the profession that may affect the pressures on leaders' decision-making. Our hope is for the Forum to provide an online

presence and case studies that prompt wider reflection.

Leaders come in all shapes and sizes, but an ethical leader will take very seriously his or her responsibility to society and the formation of young peoples' character. They'll never be content to simply say that they've followed instructions, because accountability isn't enough – we have to do good.



**Carolyn Roberts is the headteacher of Thomas Tallis School, London and the former chair of the Ethical Leadership Commission**

### WISDOM

Leaders use experience, knowledge and insight

### KINDNESS

Leaders demonstrate respect, generosity of spirit, understanding and good temper

### JUSTICE

Leaders are fair and work for the good of all children

### SERVICE

Leaders are conscientious and dutiful.

### COURAGE

Leaders work courageously in the best interests of children and young people.

### OPTIMISM

Leaders are positive and encouraging

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# Knowledge building with a difference

## WORD OF MOUTH

**"Real Training offer the best online learning platform I have ever experienced."**

Tutor support is friendly, professional and fast. Modules are well structured and really do lead to improved levels of confidence and better outcomes for students."

– Anthony, NASENCO delegate

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– Frances, CCET delegate

**"This course has enabled me to do my job much more effectively."**

It has given me confidence in my decisions, which I have at times lacked prior to studying. The tutors are extremely supportive and the constructive criticism is helpful and very useful."

– Elspeth, NASENCO delegate



*Help your staff learn, enact and reflect with Real Training's innovative and flexible courses of study*

In 2004, two educational psychologists created Real Group – Real Training's parent company – to make a real difference in education, especially among young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Today, our group of companies share one mission: to improve education to transform lives.

### WHAT DOES REAL TRAINING DO?

We provide online learning and blended training across the globe to more than 2,000 education professionals per year. The majority of our courses are at postgraduate level and practice-led, as we believe that educators transform their practice and the outcomes for their students and schools by learning, enacting and then reflecting. Our courses are respected, accredited and supportively delivered. Our expert course designers and tutors are fully qualified and experienced education practitioners.

### WHAT MAKES REAL TRAINING DIFFERENT?

#### Next generation online learning

To ensure our students have the best possible learning experience, we've created our own Virtual Learning Environment, Campus Online. Using Campus Online, Real Training delegates feel supported, included and in-touch. What's more, busy educators can study anywhere, at their own pace, taking away

the challenge of finding time away from school.

#### A practice-led learning model

A fundamental principle of Real Training is that people learn best by doing – through practice-led learning. This allows participants to apply the very latest psychological insights and expertise to their setting throughout the course, and for the rest of their career.

#### Academic accreditation

Our courses are variously accredited or fully validated by Middlesex University, giving our delegates a route to continued academic progression. We know how hard our delegates work and believe they deserve to receive academic recognition.

### WHAT COURSES DOES REAL TRAINING OFFER?

We have a wide suite of programmes for education professionals which can be seen at [realtraining.co.uk](http://realtraining.co.uk), but our most popular courses are:

- National Award in SEN Coordination
- National Professional Qualifications at Middle, Senior and Headship levels
- Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing
- Med SEND programme

**Learn more by contacting 01273 358 080 or visiting [realtraining.co.uk](http://realtraining.co.uk)**

### MEET THE SUPPLIER



#### Dr. Mark Turner

Mark is Real Group's professional and academic lead and Managing Director. He

completed his educational psychology doctorate in 2010. He publishes, speaks at conferences, is part of industry-wide governance teams and is Parent Governor of an inner London Secondary School.

# Kids Club HQ

An online tool designed to lighten the administrative burden of running before and after school clubs

- An extremely efficient cloud-based club management system
- Streamlines and automates your daily admin tasks, bookings and customer records
- Enables parents to book and pay online
- Can automate billing, facilitate payments and chase up unpaid invoices
- Highly configurable, with no set-up or licence fees
- All data stored securely and GDPR-compliant

Reviewed by: John Dabell

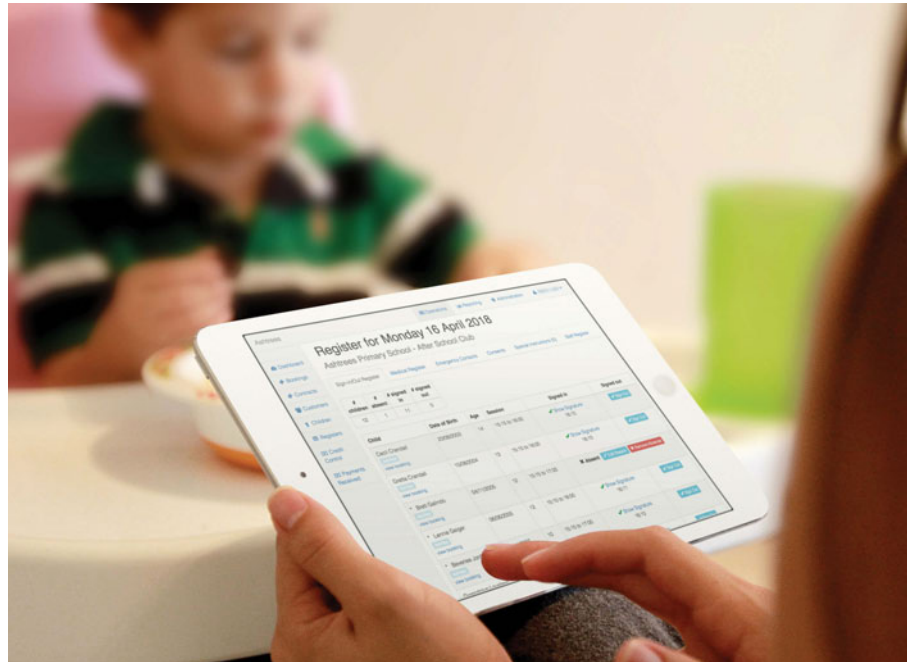
If you run any after-school or holiday clubs, you'll know that the admin side of things can be a nightmare. Managing and coordinating bookings, registers, invoices and chasing payments can soon get complicated and gobble up time, especially if you don't have a decent bookings system in place.

Kids Club HQ offers a slick and powerful administration system specifically designed for school clubs that can handle all your club booking, invoicing and communication needs. It has the potential to revolutionise your admin processes, putting all the functionality you need at your fingertips.

Its pages are intelligently laid out and accompanied by various filters and viewing options for seeing what's what and who's who. You can easily display bookings made and narrow the list down according to date and type of club, with emergency contact details, medical info, consents and special instructions all just a click away.

Kids Club HQ can be used to create bespoke online registration forms for collecting pupil and parent data; inform parents of upcoming dates; handle online bookings and payments; reconcile cash and childcare voucher payments; collate registers, generate reports, and much more besides.

The system is set up in a way that lets you use contract bookings, flexible



ad-hoc bookings or both, with system-stored registers automatically updated whenever a booking is made. Those registers then can be printed out, or you can ask parents to sign their children in and out using a club tablet or computer.

Parents get to benefit from a simple online booking process which does away with repeated form filling and assorted rigmarole. Once registered with an account, they can update their details with important information as and when, thus keeping you in the loop.

Kids Club HQ stands out from the rest of the pack for its superior functionality, while still remaining user-friendly. It's robust, reliable and puts you in complete control – to the extent that it makes Excel-assisted club admin look decidedly primitive by comparison.

All told, this is a hugely impressive, yet affordable tool for rationalising and managing the various tasks involved in organising school clubs and wraparound care provision. Kids Club HQ is perfect for anyone keen to stay on top of their club admin and exceed parental expectations when it comes to booking places online. See for yourself by requesting a demo – chance are you'll find it to be quite the life-saver...



## VERDICT

- ✓ Makes school club management and admin a breeze
- ✓ Suitable for different club types (breakfast, sport, extracurricular, etc.)
- ✓ Easy to use and navigate – no training needed
- ✓ Can save schools and parents considerable time
- ✓ Excellent value for money

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for an intuitive and flexible pre- or after-school club management system that can streamline your administration and professionalise your extra-curricular provision. Kids Club HQ is a class act. Prices start at £49 + VAT per month.

To learn more, visit [kidsclubhq.co.uk](http://kidsclubhq.co.uk) or follow @KidsClubHQ



# ParentMail



A parental engagement system used by over 6,000 schools and 3 million parents

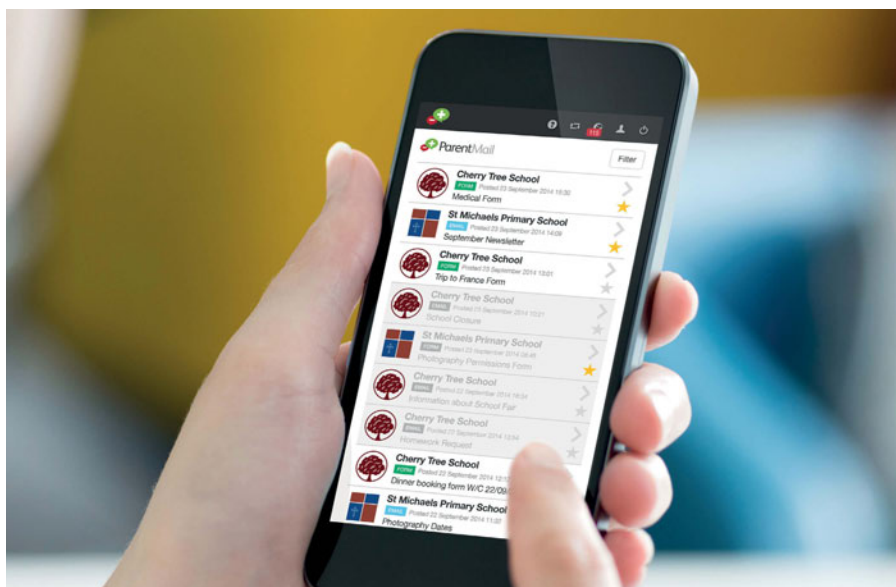
- Helps share information, manage events, manage online payments, record absences and more
- Generates customisable data reports to support student learning
- Streamlines processes, protects sensitive data and delivers cost savings
- Support available from a comprehensive help site with live chats and guided tours

Reviewed by: John Dabell

Schools need to keep parents on side if they're to help children achieve, yet some schools can make life harder for themselves by using cumbersome and outdated parental engagement systems. Engagement can be far easier to manage via a suitable technology solution that's able to keep parents in the loop, flexibly meet their needs and make your communications flow more efficiently.

ParentMail is an expert in this area, having seen its parental engagement platform improve parent-teacher relationships and boost parental involvement across thousands of schools.

The recently overhauled main portal through which users access the ParentMail service is laid out simply and logically, while providing a host of different ways in which to keep parents engaged with what's going on in school. ParentMail is built around a suite of five core application modules - '+Pay', 'Communications', 'Online Forms', 'Parents' Evening' and 'Meetings and Events', each of which can be accessed via desktops and mobile devices. The Communications module is particularly impressive, allowing you to send attachments of up to 10MB direct to parents' phones via a school-branded ParentMail app. With Online Forms, parents can also easily complete trip consent forms, fill out surveys, grant pupil permissions and access the school's dinner menus.



Meetings and Events serves as a digital diary, helping keep parents abreast of open days, sports events and other key dates. Parents' Evening appointments can meanwhile be made from home with a single tap, thus freeing teachers from a potentially time consuming administrative burden. One of ParentMail's more dynamic features is the +Pay module for processing cashless payments. Parents can use it to top up their child's dinner money and pay for sports clubs, school trips, revision guides and indeed anything else, with a choice of ways to pay, including PayPal.

For useful information on how well your parents are taking to ParentMail you can turn to the main dashboard, which gives you details on its uptake and how many are using ParentMail regularly, as well as suggestions for boosting registrations.

Taken as whole, ParentMail comes across as reliable and incredibly efficient. It enables a series of handshakes and smiles to be shared between a school and its parents, making for happier and more productive relationships between the two. With a system this intuitive in place, there's no excuse for parents to be left in the dark about developments at their child's school.



## VERDICT

- ✓ User-friendly and convenient
- ✓ Removes barriers to parental engagement
- ✓ Can deliver huge improvements to your organisation and logistics
- ✓ Makes administering parental interactions faster and cheaper, while reducing staff workload
- ✓ Keeps everyone in the loop and up to date – especially helpful for reminders and any last-minute changes

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking to dynamically engage with parents to help children achieve more, build positive relationships and offer cost-effective interactions with the school via one flexible platform. Each module is priced separately, starting from £219 per year.

To learn more, visit [parentmail.co.uk](http://parentmail.co.uk) or follow @parentmail

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Without a responsible SLT and a reliable back office, a primary school wouldn't be able to function. We here at PSM want to foreground and celebrate the valuable work done by senior leaders, SBLs and administrators, and their contributions to ensuring that pupils can fully realise their potential."

**Callum Fauser, PSM Editor**

## Financially savvy

With budget pressures increasingly central to how schools operate, PSM can provide tips on procurement, budget planning, managing your finances and more besides.

## Creatively ambitious

Gain inspiration from how school leaders, architects and builders are working together to transform learning environments across the country

## Outward looking

Find out how schools in different areas are engaging with parents, communities and businesses in a range of bold and imaginative ways

## Self improving

Each issue contains a mix of advice, commentary and reflection from expert contributors on steps school leaders can take to improve pupil outcomes.

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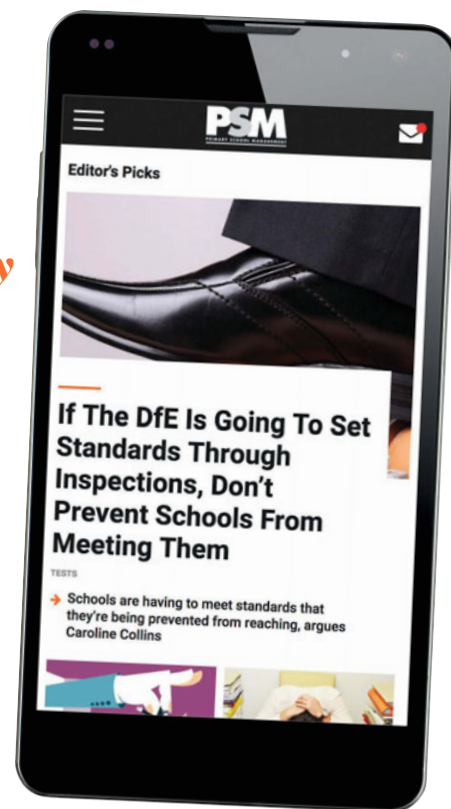


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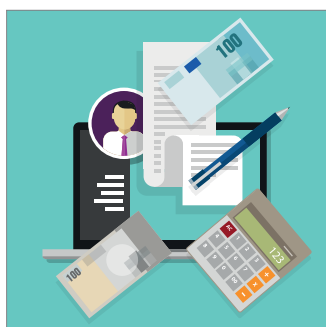
Missed an issue? On the website you can download a free electronic version of the previous edition of *Primary School Management*.



## Weekly briefings

Get great advice from fellow leaders sent direct to your inbox by signing up to our weekly newsletter. Topics so far have included how to rethink your catering, and why heads need to stop micromanaging and start leading.

### Staff Management



Is your budget prepared for staff salary rises?  
[tinyurl.com/psm-budget-sal](http://tinyurl.com/psm-budget-sal)

### School Improvement



What to prioritise when turning round a 'failing' school  
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### Parental Engagement



How headteachers should respond to parent protests  
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### Leadership



What you need in order to assemble a great SLT  
[tinyurl.com/psmslt](http://tinyurl.com/psmslt)

## WHAT'S TRENDING

1

Should heads lead with love or fear?  
[tinyurl.com/psm-love-fear](http://tinyurl.com/psm-love-fear)

2

Persuade parents to pick your school  
[tinyurl.com/psm-parents-pick](http://tinyurl.com/psm-parents-pick)

3

Zero tolerance behaviour policies aren't helping pupils  
[tinyurl.com/psm-zt-behavior](http://tinyurl.com/psm-zt-behavior)

4

Career opportunities after headship  
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5

When injuries warrant calling an ambulance  
[tinyurl.com/psm-ambulance](http://tinyurl.com/psm-ambulance)

# YOUR OFFICE STAFF ARE GREAT COMMUNICATORS

Philip Burton considers what schools should be aiming for when it comes to the workplace interactions of their administrative staff...

One thing I've learnt is that if I ever need to quickly find out what's happening within a school community, the first place to visit is the school office. After all, the office is essentially a school's communication control centre – they're the ones who regularly come into contact with staff, leaders, parents and all the other members of a learning community.

In my experience, parents tend to feel comfortable talking to office staff. They in turn will often be able to resolve parents' issues promptly without having to involve teachers and leaders, be willing to forewarn parents when problems are about to hit and be prepared to deal with a variety of situations in a supportive way. I myself have previously engaged with parents who were genuinely angry about something, or even crying at the hatch. I've dealt with parents who sat in my office telling me their life story, because of how comfortable they felt in our presence.

I'd venture that the same can also be said for staff rooms, where it tends to be office teams who take the lead in creating a positive spirit. We're a naturally inquisitive group of people, so will often be asking questions and offering friendly suggestions for dealing with a whole host of problems. Many office teams will contain a school's social secretary, who

have a great rapport with staff. Generally speaking, the more inter-staff social interaction there is within your school, the better – it can be a great form of stress relief for both office and teaching teams alike.

## CLEAR AND HONEST

With an ever-greater number of tasks being assigned to office teams that are continuing to shrink in size, it's essential that these teams can remain open and honest about the workloads they're facing. Leaders should provide opportunities for office staff to share their views, ideally via a weekly briefing. This could involve a 15-minute overview of the week given to leaders that will enable them to see what their office staff's workload is really like, and gauge whether any deadlines might need to be reviewed.

Performance reviews can be a useful way of setting objectives for the team to work towards over the year, while weekly meetings will ensure that daily tasks are reliably communicated. Regular reviews of your communication arrangements with office

staff will help keep things on track.

If there's simply too much for office staff to do, they should feel comfortable saying so. An 'open door' policy will help, but only if leaders truly commit to it. If your door's open, be in a position to stop what you're doing and listen to what your colleagues have to say. If you're busy, then make sure people know by either closing that door or putting up a 'do not disturb' sign. Leaders will get far more respect by clearly indicating when they are and aren't free, than by turning staff members away.

Leaders must be clear about what it is they want from their office teams and how it should be delivered. Maintaining a team that understands its roles and objectives, and can go about carrying them out in positive, sensitive way will help keep your workplace relaxed and stress-free.

"The more inter-staff social interaction there is within your school, the better"



**Philip Burton** is business manager at Hallbrook Primary School in Broughton Astley, Leicestershire



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