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From the editor



Happy New Year to our readers!

The grouping of children by ability has long been a popular practice, if not a point of contention, in many schools and there have been plenty of studies about the effects on pupil progress. What is less often discussed is the impact on learner behaviour and self-esteem.

A report from UCL Institute of Education, published last November, looked at this aspect and in this issue, one of its authors, Professor Eirini Flouri, discusses the findings and the implications of how you organise class grouping.

Receiving a crushing Ofsted inspection report is a traumatic experience for everyone in a school and local community. Senior leaders at Heyford Park School, in Oxfordshire, outline for us the measures they took to turn it around and point the school back in the right direction.

The recruitment and retention of valued staff remains at the forefront of concerns among head teachers. We focus on three important, but often underestimated, roles in primary schools. Hannah Glossop offers tips on ensuring continuity when a designated safeguarding lead leaves, while Stephen Morales looks at the challenges facing school business managers. Meanwhile, David Rushby takes a more light-hearted look at the role of the school receptionist – and why first impressions count.

Tackling another area of worry – school finances – is Kyrstie Stubbs, who offers her expertise on how a little innovative thinking can enrich the school coffers.

A conversation overheard in a café between mums at the next table got me thinking about toileting policies in primary schools. They were discussing their children's different experiences – one child was allowed to use the toilet during lesson time while the other said it was strictly forbidden. Alina Lynden weighs up the pros and cons of each policy.

Our Q&A is with Annamarie Hassall MBE, the newly appointed chief executive of nasen, who outlines her vision for the organisation's future and that of special needs education.

Enjoy the issue!

Dorothy Lepkowska
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January 2022

Our experts this issue



Sue Cowley,
author, teacher
trainer and early
years teacher



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Service



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Chief Executive,
Institute of School
Business
Leadership



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of **Teach Primary**

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Primary schools are uniquely placed to support SEND children

New nasen CEO, **Annamarie Hassall MBE**, outlines her vision for SEND education



What are the main challenges SEND is currently facing?

The Covid pandemic continues to disproportionately impact those with SEND and learning differences and we need to address this, in what has been an unprecedented time for the sector. However, problems predate the pandemic with parents and carers sharing their frustrations, exhaustion and despair with the SEND system in England. It's a huge challenge and not something that is going to be resolved overnight. This is why the release of the government's much anticipated SEND Review is so important.

We are also facing varied SEND experience, knowledge and provision in our schools and settings across the country, and our SENCO workforce is under a great amount of pressure.

This must be addressed.

The National SENCO Workforce 2020 survey, published by Bath Spa University and nasen, highlighted that SENCOs are given insufficient protected time. This, together with the proportion of pupils with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans increasing from 2.8% to 3.7%, means children could slip through the net. We need legislation in place to ensure SENCO time is protected, so we can give children and young people the support they deserve.

We need an increase in action research that focuses on the 'can do' and brings the perspectives of parents, carers, children and professionals to the fore, as well as more funding and investment for supporting additional needs. This must be a priority for the government.

What is the biggest threat to effective and inequitable access to SEND education?

The biggest threat occurs where there is a lack of senior leadership commitment to an inclusive vision in their schools. The pandemic means that schools have had to be reactive, and strategic plans for distributing the leadership of inclusion, and the crucial role of effective CPD, may have taken a back seat.

As schools struggle with staffing, funding and resourcing, learners with SEND and additional needs miss out. The pandemic saw children with SEND disproportionately affected, and so existing issues such as accurate identification of need will be that much more challenging for schools, as they continue to cope with delays in development and skills gaps through missed education.

What form does "catch-up" take in SEND education?

Many children with SEND are perpetually trying to 'catch up', with a curriculum which has an associated assessment regime that doesn't fit their needs.

'Age related expectations' captures this, with many children with SEND always described as 'below'.

Going back to the need for steps in learning to be appropriate and assessment to measure what's truly valued – rather than valuing what's measured – has been at the heart of debate for a long time and this remains.

Practically, there will be much work going on to ensure that mental health and wellbeing are prioritised. We also need to reflect as a sector on the incidental benefits realised from remote education to ensure they continue, such as children being able to work at their own pace and communication with families being more personalised.

We must ensure more joined up discussion between school and home around key individual priorities; much of which may centre around language, communication and reading development at earlier stages, and core curriculum learning steps for children further on in their school journey.



What can primary headteachers do to improve the educational prospects of children with SEND?

Primary headteachers are uniquely placed to consider how to make the full educational experience inclusive of all children; to make sure their school and everything that goes on within it, is inclusive by design. They should also ensure that staff have high quality, ongoing and effective CPDL, which translates into high quality teaching and learning for children, who are all different and individual in their learning styles.

What are your main priorities in your new role and what do you hope to achieve?

I want to make real change happen for children and young people, that improves life chances and outcomes. This is directly underpinned by having a good education. I make no apologies for saying that schools are the key.

It makes sound economic sense to secure the best possible education for SEND children. There is compelling evidence that

“The pandemic saw children with SEND disproportionately affected”

the primary phase is particularly important for the identification and support for additional needs.

Making change happen for those with SEND and additional needs is top of the tree for me and if we get education right for those with SEND, we ultimately get it right for all children.

Earlier identification of needs is a must as too many children move from primary to secondary without support. Even before the pandemic, it was challenging for schools to secure timely assessments and access to therapies from health and social care.

I want nasen to connect and support more teachers and practitioners, and it is well positioned to extend our membership reach, uniting schools, early years settings, FE and post 16 education. I am genuinely concerned about ensuring the best pathways for children and young people, so that they have choices and support, from early childhood through to adulthood.

The ultimate goal though is to make how SEND is supported everyone's business. Building a better understanding of SEND into Initial Teacher Training, into training for early years practitioners and those working in youth services would be a good start. Not as an additional module or a specialism, but more integral than that.

Finally, I want to put a marker down that we also need to consider each individual as having a wider set of needs. We need to recognise the holistic child and all that they bring in terms of culture, diversity and uniqueness.

We at nasen will do all we can to make this a reality.

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Teach leader,
early years,
social work and
inspection,
Birmingham
City Council

1998
Strategic Lead for
Early Years
Development and
Childcare,
Birmingham
City Council

2001
Regional adviser,
Department for
Children, Schools
and Families
(Department for
Education)

2005
Children's
Service Executive,
Capita, moving in
2006 to Director,
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2011
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School Improvement

WHY WE AXED FORMAL FEEDBACK

A more relaxed, whole-team approach works better than stressful monitoring, says **Ben Levinson**

Throughout lockdown at Kensington Primary School, we've dealt with challenges that are no doubt familiar to most schools – teacher workload, wellbeing, and remote teaching being some of the biggest. These external factors are beyond anyone's control but for us, a set of key principles, which I've outlined below, have helped foster a supportive and trusting culture, and it's been this that's allowed us to get over the hurdles we've faced.

HUMANS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY GOOD

All people are born with the capacity for growth and development. Of course, the balance between nature and nurture is complex, but with the right support,

everyone can play a positive role in society. This is no different for our Kensington team. Absolutely everyone here wants to do their very best. Sometimes they miss the mark because they're tired, or stressed, or anxious, or overwhelmed, etc, but my job as a headteacher is to help them maximise their potential.

MAD ISN'T ALWAYS BAD

As humans, we all experience the full gamut of emotions. And that is totally OK – it's an important part of what makes us, us. Added to that are the myriad factors that influence our emotions – personally, hunger affects me in an extreme way! At Kensington, we endeavour to be aware of all this. So, when a team member reacts in

an unusual way – for example, if they're angry or distressed – we try to step back from the specific reaction, identify the emotion for what it is (or what it's caused by) and then provide the appropriate support and guidance. Often, a bit of time to breathe and reflect is enough. When it isn't, work together to find solutions. All of this creates a more positive, calm environment, where issues are less likely to escalate.



INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

This supportive route has opened up lots of very interesting conversations at Kensington. After realising the monitoring systems we used not only didn't improve the quality of teaching and learning, but, arguably, detracted from it, we decided to get rid of the formal monitoring we had in place. Instead, we've developed a system where we work together, providing a supportive, reflective environment. We've embraced more collaboration, more conversation, and less direction and control. Rather than 'checking up' and 'feeding back', we spend time together in lessons, looking at the learning and then discussing what we saw. Which children were finding it hard and why? Who could have done with more challenge? Did that way of modelling work? Why? Why not? It's a small tweak but it works.

QUALITY TEACHING

The quality of teaching and learning is better than ever, as evidenced by a wide range of metrics – from speaking to children and staff, to awards, visitor feedback, and our own reflections of what goes on in the classroom. We have also overhauled our performance management systems to give staff control over their own development, rather than setting punitive targets. Everyone now identifies areas they want to develop, and then works towards their goals in their own way, supported by the team. Some have chosen to improve their knowledge of phonics teaching, others want to improve their use of assessment for learning, and others want to develop skills in having those challenging conversations with colleagues.

GOOD TO TALK

So much of what we've done is based on trust, which comes from open and honest communication. We support a variety of mechanisms for people to communicate at school, including our Kensington Matters focus groups, team meetings, and staff surveys. But most important are the relationships we've fostered together. Ultimately, all this means everyone has a voice, and ensures that what we're building is truly based on the team.

Ben Levinson OBE is head teacher at Kensington Primary School. He is a founding member of the Well Schools movement, part of the Department for Education's expert advisory group on school staff wellbeing, and a TeachActive ambassador.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO STAMMER

Abed Ahmed knows what it's like to stammer – and how schools can help children who do

Stammering can have an adverse effect on a student's confidence and ability to thrive in school.

STAMMA, the British Stammering Association, report that 8% of children will stammer at some point, and between 1% and 3% will continue into adulthood.

This means it is highly likely that you will have pupils (and perhaps some staff) in your school who stammer, though they may try to hide it.

I have struggled with a stammer since the age of four and only started to stammer openly and confidently after the age of 19.

I have been bullied and have been called all sorts of names – from "machine gun" to "woodpecker" – including by adults.

My teachers and even my parents never seemed to quite understand my stammer. Why would they? Not many people do.

So, what can you do to support your pupils? I always advise other teachers to try these 10 top tips:

- Treat a pupil who stammers the same way as you treat pupils who do not.
- Never finish their sentences. Always listen to what they have to say and not the way they are saying it.
- Be patient. The more anxious we feel, the more likely we will stammer even more.
- Do not tell a stammerer to breathe slowly or take their time – it just makes us feel that we are not capable of speaking for ourselves.
- Keep eye contact at all times. We like to

know that we are being listened to.

- Make a point of asking stammerers what you can do to support them.
- Try speaking to the pupil more often, before lessons or in their lunch break. Every bit of conversation will encourage them to feel more comfortable speaking.
- Always encourage them to take part in speaking activities – but ask them beforehand if they're comfortable doing so.
- Remember that having a stammer does not need to stop pupils from achieving. I did not let my stammer stop me from being a teacher and if I can do it, then so can other children.
- All my pupils receive additional support from a speech and language therapist. If you are in doubt, speak to your SENCO or your local speech and language therapy team for more assistance.

Ask yourself, do you take your ability to speak fluently for granted? My stammer has defined me. Surprisingly, perhaps, its impact has been, overall, positive. Despite the challenges, I believe I am a better teacher because of my stammer.

Abed Ahmed is head of maths at King Edwards VI Handsworth Wood Girls' Academy in Birmingham, and runs free student support groups via Zoom – Mr ST's Stammer Support Group – for 5 to 16-year olds. Abed won the Nasen Teacher of the Year Award in 2021.

Make your mark

Use the Quality Mark process to reflect on and celebrate the areas in which your school excels

We decided to apply for an RE Quality Mark at my school as the culmination of a two-year curriculum change programme that saw RE transformed into 'religion and worldviews'. We believed our research-informed curriculum was an example of best practice and external accreditation was a way to give validity to our view.

Quality marks are a great way for schools to show the areas they excel in. For religious education, schools can apply for the RE Quality Mark (REQM) which celebrates outstanding practice in the study of religion and worldviews, especially those schools that provide their learners with authentic experiences and contribute to whole-school outcomes.

Started in 2012, the REQM is supported by the RE Council of England and Wales to recognise and celebrate the quality of RE nationally. Schools undertaking the award measure their effectiveness in learning, curriculum, teaching and leadership.

Why bother?

For staff, the award was a chance to share their favourite examples of best practice with the wider school community. In what has been an exceptionally busy year, it was a welcome opportunity to pause, reflect and celebrate what we'd achieved together. The staff voice survey was a purposeful way to collect views and the results have informed our next CPD cycle.

Children were also involved and enjoyed the chance to speak with me about their learning and what they enjoyed the most about it. The best comment I received was from a child who said they would like "more RE than one hour per week as we always have more to talk about than the lesson allows for." Students were very pleased to learn that their work was being used as evidence and would be shared with people outside of our school.

The process

The assessment process was straightforward. After applying via the REQM website, we downloaded an evidence form and a pupil voice proforma. The evidence form provides 29 areas for reflection, with each delineated into bronze, silver and gold descriptors. There's also space to write short summaries after each section. If you know your curriculum well, it takes about 90 minutes to draft.

The evidence form is the start of the story you tell the assessor. I included

"We want more RE than one hour a week as we always have more to talk about than lessons allow for"

hyperlinks to evidence such as book scans and our curriculum documentation. If you're going for the gold award, like we were, it's worth putting in extra time and effort to capture and celebrate everything you would like the assessor to see.

For the pupil voice aspect, I spoke with children from all 10 classes in my school. I spent longer than the 10 minutes I'd planned for with each group because they all had so much to say. I collected staff voices via an online survey. This isn't required by REQM but was helpful in my evidencing for the leadership section. I also sat down with my head teacher and RE governor. This was a great opportunity to explain to my school's leaders the finer details about RE and show our successes in the subject.

The final assessment involved a 45-minute video call with our appointed assessor. They also spent 15 minutes with our head teacher. Our assessor was wonderful – they were full of praise for the school and asked pertinent questions to draw out all the details. I'd describe it as a conversation with a critical friend, helping you to celebrate your school, learning and pupils.

Final thoughts

I'd highly recommend applying for a Quality Mark. The process offered us a chance to reflect and celebrate what we offer. The REQM team is supportive and we were in communication with our assessor before the final event to ensure they would have all the evidence they needed. Our school has now been added to the national register of REQM holders and we received an icon to include on our website and letterheads. The assessor's report, included in the feedback, provides us with great evidence for future inspections. Overall, it's a great way for schools to celebrate and promote their learning.



Matthew Lane is religion and worldviews lead at Hethersett CEVC Primary in Norwich. The school was awarded a Gold RE Quality Mark in its final assessment.

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Helping parents to support maths

Parents often struggle with mathematics but getting them on board can reap huge benefits for pupils, says **Martin Hassler Hallstedt**

Early-age maths competence is the strongest predictor for future academic success. Yet the UK currently ranks seventeenth in the world league tables when it comes to maths competence assessed at the age of 15, with China, Singapore and Macau taking the top three places.

The maths curriculum has changed radically since many parents learned it at primary school. So how can we encourage parents to reform their relationship with maths, which is frequently based on traditional and dated techniques?

Maths is often a subject in which parents lack confidence themselves – especially as they might have been taught completely different methods at school – and therefore choose to avoid it or aren't as engaged as they are in reading and literacy homework.

Mathematical anxiety is common and starts at an early age and, once formed, this negative perception deepens. Here are some tips for you to share with parents at your school to help overcome any maths anxiety and support children to thrive in the learning of maths:

1 Make maths captivating – Children need to discover the magic of maths so the exercises need to be fun, engaging and rewarding. Good numeracy can be applied to everyday tasks such as shopping, budgeting, planning a trip or even following a recipe. You can help make maths fun by talking and 'playing' maths with children every day and introducing a game element or challenge with your children. For example, painting by numbers, playing bingo with addition, identifying shapes as you walk or travelling in the car.

2 Study in short bursts – Much like fitness training, it is better to train frequently but in short sessions than long and infrequently. Practising maths at home doesn't need to require a lot of time and, in fact, short bursts are better for young attention spans. I recommend 15 minutes per session to keep attention and enjoyment. By keeping the sessions short, you can incorporate it into almost anything you do.

3 Aim for a maths rhythm and fluency – Practice makes perfect and children love to feel they are masters at their subject. IQ tests are about being rapid. Many people



“It is important to overcome any negative attitudes or emotions towards maths early on by encouraging positive associations and garnering the support of parents to address this.”

can answer the questions but it is the pace at which you can answer through fluency that sets you apart. To do this, help them get a learning rhythm so that the maths exercises stick. For example, start off saying addition and subtraction facts out loud, while looking at a paper with the maths facts. Practise fluency with flashcards, singing or chanting the answers to a beat. Listen to music when doing maths homework. Many maths enthusiasts love classical music, especially the work of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. It's about time signatures, beats per minute and formulaic progressions. Listen to music with a beat, look at a note sheet, draw them out and count the beats.

4 Think beyond traditional techniques

– Use technology to support home learning. COVID 19 lockdowns, home schooling and more consumers having access to devices at a younger age have been a key driver in the growth of technology, apps and platforms used for maths learning in the last year. There are endless amounts of resources available online with YouTube videos, games, guides and ideas on how you can practise maths anywhere you may be.

EdTech has been popular in China for many years but now the UK and rest of the developed world have seen its potential. There are many platforms and apps available, but make sure you choose one which is evidence-based and that delivers improvement and results. Most UK schools now offer a tech-based maths programme as part of home learning. Try it out for yourself with your child so you understand some of the more modern techniques used to learn maths.

5 Positive role modelling

– Change your language about maths. Try to be a positive maths role model. Talk about how amazing and magical you find maths and, if possible, associate maths with richer content than just numbers so children can see and experience the meaning of maths. If you find it hard, try to talk about it as mysterious but not impossible to learn!

Language and the words we use affect the children. If we start talking about maths as something positive, children will embrace it in this way too. Give practical examples from real life – how did you use maths in your work today? To do the shopping? Give them examples of a time when maths really helped you in life – for example, when you bought your first flat or house, to budget at university, or to quickly check the bill in a restaurant.

Whatever you do, be positive and make it fun.



Dr Martin Hassler Hallstedt, is a learning psychologist and Founder of Count on me! a new

maths learning app from Akribian based on Game Embedded Teaching (GET) for children aged 6-9 years.

Turning around a failing school

Sarah Nickelson and **Craig Thomas** described how they took their free school from an “inadequate” inspection to looking ahead to a brighter future

When Heyford Park Free School (HPFS) was being conceived in 2013, the priority was to give the new growing community its own school.

It was an important development. The village of Upper Heyford, in Oxfordshire, once an important NATO air base of the Cold War, was becoming a burgeoning housing development hoping to attract thousands of families.

While all this planning was taking place, however, schools in the wider world were increasingly working together in partnerships to share staff, resources and most importantly, professional best practice. By the time HPFS opened it was isolated from other potential partners in Oxfordshire, leaving it vulnerable.

The school grew rapidly and, although initially located in porta cabins with several year groups in one class, within a matter of years it expanded to fit its current location, the Officers' Mess on the former American Airbase.

The new school was popular, attracting growing applications from nearby Bicester, which was itself in need of school places. But in November 2019 Heyford Park suffered a blow, in the form of a crushing Ofsted report.

INADEQUATE

The inspectors had deemed safeguarding to be “inadequate”; the behaviour of the children was poor; pupils with SEND were not sufficiently supported; and the curriculum needed reviewing. The response to this from the community was incredibly concerning, with many families taking the difficult decision to move their children to other schools, and the remaining families feeling uncertainty about keeping the faith in the staff and leadership.

In February 2020, Eynsham Partnership Academy (EPA) were contacted to support HPFS, and the school joined the partnership later that year.

WORKING PARTY

This was at a challenging time with lockdowns due to Covid-19. Face-to-face meetings not being an option, we held many parent meetings virtually. A smaller group of parents became a ‘working party’ with whom we were able to gain an understanding of their views on improving the school.

Step one of this journey was to bring in hugely experienced leaders and other staff to lead and work alongside the existing and enthusiastic HPS staff. At the start, we were a strong team of eight leaders from within the EPA. We investigated what action was needed and delivered a Rapid Action Plan (RAP) with us all focusing on different areas of school improvement.

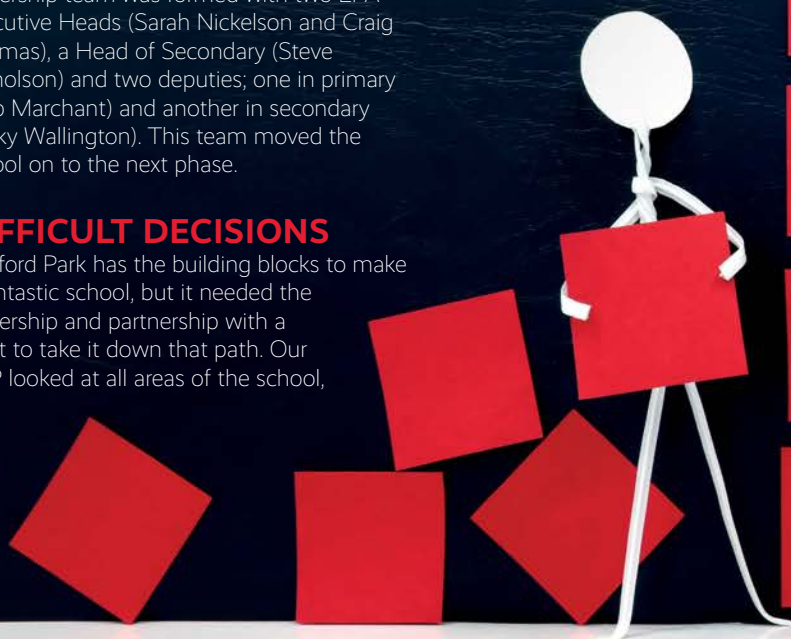
As Heyford Park is an all-through school it was essential that, to achieve the best outcome, the team should bring expertise from within all key stages and this is one of the main reasons why the school is now improving so fast. Experience and professional networks are so important and can really add value.

After the initial six months, a new leadership team was formed with two EPA Executive Heads (Sarah Nickelson and Craig Thomas), a Head of Secondary (Steve Nicholson) and two deputies; one in primary (Rob Marchant) and another in secondary (Vicky Wallington). This team moved the school on to the next phase.

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Heyford Park has the building blocks to make a fantastic school, but it needed the leadership and partnership with a Trust to take it down that path. Our RAP looked at all areas of the school,

“The response was incredibly concerning, with many families taking the difficult decision to move their children to other schools”



but our main areas of focus were on:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning, to ensure improved outcomes and wider life choices for our pupils;
- improving behaviour and ensuring consistent approaches; improving systems around safeguarding and ensuring that children feel safe;
- developing the curriculum from EYFS to the end of KS5 and rebranding the school name – Heyford Park School (HPS) – while ensuring staff felt supported;
- building a strong, cohesive team between primary and secondary.

MAKING CHANGES

One of the first steps we took in supporting staff and showing our commitment to bringing them with us on this journey, was to move the staffroom to a location in the centre of the school, which meant that staff could access it readily.

Safeguarding was a major concern for Ofsted (and parents) with pupils walking to a different site 500 metres down the road for some lessons. Pupils no longer walk between sites and parents, staff and children are much happier. A Safeguarding Review in 2020 gave us good feedback for this improvement.

The EPA has developed its own teaching and

learning principles, which have been introduced alongside our 'Developmental Drop Ins' (DDIs). These principles are used to develop staff with fortnightly 'drop ins' to lessons for 10 minutes to provide an actionable step for moving their teaching, and subsequently the children's learning, forward.

CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

One of the advantages that comes with pupils attending an all-through school is the familiarity between pupils and staff. Another is the curriculum progression from nursery onwards. It is the latter area that we are developing with secondary specialist teachers who are now also teaching pupils in primary, and subject specialists working together across the school to ensure clear progression of skills and knowledge.

Heyford Park is now meeting the very purpose for which it was designed. We have focused on collaboration and the sharing of best practice between schools in the Trust. For instance, our three science teachers at Heyford now work very closely with the larger science department at Bartholomew School, which consistently gets pupils into Oxford, Cambridge and other Russell Group universities. We also made the radical decision to move our Sixth Form to Bartholomew School (an Outstanding secondary in the EPA) so that pupils have a wider variety of subjects to access.

MEETING PUPIL NEEDS

One of the great things about HPS is that parents get a really lovely local school within walking distance for pupils that is located at the very heart of a friendly community where everyone knows one another.

SETTING PRIORITIES

To ensure consistency in the Primary Phase we introduced the 'Heyford Way' using five key elements to improve teaching and learning:

- 1 Structure of learning objectives to ensure children are supported and challenged accordingly
- 2 Consistent behaviour expectations using 'Ready, Respectful, Safe' and a focus on positive celebration of achievements
- 3 The use of assessments to inform planning using gap analysis as a basis, as well as introducing regular low stakes 'Pop Quizzes' to check children's knowledge through each unit
- 4 Improve the classroom environment so that it supports pupils with their learning ensuring working walls and help desks are in all classrooms
- 5 High expectations for presentation in books

Parents and young people now get all the benefits of a small local school with all the professional and curriculum advantages they would have received if they had sent their children some 12 miles away to other secondary schools in Oxfordshire.

Recently we commissioned a review to add credence to our self-evaluation and were pleased with the outcome:

'Evidence seen during the visit, and detailed through this report, indicates that leaders' actions, which have been well paced and effective, have secured significant improvements since the Ofsted report for Heyford Park Free School in November 2019. Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and appropriate steps have and continue to be taken to ensure the overall quality of provision for all pupils meets their high expectations.'

We are really confident as a Trust that at the next Ofsted inspection, Heyford Park School will be graded a good school – the community deserves this, as do the pupils.



Sarah Nickelson, Executive Headteacher (Primary) and Craig Thomas, Executive Headteacher (Secondary) of Heyford Park School, Oxfordshire.

WARRING PARENTS AT THE SCHOOL GATES

Dealing with family break-ups is tricky and needs careful handling, says **Melanie Bridgen**

Last year saw the largest percentage increase in the number of couples separating, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). And with divorce cases continuing to soar in 2021, schools across the UK have resumed the responsibility of navigating the sometimes-tricky waters of managing disputes between separated parents – particularly at pick up times.

A good place to start is by defining who is the parent to your pupil(s). While this might seem straightforward, legal definitions vary.

Family law determines legal parents are the biological parents, as well as those named on the birth certificate, whether married or not, adoptive parents or a person who is determined to be a parent under the Family Law Act with particular reference to artificial conception procedures.

Meanwhile, education law states legal parents are biological parents, whether married or not, but also any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child. This could be an adoptive parent, a step-parent, guardian or other relative. Any individual who – although not a biological parent who does not have parental responsibility – has care of a child or young person can also be deemed ‘a parent’ under education law.

Parental responsibility (PR) is all of the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that a parent has in relation to the

child. A person with parental responsibility can make decisions about the child’s upbringing and is entitled to information about their child.

Therefore, everyone who is a parent, as recognised under education law, can participate in their child’s education and the decisions made within it.

COURT INVOLVEMENT

Court orders under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 (also called section 8 orders) settle areas of dispute in relation to the exercise of parental responsibility, or a child’s care or upbringing, and can limit how an individual exercises their parental responsibility.

Child arrangement orders, meanwhile, set out with whom a child is to live, and when, and the persons with whom they spend time and have contact. You can request a copy of the most recent court order from parents, to support the school’s duties in respect of child safeguarding. But be aware that parents may first need to seek permission of the court to share orders with third parties, including the child’s school.

INFORMATION ABOUT A CHILD’S ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Receiving a report or heading in to meet the teacher is already a stressful time for any parent. When parents are separated, it’s important they continue to receive the same updates. They must have joint and equal rights to all information provided by their child’s school, and you are obliged to send out duplicate reports, letters etc. to keep everyone in the loop.

Both parents should also be invited and aim to attend parents’ evenings – either together or separately depending on the

circumstances. Even where one parent may be more involved with the school than the other, it’s crucial to ensure that no one is missed out.

WHO DECIDES IF A CHILD CAN GO ON A SCHOOL TRIP?

It’s a well-rehearsed scenario – the child is excited for a weekend away with friends. One parent has given permission and paid for a trip, and then the second parent finds out and rings the school in frustration. For trips outside of England and Wales, both parents, where they have parental responsibility, need to give written consent. This is important



“When parents don’t see eye to eye, school can become a battleground”



because failure to do so runs the risk of breaching the Child Abduction Act 1984.

Where there is a child arrangement order, it can be the case that the trip falls during time with the live-in parent and that only their consent is given. But, referring back to parental responsibility in education, any information or decisions within school should be shared by both parties.

Generally speaking, it's better to involve both parents in most situations and work in harmony for the sake of the child. For trips within the UK or local visits, the rules are less strict, but I would still advise caution and always involve both parents in any decisions.

DISPUTES AT THE SCHOOL GATES

However difficult the situation, parents should be encouraged to take their disagreements away from school, to avoid a detrimental impact on their children.

Parents need to have a set routine for pick up and drop off times, and to respect them. Any disputes should be resolved away from school, so they don't escalate on the school premises. But, when they do, try to diffuse the situation and ask the parents to resolve problems elsewhere.

It might be good to encourage the parents to get professional advice through mediation or legal advice. However, if it is a

recurring problem, and children are being affected, schools can consider getting the local authority involved – ultimately, the needs of the child must be considered first and foremost.

SEPARATED PARENTS WITH JOINT CUSTODY

Where you have pupils with parents who are not seeing eye to eye, but are still involved with their child's education, the school can be at risk of becoming a battleground. Parents may use the school and its staff as a way of contacting or disputing with the other party, and it's important for schools to try to stay as neutral as possible.

As children spend a substantial amount of time with their teachers and other school staff, parents may see this as a way to unload concerns, or look for ways to bring the school 'on side'. It's important to remember that any requests made to the school need the consent of both parents, for example changing a child's surname. You should also be cautious about any details being shared about disputes, particularly if the court is involved in an ongoing divorce settlement.

Keeping track of any ongoing problems, having regular contact with parents, and potentially others with parental responsibility, can help prevent issues or enable quick reactions in the event of a problem. Sometimes a school may be ordered by the court to give a statement or evidence as part of a custody trial, or over concerns about child welfare. This is perhaps the only time when the school has a right to be involved, but it is important to stick to facts, not opinions, and to stay impartial.

Education and family law specialists can sometimes help with more difficult situations, and may be able to offer advice, or approach the parents' solicitors if problems are starting to encroach on the school.

Whatever your concern, a school's top priority is the safety and wellbeing of its pupils and staff. Keeping them at the forefront of any decision regarding parents will hopefully ensure the school is not dragged into external and domestic issues. But, on top of this, the school has a responsibility to ensure the right people are involved in a child's education, and this is done through effective communication.



Melanie Bridgen, partner and solicitor in family law at Nelsons Solicitors. For more information on Nelsons'

education law expertise, visit nelsonslaw.co.uk/education-law



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IMPROVING PUPIL BEHAVIOUR – WHAT THE TEACHERS SAY

Iain Ford analyses recent Teacher Tapp survey responses on school behaviour policies and pupil conduct



Teachers reported finding the last term one of the most difficult of their careers, citing the combination of the unpredictable landscape of the pandemic and the longest term of the year. These factors, among others, led to high levels of staff burnout and exhaustion in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

It is not only staff who are affected. Tiredness hits students too, leading to slipping behaviour standards and bringing pupil conduct to the forefront of teachers' minds. At Teacher Tapp, we've been polling our panel of over 7,500 teachers – which includes over 2,000 primary teachers – to check in on pupil conduct and how they are managing it.

BEHAVIOUR IS GETTING WORSE

Not a term goes by without behaviour being mentioned as a hot topic among teachers – partly because they believe that conduct has been getting worse year on year. More than four out of 10 primary teachers say that behaviour has deteriorated since they started at their current school – only 22% say it has improved.

The trend becomes clearer when looking across a teacher's whole career. 56% of teachers with more than 20 years' experience said that behaviour has worsened since the start of their career. 48% of teachers with between 5- and 10-years' experience believe behaviour has deteriorated.

When behaviour becomes disruptive, it can

affect students' learning. When asked if behaviour had disrupted the learning in their most recent lesson, 76% of primary teachers admitted it had. Poor conduct also had dire consequences for teachers themselves – 50% reported knowing someone who has left teaching because they found behaviour too difficult to manage.

Primary teachers have come to expect some low-level disruption in the classroom – with over 55% of primary classroom teachers saying it is 'inevitable'. However, head teachers disagreed and only three in 10 thought it unavoidable.

WHAT DO TEACHERS THINK OF SCHOOL POLICIES?

School behaviour policies are a vital part of the teacher's toolkit to help consistently manage conduct in the classroom – but what are these policies and what do teachers think of them?

The most common policy was the banning of mobile phones on site, in about a third of primary schools. Furthermore, just under 20% of primaries ask their students to move silently in the corridor between lessons.

The good news is that about 60% of primary teachers find their school's policies usable. However, big differences emerge between classroom teachers and head teachers about other school rules.

Firstly, only half of classroom teachers rate the behaviour policy as fair to students, compared to three-quarters of head teachers

and it is the same result for how reasonable the policy is for staff. Only half of classroom teachers say that it is reasonable for them, compared with three-quarters of heads.

However, the most notable difference is how effective they believe the policy to be. Less than 30% of classroom teachers and middle leaders rate their policy as effective, compared to 68% of head teachers. Not only is it worth noting the great divide between teachers and head teachers, but also the fact that 30% of head teachers don't think their behaviour policy is effective!

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THESE DIFFERENCES IN OPINION?

When asked recently how leaders in their school could improve staff wellbeing, two-thirds of classroom teachers wanted heads to communicate better and reduce administrative requirements. Better communication may also help bring on board the 40% of teachers who say that their school's behaviour policy isn't aligned to their values – or bring about change that means it is.

With such a stark discrepancy between classroom teachers' and heads' perceptions of behaviour policies, it's clear that more can be done to support teachers in managing behaviour. In doing so, not only might we improve the wellbeing of teachers but also halt those teachers who are leaving the profession because of pupil conduct.

BE PART OF THE PANEL

For more snappy insights like this, and to be part of the panel, please join in via the free Teacher Tapp app – available to download for iOS and Android. You will learn something new every day.



Iain Ford is Senior Data Analyst with TeacherTapp

CREATING MENTALLY HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Dr Sally Pearse and **Sue O'Brien** discuss the benefit of a trauma informed approach in improving the wellbeing of all staff and pupils

As we reflect on the impact of Covid-19, we should recognise that we were already in the midst of a mental health crisis in schools before we entered the pandemic. The latest research shows that the rates of probable mental disorders have increased in the past four years from 1:9 to 1:6 in 6–16-year-olds, and from 1:10 to 1:6 in 17–19 year-olds.

Teachers are on the frontline when it comes to dealing day-to-day with their pupils' mental health and they, too, have been hugely impacted by the pandemic, with stress levels at an all-time high. The Teacher Wellbeing Index (2020) showed 62% of classroom staff and 77% of senior leaders 'described themselves as stressed', 31% of staff 'experienced mental health issues', 74% of staff 'experienced behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms due to their work' and 57% of staff 'would not feel confident in disclosing unmanageable stress/mental health issues to their employer'.

With the added pressures of missed learning; supporting children and families who are increasingly vulnerable; and partial closures due to Covid outbreaks in schools, levels of stress and mental illness are on the increase. Staff and teachers trying to deal with chronic stress alone may end up with stress related illness, secondary trauma, anxiety, depression and burnout.

The inevitable knock-on effect is an exodus from the profession and, although a recent survey shows teacher training applications are high, twice as many teachers are considering leaving the profession than pre-Covid, with a higher number in the early years. Absence and staff turnover have a direct impact on pupils, colleagues and school development. To curtail this exodus and uncertainty, wellbeing and mental health need to be at the top of the school agenda.



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

We need to create mentally healthy schools that support the wellbeing of everyone inside their community – pupils, teachers and staff, and parents. School cultures that encourage everyone to feel connected and part of the school create a sense of community or family, and keep schools moving ahead with everyone on board.

A school's success is measured by its pupils' success which is reliant on the expertise and dedication of the teachers and staff. If they, too, are feeling supported, fulfilled and content in their work, the school flourishes. Trauma informed (TI) schools place wellbeing alongside academic expectations as one supports the other. It is a holistic, empathic approach that determines how the whole school community behaves, reacts, and responds, building trusting supportive relationships.

Although there are emerging findings about the impact of trauma informed practices in schools, there is not yet a clear evidence base because of the complexity of approaches that seek to impact on relationships and school culture. The TI approach that we follow at Sheffield Hallam University is, however, underpinned by over 1000 evidence-based psychological, medical and neuroscience research studies. It is designed to inform and empower school staff to respond effectively to vulnerable children and those who have suffered a trauma or have a mental health issue as well as support a mentally healthy environment for all.

The training provides insight into the causes and consequences of mental ill-health and vital tools and approaches to respond to and support children in crisis. Without such interventions, painful life experiences are likely to present in challenging behaviour, and/or blocks to learning.

If pupils are upset and dysregulated, they are given time outside the classroom to talk to an adult and regulate their feelings, returning to class when they are ready to participate and learn. Rather than being labelled as 'naughty' or out of control and given punitive measures – which are rarely a lasting solution – teachers and practitioners are encouraged to be curious and compassionate and ask the question: 'why are they acting in that way?'

Far too many school pupils labelled as disruptive, aggressive or badly behaved are caught up in a downward spiral of repeated offending and discipline, which for some ends in exclusion. In reality they are reacting to trauma or adverse childhood experiences that they cannot process without the help of an empathic adult.

At Sheffield Hallam, as providers of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) we recognised the

need to equip the next generation of teachers with the necessary tools to support their pupils' mental health. We recognise this important aspect of their role and want to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to support children and young people in the school and classroom environment, and make a positive difference. Addressing pupils' mental health and wellbeing, enables them to play a full part in school life, build positive relationships and make the progress they need to lead successful lives.

Initial Trauma Informed training has been a compulsory element of training for all Hallam students on ITE courses, from 2014 in early years, and more recently in 2019 for primary, secondary and post-16. The training, developed in partnership with Trauma Informed Schools UK (TISUK) – a non-profit educational organisation – highlights the crucial role of teacher/pupil relationships, the importance of enriched classroom environments and consideration about how the curriculum is delivered.

Including the initial TISUK training in our

“Painful life experiences are likely to present in challenging behaviour”

ITE courses, not only impacts how our trainees respond to pupils, but also helps them to recognise when they themselves are experiencing stress. All of our academic staff (20 in total) who deliver this input have completed the Diploma in Trauma, and Mental Health Informed Schools and Communities training. This includes interventions designed specifically to address teacher stress, so our lecturers can identify and respond to trainees who are facing difficulties due to stress during their studies.

The most common response from teachers and academics undertaking this training is, 'Why did I not know this sooner?' It doesn't just help children. It has a positive impact on all our relationships.

The government has responded to the dramatic rise in mental health needs with a focus on mental health training for specific staff. We recommend that all staff have an understanding of trauma informed practice, so they can use their knowledge and understanding in their interactions with children and young people, families and colleagues. Embedding trauma informed practice in schools and educational settings will create a much wider positive impact and more support for children in crisis.

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?

The Government Green Paper (December 2017) Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision, states that:

- There is evidence that appropriately-trained and supported staff such as teachers, school nurses, counsellors, and teaching assistants can achieve results comparable to those achieved by trained therapists in delivering a number of interventions addressing mild to moderate mental health problems (such as anxiety, conduct disorder, substance use disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder).
- Trauma Informed Schools UK provides training for schools, communities and organisations to become trauma informed and mentally healthy places for all. Trauma informed interventions are based on over 1,000 psychology and neuroscience studies, and address changes and imbalances in a child's neurological, neurochemical and physiological systems. Trained school staff can help children and teenagers before trauma develops into mental ill-health.

For more information contact: traumainformedschools.co.uk

The culture of all schools is led from the top, and the lived values of any school are demonstrated and enacted by those in charge. If we want this to have impact, the senior leadership team should lead the way in prioritising this approach.

We need to make change now to improve outcomes for children and young people, support our teachers and staff and make school – the place we spend the majority of our childhood and, for some, our working lives – mentally healthy.



Dr Sally Pearse and Sue O'Brien, Strategic Leads for Delivery, Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University

MAPPING THE JOURNEY

Sue Cowley helps to navigate the choppy waters of a new inspections framework and early years curriculum demands

With the introduction of the new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF) in September 2019, head teachers were asked to consider how best to create a curriculum that worked right across their schools. The pandemic brought a cessation to inspections, but these have now fully resumed. Inspection reports show that inspectors are focusing on primary schools having on a coherent, sequenced curriculum from the early years through to the end of Year 6.

Nursery and reception classes, and any two-year-old provision in schools, fall under a different statutory framework to classes in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. However, they fall under the same school inspection handbook.

Working out how to link the work done by staff under the EYFS Statutory Framework, to work done in later key stages under (or in line with) the National Curriculum, has been tricky for many schools. It is also an area of particular focus for Ofsted, and has featured in a number of recent inspection reports.

TWO FRAMEWORKS

The National Curriculum and the EYFS Statutory Framework are fundamentally different in scope, not least because the EYFS is an entire phase, from birth to five years old. The majority of early years provision is delivered outside of schools.

In addition, although the framework is statutory, the phase is a non-compulsory part of school. Children do not have to be in full-time education until the term after they turn five. For any children born in the summer term or later, who are in a reception class, the entire phase is non-compulsory.

The National Curriculum is, of course, a subject-based curriculum, with what we might recognise as a 'traditional' set of school subjects. However, the curriculum in the EYFS has 'areas of learning' which encompass a wide range of skills, knowledge, attitudes and attributes.

As well as ensuring that children learn what we might recognise as 'subjects' – such as maths – nursery and reception teachers must plan and account for children's wider care and development. The statutory

framework requires them to put a strong focus on the prime areas of learning: physical development, communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development.

TWO SECTORS – TWO HANDBOOKS

Another complication is that the EYFS is a phase delivered in two different sectors. Children access early years provision in a

wide range of different types of settings, including preschools, full day care nurseries, infant and primary schools, maintained nursery schools, childminders and independent nursery classes.

The phase is also judged under two very different handbooks – 'PVI' (private, voluntary and independent) settings are judged under the Early Years Handbook, whereas early years settings in primary schools are judged under the Schools Handbook.



WHAT IS 'CURRICULUM'?

Ofsted wants schools to show how pupils progress through their curriculum in each subject area, with 'deep dives' into individual subjects. Inspectors are asking children what they remember of the different subjects they have been taught. Ofsted has also published individual 'subject reviews', summarising some of the research into each National Curriculum subject area.

Many schools have created 'curriculum maps' for each subject, to show progression through the year groups and key stages. However, reception teachers are reporting difficulty linking up the work they do under the EYFS areas of learning with the single subject approach of the National Curriculum, particularly where subject-based 'maps' are in place.

The EYFS Statutory Framework states that "all areas of learning are important and interconnected". Where 'Understanding the World' is taken to mean 'History' or 'Geography', and 'Physical Development' to mean 'PE', this is to misunderstand the nature of the foundation stage.

"Teachers are reporting difficulty linking up the work they do under the EYFS areas of learning with the single subject approach of the National Curriculum"

THE EYFS: A DIFFERENT TYPE OF CURRICULUM

Because the areas of learning and development in the EYFS are interconnected, all areas can often be seen in a single activity. For instance, while cutting up fruits for snacks, children might build mathematical concepts, learn to handle tools, and develop their fine motor skills. At the same time, they might talk about where in the world the fruits come from, present fruit creatively on plates, build their communication and language skills, and learn more about social interactions. In other words, all areas of learning are covered through a single task.

The Prime Areas are of particular importance in the EYFS, but again are not what we might call traditional 'subjects'. These areas are about building "a foundation for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, forming relationships and thriving".

THE UNIQUE CHILD – BUILDING ON INTERESTS

The Statutory Framework also requires teachers to take account of the concept of the "unique child" and to act as a "key person", building strong attachments with children. Practitioners must consider each child's "individual needs, interests and development" and understand that children "learn by leading their own play".

Where a curriculum is mapped out ahead of time – for instance, by using pre-written schemes of work – it can be difficult for staff to find space to build on children's interests. This creates significant tensions between the statutory approach within the EYFS and some of Ofsted's requirements.

CURRICULUM PLANNING AND INSPECTIONS

Recent inspection reports talk about leaders planning and sequencing "what they want children to know in all areas of the early years curriculum". In some cases, where schools have been downgraded, this is because "curriculum planning in some subjects does not start from early years".

A useful exercise is to consider how the curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2 builds on the early years, rather than trying to link the two different frameworks with each other. For instance, how do colleagues build on the huge amount of work done on children's self-regulation in early years provision? How do staff continue to develop children's communication and language, for instance through talk and oral presentations?

The crucial consideration here is the idea of 'building on', rather than 'linking to'. With the EYFS sitting at the earliest stage of schooling, consider how subject-based work under the NC builds on the skills and attitudes fostered in the early years.

BUILDING ON THE EYFS

Another effective way to build on early years provision is to ask nursery and reception teachers to explain their approach to introducing a range of concepts that are seen later on in individual subjects. For instance, how do they introduce the concepts of 'long ago' and 'time passing', which are so fundamental to work done in history lessons? How do they introduce concepts such as changing materials and understanding volume, required for later scientific and mathematical learning, by resourcing the sand or water tray?

The reforms to the EYFS highlight the importance that government attaches to reading. This is an area of considerable expertise for early years staff and it will be useful for them to explain their approach to staff working in the other key stages, to ensure that they build on what has been learned before.

Allocate time for nursery and reception teachers to explain their approach to others, and to clarify the key values, attributes, skills and knowledge that are developed within the EYFS. In this way you can ensure that your curriculum is built on solid foundations and from the ground up, rather than the top down.



Sue Cowley is an author, teacher trainer, early years teacher and chair of a pre-school committee.

Her online webinars are available here: suecowley.co.uk. Sue's latest book is "Learning Behaviours: A Practical Guide to Self-Regulation in the Early Years".





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30 SECOND BRIEFING

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5 REASONS TO TRY... THE JUNIOR MEMORY CHAMPIONSHIP

Jonathan Hancock, former deputy head, two-time world record holder, and founder of the JMC, explains the benefits of this unique learning challenge

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The most important thing about the JMC is that it improves learning. Year after year it proves just how much children can gain from boosting their memories and strengthening their learning skills. They discover how to engage with whatever they're learning, highlight key information, organise it efficiently, and then commit it to memory in creative ways. They discover age-old learning methods that are more relevant than ever in our fast-moving, information-filled world. And as they master the core strategies, they also strengthen their concentration, focus and resilience – so they're developing the right habits to be lifelong learners.

2 THE JMC PROMOTES METACOGNITION

Metacognition – thinking about thinking – has been shown to have a powerful impact on academic success. The JMC encourages children to consider how the human brain works – and how to get more out of theirs! The teaching resources explore memory and learning in general, but they also help each child to discover which methods work best for them. Their teachers can then discuss not just “what to learn” but also “how to learn,” in lessons every day.

3 THE JMC BOOSTS CONFIDENCE

Many teachers have told us about the confidence-boosting impact of the JMC. Children who'd previously been nervous under pressure or unsure about taking part in group activities have gained new assurance and self-belief. Memory training has given them a different opinion about what they can achieve, and made them want to show off their skills. Have a look at the project's website and you'll see some of the incredible learning achievements recorded by JMC competitors over the years.

Contact:

Full details about the JMC are available at juniormemorychampionship.com

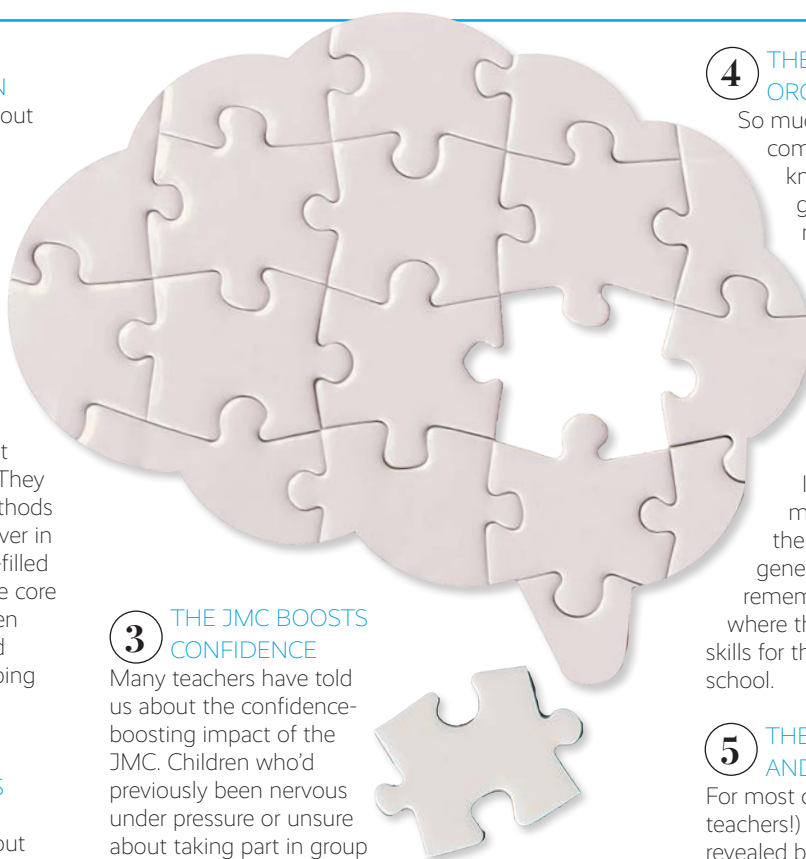
The project is supported by The Learning Skills Foundation. Find out more about their values, aims and wider activities at learningskillsfoundation.com

4 THE JMC IMPROVES ORGANISATION

So much of academic success comes down to organisation: knowing what to learn, gathering everything you need, having effective ways to learn and practise – and then being ready to put your knowledge to use when the time comes. The JMC helps children to learn with focus and efficiency. It also shows them how memory skills can help them to be more organised in general, to manage their time, remember their stuff, and get where they need to be – all vital skills for the step up to secondary school.

5 THE JMC IS EXCITING AND FUN!

For most children (and many teachers!) the memory techniques revealed by the JMC are new and fascinating. In just a few minutes they find that they can memorise a list of words, numbers, facts, names; learn instructions; remember passwords, jokes, poems, scripts; and get more out of every learning experience. It all happens when they switch on their imagination, make memory fun, and embrace the competitive challenge. And the online tests add an extra buzz to their training, allowing them to get recognition in school – and maybe even make it to the final!



KEY POINTS

The Junior Memory Championship is a national learning competition, now registering primary schools for its 15th year.

When you sign up, you'll receive a full set of resources to teach your children how to use tried-and-tested memory and learning techniques – helping them to achieve their potential, both in and out of school.

In-school training is quick, straightforward and fun. And when the children are ready, they get to test their new learning skills in a series of online challenges.

The top performers from around the UK are invited to take part in the JMC final – to compete for prizes and the coveted title of Junior Memory Champion.

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The long road to post-Covid recovery

Nicola West breaks down the evidence for post-pandemic action in schools

Even in comparison to the other gargantuan issues schools are expected to solve on a day-to-day basis, this was a big one: how can you get the nation's school children to 'catch-up' on, not just the academic 'lost' learning they've experienced, but on all the other important aspects of their development affected by the pandemic, too. From learning behaviours to social skills and mental wellbeing, and even the practical skills needed to navigate the curriculum, this was never going to be a straightforward challenge to address.

THE PROGRESS PICTURE IN SCHOOLS

In The Key's recent survey of school leaders, we found academic learning to be the area respondents are most concerned about, and their pupils making progress in this year (chosen by 75%). Indeed, three-quarters of those surveyed told us the majority of their pupils are 'behind' (62%) or 'significantly behind' (13%) academically, compared to previous cohorts. But the learning gap is also evident in other crucial areas of pupils' development, too. 73% told us their pupils' social skills are 'behind' or 'significantly behind', 54% say this is true of their pupils' practical skills and 39% report the same of their pupils' sporting abilities.

Nevertheless, this apparent lack of progress is not for want of trying. School leaders told us that in the last year, they have redesigned their curriculum to make sure catch-up happens in normal lessons – a huge undertaking when the curriculum is already packed, and in many cases, only recently redesigned under the current Ofsted Inspection framework. Effective staff training has also been carried out specifically on supporting pupils to catch-up. Despite this, an overwhelming 95% of respondents to our survey believe they will still be running interventions to support catch-up, until at least July 2023.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES THIS ACADEMIC YEAR

In our survey, over half (51%) of school leaders told us that 'insufficient staff, due to absences', is one of the top three biggest barriers for pupils not making more progress.



An additional 35% told us that 'pupil attendance' was in their top three reasons. These figures represent a significant increase from the summer term when pupil attendance and staff absences were chosen by just 16% and 12% respectively. What's more, with new government rules being introduced recently in relation to self-isolation for vaccinated contacts of Omicron-infected people (even if they themselves test negative), we can expect absences may not subside for a while yet.

One of our respondents commented that "Staff absence, both Covid and non-Covid related, has been the main reason for the slower-than-expected progress. We have had up to 11 members of staff off at one time, significantly impacting on provision." And the knock on effect is perhaps best summed up by this leader: "Children learn best with their own teacher, not supply teachers."

We also found that a huge number of comments left by school leaders in our survey pointed to a lack of resilience, concentration and stamina in pupils generally. These skills are all prerequisites for learning, which helps to explain why progress is going to take some time.

AGE MATTERS

Interestingly, the survey findings also reveal that certain year groups are struggling more

than others. In primary schools, Year 2 is the year group most widely considered to be in need of catch-up provision (chosen by 57% of respondents). These children were in reception when the pandemic started and have never experienced a 'normal' year of school. Despite a focus on working towards the end of Key Stage 1 expectations, they are still struggling with some of the basics of being at school (for example not being able to "have a snack" on demand, or to cope with work they find tricky, without giving up). On the other hand, despite preparing for May's SAT exams and the transition to secondary, the current Year 6 pupils are less of a concern (chosen by 35% of respondents) – a likely result of the solid four years in school they had under their belts before the pandemic started.

Of course, none of us can predict how the winding path to recovery will unfold, or indeed how absence rates might evolve over spring and summer. If there's one thing the events of the last two years have shown us, it's that the profession can undoubtedly rise to the challenge.



Nicola West Jones is Head of Market Research at The Key.

Sharing SEND best practice

Ashley Eastwood describes how the Learning in Harmony Trust is rolling out its SEND approaches nationwide

Ensuring a school has the right SEND expertise, resource and capacity to support each child's individual needs is a complicated but vital task.

Whether a school is a special school, has a specialist unit or is mainstream, there is often a broad range of students with diverse and sometimes conflicting needs.

Learning in Harmony Trust (LiHT) has been developing our SEND strategy to ensure we offer each pupil the most suitable and specialised support. A fundamental part of our ability to build this strategy is being able to draw from the expertise of our JFK Special School.

JFK was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2017 and supports our mainstream schools in transforming their SEND provision, and working with JFK staff has shaped the way that we view SEND provision in mainstream schools.

PRIORITIES

Our SEND strategy features three key priorities:

- Creating an effective and collaborative admissions plan. This looks at the needs of individual students, and not their disability alone. We support parents in placing their children in the best environment for success. This plan also supports the local authority in signposting students to the right schools, and has created a great opportunity for our Trust to help the local authority make a meaningful difference for SEND children.
- Sharing best practice across our family of schools. This is a network of highly trained experts who are able to share best practice, ideas, resources, present case studies and problem-solve as a

collective. A central team of SENCo leaders from JFK and the mainstream schools meet once a week to enable mainstream schools to discuss challenges and seek support. It has led to formal opportunities for professional development, as the network has run its own training sessions, and middle leaders from JFK have worked alongside teachers in mainstream schools to help upskill them.

- Establishing specialist classrooms in mainstream settings. The support of JFK has enabled us to expand our specialist provision offers into our mainstream primary schools, through the creation of specialist classrooms. These settings are an important way of offering pupils exceptional engagement opportunities that can have a huge benefit for a child's social and emotional development.

SPECIALIST PROVISION IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS

When setting up a specialist classroom, it's more valuable to recruit a teacher who has the experience to effectively deal with any initial challenges, than appointing a less-experienced teacher from within the school.

These classrooms are not the best fit for every child – some do better in all mainstream classes, while others may thrive in specialist schools. It's important to focus on the combination of specific needs when determining the mix of pupils. Teachers must understand why each child is being placed in these classrooms and how it supports their development.

Smaller class sizes are the most effective, with an average of eight students and four adults who are teaching a highly-personalised

curriculum. The classroom should include spaces that are designed for pupils with sensory-specific needs.

We also ensure that learning for each child is personalised. A specialist classroom does not mean "one size fits all". We address this with the careful planning of motivating and purposeful learning activities.

CHALLENGES

One challenge we faced during the initial set-up of these classrooms was apprehension from parents, which was overcome by building on existing strong relationships, allowing them to express their concerns and addressing these individually. Parents meet the teacher leading the provision so she can explain her vision for the child, receive feedback and make necessary adaptations.

SHARING OUR VISION

We are now looking to use our experience to open more specialist provision schools to support the most vulnerable children within our region, and working with the local authority to support planning for 2024 admissions, to combat the increasing shortage of secondary schools' spaces for children with SEND.

As part of our wider commitment to improving education nationally, we have been working beyond the Trust to improve opportunities and outcomes for children with SEND. JFK, as part of the Teaching School Alliance, has undertaken school-to-school outreach work to assist SEND departments through CPD courses and support packages. We are also building a new and innovative model that supports underrepresented cohorts in accessing mainstream secondary settings.

It has been extremely rewarding to be able to leverage our structure and the depth of SEND expertise we have across the Trust to create exceptional learning facilities for these children.



Ashley Eastwood is Executive Leader at Learning in Harmony Trust

5 REASONS TO TRY... RSPB's Big Schools' Birdwatch

The UK's largest citizen science project for schools



30 SECOND BRIEFING

"Big Schools' Birdwatch is the UK's largest citizen science project for schools. Every year, the efforts of thousands of schools help to provide data about how birds are faring across the UK. The project is free to take part and we send resource packs with everything you need to complete your Birdwatch."

1 JOIN THOUSANDS OF OTHER SCHOOLS FOR CITIZEN SCIENCE

Put pledges for nature into action. Every year, thousands of schools and tens of thousands of learners send their Birdwatch data. Big Schools' Birdwatch is the UK's largest citizen science project for schools. All the data sent to the RSPB helps to monitor how birds are faring across the UK. Our conservation scientists crunch the numbers to bring you the national results. Schools can compare their year-on-year data to track their local changes too.

2 BIODIVERSITY IN SCHOOL GROUNDS

Big Schools' Birdwatch is a meaningful reason to take learning outside into the school grounds. It provides excellent context for data and statistics in maths, or even food chains and adaptation in science. Many schools find the project ignites a desire to make changes to the school grounds to support biodiversity. The impact of changes to the school grounds can be monitored in the year-on-year Big Schools' Birdwatch results.

3 FREE RESOURCE PACK

You'll receive a free pack of resources with everything you need to take part in Big Schools' Birdwatch. The pack includes fact files about the most frequently seen birds, counting sheets, how to take part guide and supporting activities. Resources are created by teachers



Contact:

Get your free pack at rspb.org.uk/schoolswatch

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On social media
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for teachers with the curriculum in mind, such as survey sheets with tens frames and subitizing, or fact files written with examples of the grammar for the phase.

4 WELLBEING

The numerous wellbeing benefits of outdoor learning are well documented. During the winter months, schools can find it more challenging to take learning outside. Big Schools' Birdwatch can be delivered any time during the first half of the Spring term helping learners get into the school grounds and learn through the nature around them. There is no need for lots of green space in your grounds, simply a feeder or two on a fence can attract local species and start providing opportunities to connect with nature.

5 JUST 3 STEPS

Taking part is simple for teachers to deliver.

1. Request a free pack
2. Get counting
3. Tell us what you saw between 5th January – 21st February 2022 and receive a certificate.

KEY POINTS

Gather meaningful data and work together to get closer to the nature in your grounds.

Winter can make it harder for teachers to get outside. Big Schools' Birdwatch is a simple way to incorporate outdoor learning into the curriculum during the first half of Spring term.

Take action for nature. Put pledges into action by playing your part in citizen science.

RSPB's Big Schools' Birdwatch comes with a free resource pack to support the delivery of your Birdwatch.

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Schools

JOB APPLICATIONS TAKE DAYS

So the least school leaders can do is send out a polite rejection email to candidates who aren't shortlisted, says **Sophie Hudson**

Rejection in any form is hard, but on a professional level it can be soul-destroying. We've all been there as teachers: you spend hours writing a job application, noting every GCSE you've got, scouring the school's website to fine tune your cover letter. Every teaching job application I've ever submitted has taken hours or even days to complete – numerous proof-checks; sending it round for people to look at. When you've spent that much time applying, prepping and, dare I say, picturing yourself at the school, when you get a rejection it feels like a punch in the gut.

I vividly remember applying for my first teaching job. It was at a school that I'd attended as a child. I'd returned to do some work experience there and when a job came up, a colleague emailed me to tell me to apply. I prepared, had my mentor look over my lesson, did a mock interview and put my heart and soul into the application.

I can't say it went to plan – I'd saved over my lesson with a blank PowerPoint. I knew I wasn't going to get the role, but when they finally rang to confirm my suspicions, I still struggled. In all honesty it wasn't even about that job. It was the rejection. They knew me, knew my work ethic and still didn't want me. I took it personally.

In hindsight though, I wasn't impressed with the school or the interview process. I was made to wait two hours for my interview and didn't even know where the toilets were. I didn't meet the head, which I'd been told was the norm. It felt odd and I drove home feeling a little unsettled about it.

The day after the rejection I got invited to interview at my current school. I had a tour from a group of students, taught a lesson and was so impressed with pupils' conduct and engagement. I got such a real sense of what the school was about from the visit. This one felt different. Luckily, I got it and it's been the perfect place for the start of my career.

Even though I love my current school, I recently applied for another job. It seemed perfect. I put so much effort into my application – I felt I had so much to offer the school. Ten days after submitting my

application I still hadn't heard anything so emailed to enquire. The school told me I hadn't made the shortlist. Part of me was frustrated. I worked solidly for two days and two evenings to write my application and they didn't even tell me 'no' until I emailed. Rejected, again. What had I done wrong? What could I have done differently?

When you spend hours and days writing an application only for it to be disregarded it's hard to deal with. If the same thing has happened to you, know that you're not alone. Facing rejection helps build your resilience. It's OK to feel sad or angry, but I promise it does pass. Keep your head up high. Everything happens for a reason – I truly believe that.

My plea to school leaders is this: even if you have 100 applications, please be considerate and email those who applied to tell them they were not shortlisted. Even a generic message is enough. For those ten days when I was waiting for news of my application I was a mess. My heart raced every time an email arrived and I checked my phone more times than I care to admit. I had to chase up to get any closure. The teaching job market seems particularly tough at the moment, so my advice, especially to trainees, is to persevere. Rejection does not mean failure.

“Even if you have 100 applications, please be considerate and email those who applied”



Sophie Hudson is a secondary school teacher in London



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Buildings & procurement

GET MORE FROM THE OUTDOORS

Investing in play has helped improve inclusion and behaviour at Jill Wright and Marie Beale's school

As we returned from the first Covid-19 lockdown and considered how to rebuild, we quickly found that we needed to reconnect and rebuild our relationships with the children, and help them to remake friendships with their peers.

Our approach was to implement open-ended, loose parts play – usually reserved for Early Years – in our whole-school break for half an hour each day and over lunchtimes. To get started we visited the Leeds ScrapShed and collected an eclectic mix of crates, pipes, pots, pans, wheels, cable reels and other flexible items to create excitement and engagement.

Initially, we were supported by our expert Early Years team in modelling and understanding play opportunities. Staff worked with children to develop ideas about how they could use the resources and taught pupils how to care for them, as they were initially destructive.

WHOLE-SCHOOL PLAY

Now all our class-based staff join in the extended morning play time. This is no longer 'playground duty' – our challenge is to help children of every age to have a rich, imaginative and varied experience. At first, the need for Covid zones helped with this, and we decided to maintain play zones with different resources this academic year to make sure the play stays fresh and exciting.

We are fortunate to have a large outdoor space and have, over time, invested to develop it. We now have an urban forest, two large sandpits and lots of green, calm spaces.



These are rich environments, but loose parts play works just as well on our normal playground – having open-ended resources and skilled facilitating adults was the most important aspect.

Initially staff were hesitant about the pressure on the timetable and loss of breaks, but in time recognised that the benefits of a much more positive experience meant that children were able to learn more easily and less learning time was lost sorting out disputes after lunch. They also found their adult-child relationships were much stronger through the shared experience of playing and creating together, and loved seeing children full of joy.

BEHAVIOURAL TOOLKITS

This is not to say disagreements on the playground are a thing of the past, but our behaviour logs show they have dramatically reduced, particularly among our neurodiverse learners. When incidents do happen, it is rare that senior leaders need to get involved, and those incidents are lower level.

We underpin everything we do at school by using ‘zones of regulation’ as the basis of our behaviour policy, so that children are taught emotional literacy and can build a toolkit of strategies to help them first co-regulate, then self-regulate their emotions, and so their reactions. This is key for many of our learners who need additional support. During playtimes this means that our staff and children have a shared language to discuss any conflict or heightened emotion, and children develop their own toolkit to manage themselves, or communicate when they need help.

This includes making clear links with the physical impact of emotions, and on how to recognise and avoid triggers. We use the Take Ten app (letstaketen.com) which visualises heart rate and helps children to recognise and change what is happening to them. Our next steps will be to teach parents more about regulation and play so we can work more seamlessly together. We are thrilled to have been given a grant from SHINE UK (shinetrust.org.uk) to trial this work in Early Years, with a view to rolling it out to other schools in the future.

Jill Wright and Marie Beale are head teacher and deputy head teacher, respectively, at Whitefield Primary School, which won the 2021 nasen Award for Primary Provision.



ARE YOU BUYING ENOUGH BOOKS?

Forget plush cushions and flashing lights, funding for reading corners should be for well-stocked shelves

I asked a teacher the other day if he had any copies of Alex Rider books. “I’m not sure,” he replied. “What about any Philip Pullman books?” I enquired. He didn’t know. His reading corner looked lovely, but he had no idea what books were on his shelf. As I took a closer look to find the titles I was looking for, I soon discovered the familiar reading corner reality.

The bookcase was packed. But over 50 per cent of the books were damaged and unusable. Protective coverings were absent, decades-old editions that looked dated, sat unloved. A common misconception schools have is that because they have lots of titles for the children to choose from, their provision is good. Nobody likes throwing books away, so they sit forlornly in the reading corner for years.

One school I worked at recently told me off for throwing away lots of books in my reading corner. The titles were all very tatty and over 20 years old. “Why on earth did you do that? Now we don’t have enough books!” the head exclaimed. I nodded and said, “Yes, you might have to spend some money now. Children need a wider range of books that are new and attractive enough to want to pick up.”

I told another head teacher recently that over half of the books in classrooms had been funded by the teachers. She was shocked. The bookcases looked packed, so she had no reason to assume she needed to replenish stock.

Crafting trees, lampposts and other 3D objects in my reading corner serve absolutely no purpose unless it contains half decent and modern books! Telling KS2 teachers to have cushions and twinkly lights in their reading corner is a lovely idea, but within minutes of pupils standing there, I hear

them saying, “Hurry up, choose a book and sit back down.” Or, “Stop talking, please.” In fact, having children in the reading corner is often more disruptive than productive.

One non-negotiable that always makes me angry is: *ensure high-quality texts are accessible in the reading corner*. I know it might sound odd to oppose this, because of course, in an ideal world, ‘high-quality’ texts would be wonderful. But in reality, schools often can’t or won’t spend money supporting this statement, and it’s the teachers that get it in the neck.

Or worse still, I’ve been told to remove books that kids love – by David Walliams, or The Diary of the Wimpy Kid series. I don’t understand this attitude. My first head teacher said I had to remove all the Beast Quest books from my room because he felt the story lines and language were too simple. Snobby attitudes like this irritate me. Yes, read high-quality texts to the class. But don’t ban books for children if they enjoy them.

Our school had a reading learning walk recently, and top of the agenda was ensuring each class had an exciting reading corner to inspire children to read. Everyone went to town of course – they looked amazing. We all *passed!* But the quality of the books in said corners were substandard and thus, utterly pointless.

At risk of being a broken record, a reading corner *really* is only as good as its books. Schools need to ring-fence money every year to buy decent titles, and realise that a smattering of twinkly lights isn’t the answer.

The writer is a primary teacher in England.

I recall a conversation with a friend who had visited a school that I knew well. She described how dreadfully she was welcomed.

She was left alone in the reception area, with little acknowledgement or consideration. She sat and waited as the receptionist huffed and puffed, busying herself, unaware of the perception she was creating.

I found myself having to convince my friend that, despite these first impressions, this was a good school, and that they were kind, open and friendly.

The school was working on the inside, raising standards and striving to create a positive reputation. From the outside, though, it appeared cold, which could only serve to unknowingly undermine and damage.

The perception created by the school was that the receptionist means everything. From my days as a head teacher, I was blessed with some truly great office staff.

But what is the job really about? I have some words of advice – in the form of a job description – for a potential employee:



FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST

David Rushby discusses the merits of a good school receptionist

RECEPTIONIST JOB DESCRIPTION

“Dear prospective applicant,

We are looking to appoint a receptionist. Please read the following advertisement carefully and consider if this the job for you.

Are you alright with blood and other bodily fluids? Children often bump heads or suffer a nosebleed. We sometimes forget to mention that you will also be a first aider, with the ability to calm and reassure a distressed child. As you assess the damage, you will gently humour them to generate smiles. If the parents are required, you will clean up the patient and change their shirt to avoid distressing the parent on arrival. We will realise that this aspect of the role has nothing to do with administration, which may tell you quite a lot about the type of person that we are looking for.

Sometimes parents turn up with a concern and be difficult because they wear their heart on their sleeve. You will understand their feelings and have already applied the groundwork to create a good relationship. This enables you to relate to the parent, and be sincere and fair. As you settle the complainant, you will make a discreet call to the head teacher to give them a heads up, allowing for a positive outcome to be reached for all parties.

When professional partners and guests arrive, offer them a hot drink and a biscuit, if you have some. This will also come with the familiar little joke about the colour of the tea. ‘American tan?’ you will ask.

You will understand that inspections are a big

deal. They affect everyone and you are proud of your school. You are aware that you have a starring role, and so you will make arrangements to be in early, without being asked. Smiling and ready. Smart and professional.

You will not be a gossip. But you may occasionally share the inside story, in confidence, with the school leaders. You will have the ability to be both inwards facing and outwards facing. This is because you know and understand this community. When things appear on Facebook, or there is unrest in your corner of town, it can be helpful to inform the right people.

Do you have a mischievous wit? Children will find this adorable. On those days when a stressed parent turns up with a crying child, you will intervene with jokes and stickers for a successful handover. You will also remember to text them when their child is safely back in class. This is because you understand how difficult it must be for them to leave a distressed child behind, as they walk away with tears in their eyes.

You will do all of these things and more because you will love your job. You have a positive outlook, which permeates through every interaction. We look forward to appointing someone very special to our exceptional team.

NOTE: Please take a good look at the job spec. This involves a lot of other important words like ‘managing’, ‘administration’, ‘sorting’ and ‘answering’. “

“From the outside, the school appeared cold”

FRONT OF HOUSE

Let’s not underestimate or undervalue the importance of a good school receptionist. This could be the best – or the worst – PR money can buy, and is one of the most significant appointments a school can make. The requirement for self-awareness, trust, integrity and intelligence will grease the wheels for everything else to successfully take place.



David Rushby is a former headteacher and director of

Nautilus Education

MARKETING YOUR SCHOOL

Promoting your primary can be daunting but, with a bit of thought, it will bring financial benefits, says **Kyrstie Stubbs**

The past few years have been a constant struggle to make sure there are enough pupils on roll to match our Pupil Admission Number (PAN), and therefore our staffing structure. I often get asked why I spend time marketing my school and the answer boils down to bums on seats! One of my most important roles as head teacher is to moonlight as chief marketer and promoter.

I often battle with this concept and wondered whether it was right to spend time and potentially money on marketing. But then I remind myself that most of the school's income comes from parents choosing this school for their kids. And that makes marketing a no-brainer.

As leaders we need to see this as an essential part of our role. I can't see how we cannot market and promote our schools.

ATTRACTING MORE PUPILS

At my previous school we 'owed' around £50,000 to the local authority and our pupil numbers were well below PAN, with less than 80 on roll. Over the course of three years, we managed to increase this to over 150 pupils and this, in turn, improved both the opportunities and standards of education we were able to offer. Quite simply, it transformed our budget.

Fluctuating birth rate and competition between schools created by Ofsted gradings and new housing developments can impact pupil numbers considerably, and with every child bringing in around £3,000, losing pupils can have a huge impact.

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY

So how can you attract more pupils? How do you change perceptions in the community and market your school effectively? There are no right or wrong answers, but here are a few ideas:

“One of my most important roles as head teacher is to moonlight as chief marketer and promoter”





- What makes you different to other schools – not necessarily better but different? Work out your unique selling point and make sure your website reflects this. It might be a focus on sport, or your pupils' access to music tuition, or your amazing variety of after-school clubs.
- Create brochures or leaflets that you can give to prospective parents and staff – the more professional the better. A student created ours and we had them printed at less than £300 for 250 leaflets. Negotiate a good rate with a local printing firm for a professional finish.
- Get a virtual tour done for your school. You can pay someone to do it professionally, or just use an iPad to record walking around the school and adding your own commentary. Parents like to see inside a school but don't always have the time to come to an open day.

- Get your school featured in the local papers as often as you can (see panel on writing press release). I find that writing my own article with photos and sending it to them works well. I make it as easy as possible for them to put in a good news story. Better still, find out if you have a communications or marketing professional among your parents who can help to write or edit press releases.
- Celebrate and advertise all the great things you do on social media and make sure you choose the right platform and ensure it is regularly updated. We use Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to make sure we appeal to different groups. Different staff members are responsible for each platform.
- Review PAN in the classes where this is manageable and get your staff on-side. My staff don't object to having one or two extra pupils in their KS2 class if it brings in more funding. This sounds controversial but schools often must take in additional pupils anyway, because of appeals.
- Open your doors to visitors as often as you can. We couldn't do this during Covid, but we found that increasing the number of opportunities for parents to attend events or open days really increased our numbers. Word soon spreads if you are holding community and family events. We tend to work with local charities such as those supporting people with stay and play or domestic violence and have a designated member of staff – our community leader – who is given the time to develop relationships and organise events.
- Spend time writing bids and grants and give a designated colleague the time to do this. You are likely to get free advertising if you are successful, and you can add the money to your budget to do things you would not otherwise be able to afford.

While making money doesn't seem to be on any job description for a headteacher, it is becoming a key part of our role and one that I think we need to give time to – without feeling we are not doing what we should be doing.



**Kyrstie Stubbs, Principal,
Boothroyd Primary
Academy, Dewsbury. A
version of this article first
appeared in *The Tattooed Headteacher*:
thetattooedheadteacher.com**

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Publicising your school to the media, and dealing with journalists, might feel a bit scary. But if you send in a well-written press release, it will maximise your chances of coverage.

- **When sending a press release ensure it contains an embargo date and the time, date and venue of any event that you're planning. Remember to include your name and contact details.**
- **Keep it simple. Use easy to understand language to explain who you are and what you're trying to publicise – the kind of language you'd use if explaining it to a friend. Avoid slang, jargon and acronyms they might need to look up.**
- **Target your press release to the appropriate person and by name, if possible. National and regional newspapers often have an education or community correspondents, whose details should be on the website of the publication. Broadcast media contacts can be harder to find, so send your release to the News Desk. Copy in the News Desk to newspapers too, in case your designated reporter is away.**
- **Initial contact is best by email. Be short and to the point, and try to make your subject line as interesting as possible as journalists receive hundreds of e-mails every day. Sending your release in the main body of the e-mail, rather than as an attachment, will make it more likely to be read.**
- **Try to give journalists some notice if you're offering them a story about an event – a week is ideal for a daily news outlet. Despite the advanced technology now used in the print production process, deadlines and production times can still be long.**
- **Offer a high-res image or photo to accompany your release if you can, as newspapers often rely on contributors to supply photos.**
- **Remember that journalists can't guarantee coverage. As interested as they might be in your story, events elsewhere can take precedence and it isn't the reporter who makes these decisions.**
- **Try to develop a relationship with your local education or community journalist. Invite them to visit – the worst that can happen is that they say no. If they agree to a meeting it could be the start of a mutually beneficial, professional relationship.**

Saving schools MILLIONS

Claudia Robinson looks at how Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Trust is rolling out its new procurement service

It is estimated that schools in England spend a total of £10.7 billion every year on non-staffing costs, with the North East's share of that being half a billion pounds. Everything from catering, stationery, IT, electricity, water, printers, transport and facilities management comes out of that pot.

The challenges schools face when trying to find ways to save money are many and complex, and there is little time to research and execute the best deals. There are often skills and knowledge gaps internally and stakeholder engagement can be time consuming. Coupled with the complexities of the market, conflicting commercial models and a lack of education specialists in the supply chain, it is understandable why many schools follow the pack, and stick with existing suppliers.

But it's very much like that letter we receive every year from our house, car or life insurance provider. If you shop around, you are more than likely to find a better deal. But have you got the time? For many schools, the answer is no.

In 2017 the Department for Education launched the schools' buying strategy, to formalise a series of initiatives to support buyers in schools to help them get the best value, save time and ultimately invest those savings back into the school.

The strategy aimed to support schools to save over £1 billion a year by 2019-20. The initiative had secured estimated savings of over £425 million by April 2020 – half of what they set out to do.

Education Commercial Services (ECS) believes it can do better than that.



MAKING SAVINGS

The Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust (BWCET), one of the largest Academy Trusts in the North East, initially set up ECS to secure better deals for its schools and is already helping them save at least 10% on non-staffing costs.

Julie Collins, Commercial Director at ECS and BWCET, said: "By July 2022 we will have 48 schools in our trust, which equates to an income of £85 million with 75% of that being spent on the salaries of 2,200 members of staff.

"This means we'll have a purchasing capacity of £21 million for goods and services to support the educational experience of 16,000 pupils, so it's crucial we get this right to ensure as much money as possible is saved. And that's exactly what we're doing, saving way more than 10% across the trust."

ECS is now rolling out the service to schools outside of the Trust and already has some satisfied customers. Ultimately, ECS believes it can help schools, in the North East alone, save £25m.

Nick Hurn, CEO of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, described the concept behind ECS as "quite simple":

"It is to match what a school or trust needs with a highly skilled and knowledgeable commercial and procurement specialist – so ensuring that the school or trust gets exactly what they want and need at the best possible value for money, while also staying fully compliant and within the law.

"That's why we knew this idea was a winner from the very start, as invariably many schools over the years have not been getting best value for money and are often working outside the financial regulations without even knowing."

SUPPORTING ALL SCHOOLS

Whickham School in Gateshead is one of the first schools to benefit from ECS, despite not being part of the Trust.

The school had a vision to create high-quality service provision that matched not only its own expectations but also those of its students – as well as helping to complement existing facilities and infrastructure, while offering them the potential to grow as a trust.

There needed to be a focus on quality hot and cold food options, which were delicious, nutritious and healthy, and produced in line with a healthy eating policy, whilst ensuring good value for money.

Steve Haigh, the school's CEO, said: "We already had a fair amount of procurement experience at the school, but we were looking for someone to take us through a catering tender as we were very short on time.

"We needed someone to accelerate us through the process. We were particularly impressed with the bespoke proposal we received from ECS and felt, on balance, it was a worthwhile exercise to do, with the aim of saving money.

"One of the appeals was that there is a broader team at ECS and their experience, involvement and knowledge in this area has been really impressive. We felt like they were part of our team, making the process cohesive and remarkably straightforward.

"We already had a commercial offer from the incumbent catering provider but to be compliant in the public sector we had to go through the tender process. We had been with the previous company for seven years but there comes a point when you have to demonstrate fairness, transparency, to prove the contract is competitive – and that you are obtaining value for money.

"From an internal management point of view, we were confident their new proposal was attractive, but the view from governors was that we had to prove it was good. ECS were able not just to investigate this for us but undertake a fully compliant competitive tendering process and ultimately secure even more substantial savings for the school.

"We are also rebranding and relaunching the service to increase footfall as part of the tender process and this was all achieved in a fast, 18-week project turnaround."

"There comes a point when you have to demonstrate fairness and transparency to prove the contract is competitive – and that you are obtaining value for money"

WHICKHAM SCHOOL FACED SEVERAL CHALLENGES:

- The value and complexity of the project required compliance with UK Contract Procedure Rules and whilst the school had some experience in procurement, they wanted to ensure the process was conducted in accordance with the law
- The incumbent provider had been providing the service for a number of years and the school had no real idea on whether or not they were receiving the best possible solution and achieving value for money
- As a service contract, it was subject to TUPE regulations which the school was keen to ensure was managed correctly
- The school wanted to embed social value and sustainability within the contract in support of their longer-term sustainability goals
- The school wanted to increase footfall as part of their commitment to ensure all children had access to a healthy, nutritious meal priced within government guidelines.

Julie Collins added: "The fact we are now helping schools that aren't part of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust makes our work even more rewarding. We are looking forward to working with many more schools in the North East, and beyond to ensure they're getting the best procurement deals, enabling them to invest more in their pupils and their futures."

Steve and the senior leadership team at Whickham School were so impressed with the outcome that they've since engaged ECS to deliver in other areas of non-staffing spend.

"We have looked at payroll and HR advice and are currently working on school uniform," Steve said. "It's a really comprehensive process and we're encouraged by ECS' passion and commitment for getting the best deal, whilst saving us loads of time in a swift and efficient way."



Claudia Robinson is Head of Content at Allies Group

How King James Academy Supports Teachers to Achieve Better Learning Outcomes in Maths



Lorna Blackhurst
Gordon Farquhar

Deputy Head Teacher - King James Academy
Head Teacher - King James Academy



King James Academy Royston, Hertfordshire, is part of a large multi-academy trust which has worked with Whizz Education for many years.

King James Academy's relationship with Whizz Education started in 2020 when we looked to support our teachers better to help them improve learning outcomes in maths. Maths brought down our combined assessment results in 2020, therefore, we decided to adopt a new approach. This included various changes as part of a bigger plan, one of which was working with Whizz Education.

As leading educationalists dedicated to helping schools improve learning outcomes in maths, Whizz Education was the perfect partner. We held initial meetings with Whizz Education to discuss our strategic goals, design our implementation plan and agree on targets. We also knew it was necessary to work with an EdTech tool with a proven record of success which was easy for staff and students to use, to produce maximum results with minimum input. The result was the creation of an educational plan that used the awarded-winning virtual tutor as an enabler to provide tailored and engaging maths lessons for each child, along with a library of teaching resources to support strategic lesson planning and delivery. The data output for the tech platform along with qualitative insights were used to draw tangible insights to ensure progress was being made and that we were meeting our target of 50% children achieving ARE in maths within the academic year.

Initially, a teacher capacity building programme was arranged to up-skill staff to work with the blended learning programme; then, we piloted the virtual tutor for 12 weeks before enabling access for all 308 Key Stage 2 students across 12 Year Five and Six classes. We expected students to achieve three progressions per week using Maths-Whizz, which equals just one hour per week as homework to support in-class teaching.

Fortunately, we had worked closely with Whizz Education's Education Success Partners to complete our implementation plan before the start of the second spring lockdown in 2021. This meant our teachers could deliver remote live lessons, with teachers assigning homework via Maths-Whizz, so our teaching provision was as 'normal' as possible. The teachers' resources and activity plans meant that children could build on topics they had studied in class to develop their maths fluency. As a result, Maths-Whizz became a vital part of our isolation provision. It was great to know that every homework session was purposeful and impacted learning outcomes positively during lockdown and when children returned to school.

For the students, the virtual tutor itself is fun and engaging. They like the bright colours and avatars. It also automatically pitches work at the right level for the individual covering all the elements of the curriculum, enabling them to make progress tailored to their own pace and ability. They say: 'it doesn't feel like homework' and the accessibility at the right level, rewards and competitions keep them motivated to succeed.

As well as innovative and creative resources such as trophies, certificates and a recent 'Summer Challenge' to encourage engagement, the data and support Whizz Education provides is particularly helpful. We are emailed weekly with an overview of the amount of quality learning time our students have spent on the tutor, which benchmarks us against other schools and provides specific highlights or areas which need attention. This may be where a group of students have struggled with a particular topic, for example.

Our Whizz Education Success Partner can then provide strategies for our teachers to address this challenge and take targeted action in lessons to improve learning outcomes. This course correction approach is particularly beneficial. It doesn't burden teachers but focuses on results, and it has been very well received.

Despite the challenges of delivering lessons during the pandemic, we've doubled the number of children meeting age related expectations (ARE).

We made some significant changes to the way we approach maths at King James Academy.

Working with Whizz Education has undoubtedly played an essential role in the improved learning outcomes achieved in maths over the past year.

We believe for EdTech to work successfully, it needs to be included as part of a broader strategic plan tied to clear objectives. Data needs to be analysed, monitored and acted upon, enabling teachers to deliver the best learning outcomes possible within mixed ability environments. Whizz Education has provided a consultative and strategic programme that aligns with our objectives and delivers exactly what was required.

Matt Jones, Education Success Partner at Whizz Education: "In March 2021 we noticed a low pass rate (65%) for the tests within Maths-Whizz. We discussed lack of confidence in students completing the tests independently and strategies for resolving this. Once class teachers were made aware of the trend, they could observe, monitor, and take action and assessment results improved.

Since the beginning of this academic year, the school's pass rate for the unsupported elements of Maths-Whizz is now 72% across all classes. We are also currently in the process of arranging a training session for staff on identifying student struggle and the elements of Maths-Whizz which can be harnessed quickly and easily by teachers to intervene and support their students. These are examples of how our approach to course correction and action can result in a positive impact across student cohorts."



TURN PUPIL TRACKING ON ITS HEAD

Frazer Westmorland discusses how his school uses technology to intervene earlier and boost pupil success

One thing that gets a school leader out of bed in the morning is the desire to unlock the true potential of every child.

Our school, Mundella Primary, in Folkestone, serves a community with pockets of significant disadvantage, with about half of pupils on free school meals.

We've been on a journey to uncover the difficulties children face and break down barriers that hold learning back. We wanted a deeper understanding of what each pupil was capable of achieving so the right support could be provided at the right time to help get them there.

NO LOOKING BACK

Schools are focused on catch up and missed learning, but teachers can't always spend hours crunching attainment data to see the depth of information needed to improve pupil progress.

All schools use technology to help them get insights into their pupils. Often, a piece of whizzy software simply provides a convenient place to record historical pupil assessment data or create reports based on past achievement. Schools need a simple way of identifying gaps.

BANG FOR BUCK

It's impossible to know in advance whether a particular intervention or support scheme, or recruiting a specialist teacher, will have the maximum impact on pupil achievement.

If we could predict where targeted support would help most, we could all

make good and timely decisions about when and where to put support in place.

We wanted to find out whether technology could help, so we decided to pilot a new achievement tracking tool from Juniper Education, called Sonar Tracker.

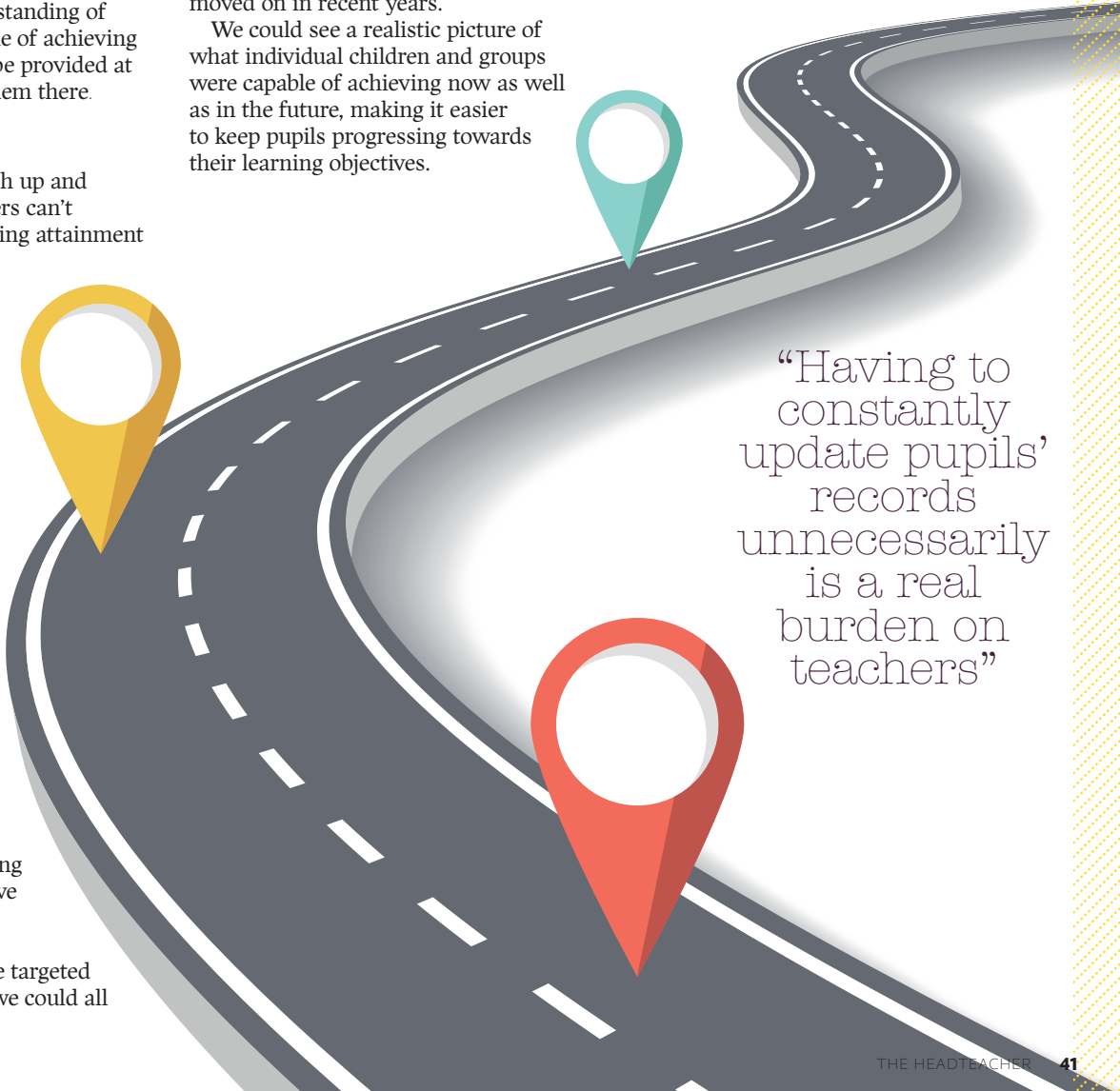
FUTURE VIEW

The trial was an eye-opener of how pupil tracking technology has moved on in recent years.

We could see a realistic picture of what individual children and groups were capable of achieving now as well as in the future, making it easier to keep pupils progressing towards their learning objectives.

Teachers could easily spot children who were coasting, and issues were uncovered that might otherwise be missed too, such as a child or group smashing their learning targets in English but falling behind in other areas.

Having targeted insight changed our approach to supporting pupil progress.

A graphic illustration of a grey winding road with white dashed lines, curving from the bottom left towards the top right. Three large, 3D-style location pins are placed along the road: a yellow one on the left, a teal one in the middle, and a red one on the right. To the right of the road, there is a quote in a serif font.

“Having to constantly update pupils’ records unnecessarily is a real burden on teachers”

SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS

Using pupils' historical attainment data, we could 'model' the potential outcome of putting an effective intervention in place, running various scenarios, on screen, in minutes.

We can now identify the children who would benefit from a targeted programme and plot the potential uplift in achievement of a class, year group or the whole school.

DETAIL WITHOUT THE FAFF

Having constantly to update pupils' records unnecessarily is a real burden, particularly if progress has been maintained. We changed our processes and now pupil attainment data need only be amended if pupils deviate from being on track.

“We want every child to benefit from enrichment”

We've realised the importance of having the latest school wide information on groups at our fingertips too, such as pupils with special needs, pupil premium or gifted and talented so that school leaders, subject coordinators and teachers can plan effectively and respond rapidly.

NOT BOXED IN

We want every child to benefit from the learning and enrichment opportunities we provide, including through our forest and beach school activities. With our new approach to data, we can monitor children's performance, in all subjects, and provide targeted support that promotes their success every step of the way.

Frazer Westmorland is head teacher of Mundella Primary School, Folkestone. Sonar Tracker is available from Juniper Education.



PLAIN SAILING PARENTS' EVENINGS

Rachel Smith on how her school mixes remote with face-to-face meetings

We started using a system called SchoolCloud about two years ago and we've never looked back.

We put it in place before the Covid school closures, so we were really lucky to have it already up and running. Getting it set-up was really easy and the user guides were very helpful for getting both admins, teachers and parents up-to-speed.

The first time we used it was for an in-school, face-to-face parents evening where we used the booking and appointments tools. During the lockdown we were able to use the fully online version with booking and video enabled sessions.

Since then, we've used it for face-to-face again and it works well both ways. What's great is that we have the flexibility to use it how we want to – whatever the circumstances.

It has revolutionised the way we manage and run parents' evenings. One of the best features is that whether you log-on as a parent (I've got two children at the school) or a teacher, you get the whole family on one log-in.

For example, when I log in I can see both my kids on one page and book all their teachers in one go. The algorithm selects the best and most convenient session for me that evening. If a parent needs me, as the office manager, to help them book a session, I can log in and do the same for

them, which makes it so much simpler and less time consuming.

It's also very convenient for me as the office manager when setting up the various parents' evenings, as I can simply copy and move information from one to another with no fuss – it saves so much time.

For example, I can book separate requirements for part-time teachers, SEND pupils, parents and teachers in one action. I also like the fact that, after the evening has taken place, we can pull off a report that shows all the appointments that did or didn't happen, helping us to follow-up with families if needed.

One of the only barriers we have is with families that don't have English as a first language (EAL). However, we just book on their behalf.

Feedback from our staff members has been great. Some found the technology a little scary to start with but as soon as they had logged in and tried it once they were big fans. They were amazed at how well it worked. The user guides were clear and well-written, which really helped.

Feedback from the parents had largely been the same and, as soon as they logged in once, they could see how much easier and convenient it was.

Rachel Smith is office manager of Great Denham Primary School in Bedfordshire.

Crossing the barriers to better parental engagement

New research has revealed a range of ways schools can improve how they engage with parents, says **Simon Hay**

It's already commonly acknowledged – and backed up by research – that the more engaged parents are in their child's learning the greater the learning progress the child will make.

But many parents struggle to understand how best to support their child's learning at home.

As an organisation working with many schools on ways to bring parents into the learning conversation, we were keen to add to schools' understanding of the issues that currently exist and how we can overcome any barriers to better parent engagement.

Teaching and learning

The result was our in-depth research report, *How well are schools helping parents to support their child's learning?* Based on findings from a survey of more than 2,000 teachers and parents, the report focuses on parental engagement with teaching and learning, rather than operational matters such as payments, school trips, and reporting absences.

Each section of the report features recommendations, suggestions and questions that should be seen as starting points for further reflection within school staff teams and leadership groups. A key focus of our report was to examine the barriers to effective engagement as seen by parents. These include:

- **Language.** Education jargon was a big no-no, along with avoiding an overly formal tone, for example signing off a letter 'warmest wishes' rather than 'yours sincerely'. Greater awareness that parents may have different levels of comprehension, educational needs and some may speak English as an additional language, were also stressed.
- **Action.** Some felt that schools could focus more on what parents should do with the information, such as being explicit about any action needed. Others felt that even though certain communication

methods, such as email, worked for them, barriers could be erected if documents are sent as attachments that aren't easily viewable on a phone.

- **Experience.** Teachers and parents highlighted the need to overcome parents' negative experiences of their own schooling. Technology might work better than traditional face-to-face communication; video calls have replaced physical parents' evenings during the pandemic lockdowns.

- **Technology.** Technology could foster increased parental engagement, but not everyone has access to the same equipment, tools or software. Children often have access to the latest smartphone, but parents may use an old laptop that can't run modern software.

- **Agency.** Asking parents their preferred communication method is a good way of improving engagement. Parents may not know all the ways they can access school information, such as a school portal because they lack the right technology, or they do not have the know-how to access it.

Improving communications

Reflecting on your current practice:

- **Identify barriers.** Make a plan for families who are struggling to engage and sell parents the benefits of doing so. As a staff team, discuss and address any unconscious bias around parents and how they engage in their child's learning, and feed these discussions into your communication plans.

- **Understand parents.** Find out their expectations – and barriers. If you have a parent group, use their knowledge and influence to help drive engagement. When you have a new cohort of parents make sure they understand the

school's expectations around communications and supporting their child's learning.

- **Use tech creatively.** Use technology in ways that can help break down barriers and make it easier for parents to understand the what, why and how of supporting their children's learning. Can you find one delivery method that can be equally accessed by all, or do you need to plan for several delivery methods? Parents like email but it is less popular with teachers. Offer a generic school address, or year group address, and manage expectations about how often that will be monitored. Make sure parents can find relevant contact details easily.

- **Communicate clearly.** Use plain English and avoid jargon, academic language, or Ofsted inspired terminology. Not all parents have the same language skills, so identify ways to make communications accessible to everyone. Do you separate your communications for pastoral, administration and learning support issues, and can they be sent out using different methods?



Simon Hay is co-founder and CEO at Firefly, the school engagement platform. Download the new research report from Firefly, *How well are schools helping parents to support their child's learning?* at fireflylearning.com/parent-engagement-free-report



“Children might have access to the latest smartphone, but parents may use an old laptop that can't run modern software”

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1 SAVE MONEY

On average, primary schools identify potential savings of £80k – which can be invested where needs are highest in your context. Schools turn around deficit budgets – or maintain their positive position – and build reserves.

SMARTcurriculum® enables the agility to respond to unexpected need, such as the pandemic.

2 BALANCE STAFFING

Analyse staffing to ensure teaching and support practices are optimised. Rather than 'that's how it has always been done' or 'what a neighbouring school does', look afresh, with data-rich understanding, at your staffing structure to ensure investment is focused on your context and needs.

3 MANAGE ROLL & CLASS SIZE

Become more agile in responding to a fluctuating roll year-on-year. Be pre-emptive in planning for the strategic impact of birthrate changes. Analyse and understand the benefits and costs of reducing class sizes. Model the feasibility of smaller classes without reducing the overall roll.

4 INVEST IN YOUR TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF

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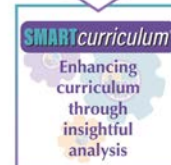


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The **ReaderPen™** contains dictionary definitions to provide immediate validation. These quick definitions keep the flow of reading moving, allowing students to read at their own pace without having to go back and forth to a dictionary.

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Students with EAL, dyslexia, struggling readers, and students who crave re-assurance can be thriving on discreet, portable, and personal support at the point of need. To achieve the same level of human support, we would need to employ platoons of teaching assistants. But even a fleet of teaching assistants won't be able to support independent learning skills. This is where **ReaderPen™** excels.

Trial free at www.scanningpens.com

SOLVING THE SUPPLY STAFF HEADACHE

Ollie Parsons examines how schools can save time and money by sourcing their own substitute teachers

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to the education sector in the UK. Headteachers across the nation have had to move rapidly to ensure the continued and uninterrupted provision of education for their pupils. This has meant embracing new technologies and adapting to rapid change.

Digitisation has touched almost every aspect of the classroom and school life. But while digital pedagogy has developed rapidly over the last two years, contingent school staffing hasn't seen the same benefits.

Schools in England and Wales are still mostly reliant upon agencies to address any form of temporary staffing need. While the lockdown brought an initial reprieve, since schools have re-opened they have been plagued by unpredictable Covid-related staff absences that have caused havoc. In addition to this, the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and migration caused by Brexit have led to a greatly reduced teacher supply pool for this current academic year.

Some schools have attempted to move away from the agency model over the last two years by employing teams of cover supervisors on direct contract or by building their own bank of local supply staff. However, these systems are limited in capacity, are usually recorded piecemeal on spreadsheets and remain vulnerable to the unpredictable nature of Covid absence.

CAN TECHNOLOGY SOLVE STAFFING ISSUES?

A number of companies have begun to look at this challenge and what is evident so far is that, with the right system, the traditional role of the recruitment consultant can be easily excised. The correct engagement of a technological platform can put schools in direct contact with teachers who are looking for work. Modern forms of communication allow schools to reach staff anywhere at any time.

Using a technological platform to create a pool of teachers can save you much needed time. You can communicate your needs with teachers at the click of a button and similarly, they too can respond with their availability with ease.

Your pool of staff doesn't need to be contained to your contacts alone either. You could reach out to other schools in your local area, local authority or within academy chains, making your pool of trusted supply teachers and staff even bigger.

For an example of this in motion we can look at the models of Scotland and Northern Ireland. Both use a variation of the bank of supply staff model, backed up by a technological platform. In Scotland for instance, the supply model is local authority led, with supply teachers having to sign up to their supply pool to secure work. There are no agencies and the vetting and payroll is handled by the local authority. Schools have access to an online platform that puts them in direct contact with the council

approved supply staff and at no point in the supply process is an agency involved.

WHAT ABOUT THE ADMIN?

In addition to providing a tool to pool together your contacts, online platforms can also operate as an easy to access one-stop shop. Not only do they function as communicating a vacancy, but they can offer timesheet systems and approvals and payroll options too.



BALANCING THE BOOKS

One of the main advantages of a technological platform, alluded to already, is its capacity to cut out agencies from the picture. Over £1 billion is now spent annually on agencies in the education sector, which has compounded the problems brought on by reduced government funding.

Agencies rely on their consultants to close deals and bring in revenue. It is often a thankless job, requiring long hours. The only way agencies can attract and retain good consultants is by paying them handsome commissions. Depending on an agency's commission structure, at some bandings recruitment consultants can earn up to 20% of their billings as commission, on top of their basic salary which for many starts at around £40k, and it is school budgets that are funding these salaries.

Schools can be charged margins ranging from £30 - £80 a day on daily/long term supply bookings and will levy engagement fees starting from 10% of annual salary up to 25% in some cases. It is these huge expenses that can cripple school budgets.

With the successful application of technology and a correctly built and calibrated online booking system, schools can remove the need for consultants and so the costs to schools can be drastically reduced – there is no longer the need to support and perpetuate the commission culture.

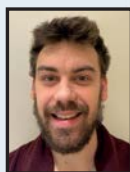
HOW DO WE GET THERE?

As great as these technology platforms may sound, it will take time and a change in attitudes in order to implement them. The technology itself can be quick to set up but the recruitment and maintaining of local supply pools will require schools and local authorities to work together. This is a good thing. Staffing shortages shouldn't be something that schools have to tackle on their own.

By working in collaboration with each other to build regional supply pools, schools and local authorities will be able to control who they recruit, share data on what their most acute needs are and ensure that appropriate standards are upheld with regards to compliance and vetting.

Schools have embraced a wide range of new technological solutions to help ensure they remain functional and recruitment has been no exception.

Now is the ideal time for schools to continue to drive forward this much needed change. 2022 can definitely be the year we fix supply recruitment headaches!



Ollie Parsons is Education Recruitment Specialist at Teacher Booker, which offers a range of services and

advice to help schools and teachers. Follow Teacher Booker on Twitter and Facebook: @teacherbooker or email hello@teacherbooker.com

WHAT CAN WE DO IN THE INTERIM?

- There are several steps schools can take to get things in motion:
- **Build your own pool.** Employ a team of cover supervisors on direct contract to act as your first line of contingency staffing. The money you spend on these salaries will save thousands in agency fees and the job security provided will lead to consistency. The students will know who to expect for cover and things will go a lot smoother.
- **Offer progression to support staff.** Use staff that are already familiar with the school. Teaching Assistants are a great place to start. After a year on the job consider offering them additional responsibility as a cover supervisor and offer them a career path. If you can nurture the support staff you already employ, then they could become your future teachers.
- If you have to deal with agencies, limit the number you work with and don't be afraid to negotiate hard. Find a consultant who actually listens to you. Establish fixed rates for supply and do not deviate from them.
- Remember, unless you sign a contract with an agency for their services, you can always negotiate rates down.
- **Treat supply staff well!** Remember, supply teachers are providing an invaluable service. Make sure they receive a warm welcome and brief them on exactly what they will be doing/what you expect of them. They are there to help and while not all supply teachers are the same, you want to ensure that supply staff are happy to come to your school. They compare notes and stories of mismanagement, poor organisation or being treated dismissively, will spread.
- **Speak to your local authority and schools in your local area about collaborating.** Think of how you could share resources, merge your supply pools or frontline contingency staff.

LET'S NARROW THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Amber Birsen examines the lessons learned from the pandemic for the future

The digital divide is nothing new; it wasn't a side effect of the pandemic. The pandemic just shed a harsh light on the reality that many people do not have equal opportunities, because they do not have access to the internet or appropriate devices. It is no secret that there is, and has been for over a decade, a correlation between your income and access to the online world. The need for distance learning only widened the gap between children living in poverty and their peers.

I am one of many teachers glad to be teaching face-to-face again now that schools have reopened. Many of us can agree that teaching is not the same as it was before. We are faced with new challenges, academically and behaviourally. The mission now is to help pupils catch up with lost learning which has arisen due to the lockdown. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have more ground to make up as a result of the digital divide. For example, some of my pupils were only able to access lessons on a smartphone during lockdown, or had to share a device with multiple members of their household.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

In October this year, I contributed to Oxford University Press' new report into the digital divide, which surveyed over 1,500 teachers globally to understand their experiences. The results revealed that remote learning during lockdowns disproportionately affected the most disadvantaged: 70% of teachers said the most disadvantaged students lost learning due to limited or no access to digital devices, and almost half felt their wellbeing had been particularly negatively affected. Tallying with my own experiences, teachers in the survey said lack of access to digital devices was a problem, while over half said both they and their learners lacked the skills to make digital learning a success.

The issue surrounding limited technological skills is important. It means that even those children and young people who have no issues accessing technology may still face challenges if they or their teachers are not confident in their digital capabilities. In my own experience, I found that it is not just teachers and children with skills gaps: the lockdowns alerted us to the high number of adults without the technological skills to

navigate the online world. If a parent's own confidence is low, this can affect their usage and in turn mean many children are not accessing distance learning. It was interesting to see this reflected in the report, with other teachers noting that same issue: specifically, that it was more likely to be parents of disadvantaged children who lacked the digital skills needed to help their child engage with remote learning.

"The skills we've gained will quickly go out-of-date if we don't make the effort to keep them current."

LEFT BEHIND

Clearly, we need to embrace digital education, particularly in light of its potential to help pupils catch up with lost learning. The challenge is to address the digital divide to ensure no one is left behind. There are some immediate areas to address: social issues such as affordable access to the internet and devices need a government-level approach, but there are some actions schools can take to help close the divide too.

The first of these actions is to address the skills problem. When the pandemic began, teachers were forced to adapt their teaching to an online format which for many was alien. We have all learnt an incredible amount about online teaching during the pandemic. The skills we've gained will quickly go out-of-date if we don't make the effort to keep them current. Technology is constantly evolving, and it would be a shame if teachers everywhere did not get the opportunity to retain and build upon their hard-earned digital skills. Incorporating an element of online learning into the school day is one natural solution.

Children and their parents can also be supported with more focus on digital skills resources. It can be easy to assume that the current generation are all 'digital natives', but using technology for entertainment is very different to using it for educational purposes. Teachers need to approach the topic sensitively and should not make assumptions about digital capabilities of parents or other colleagues.

REMOTE ENGAGEMENT

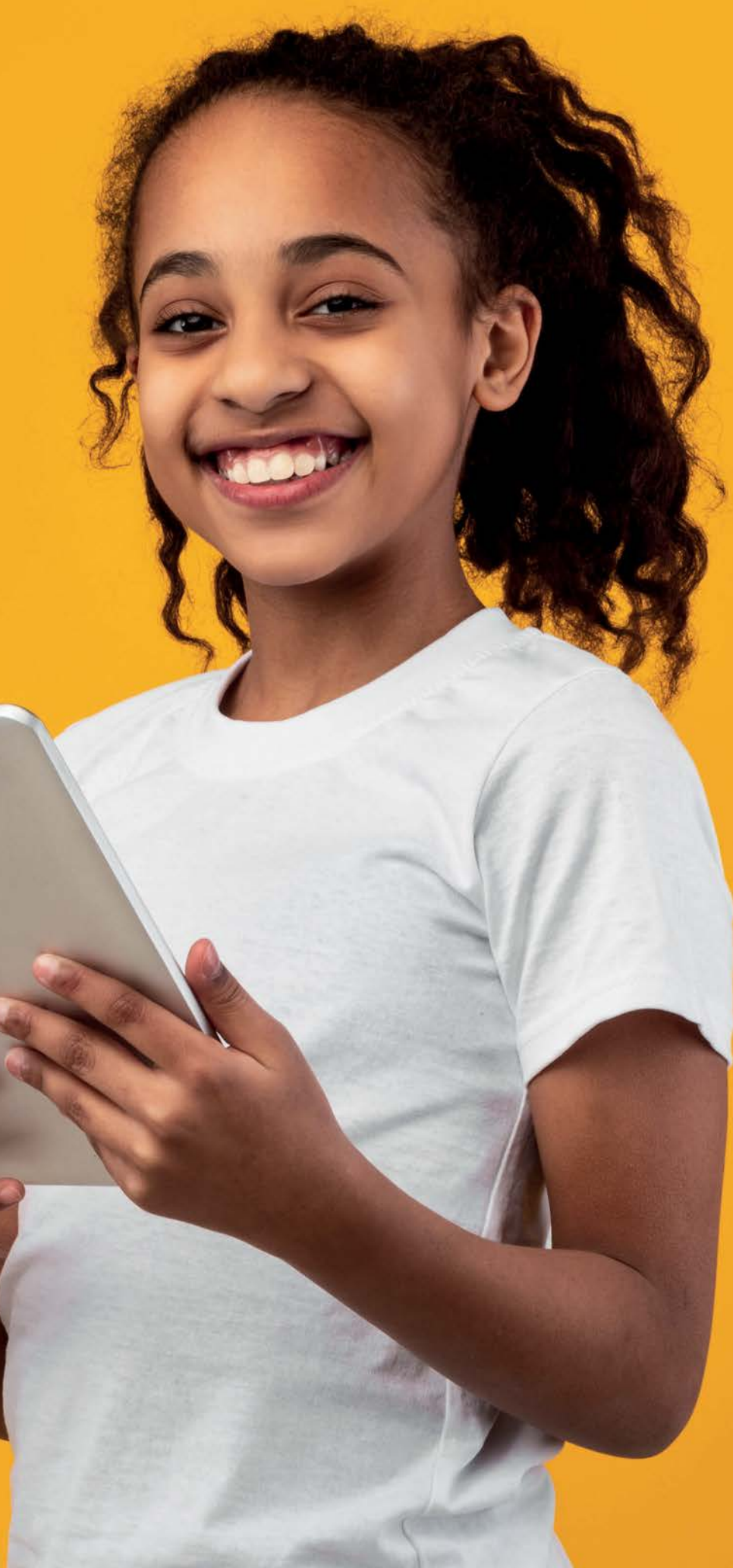
Independent learning via digital education is another option. As I'm sure many teachers found, it can be incredibly difficult to keep children engaged when teaching remotely. The issue is that we are unable to recreate the classroom on a screen; the digital learning environment is devoid of the social, non-verbal cues that teachers use to address early signs of

disengagement.

Face-to-face lessons are filled with small-steps, questions and regular assessment points which inform the teacher of the progress of the children. This is not always possible to replicate on an online platform. Misconceptions can easily arise and when these are not challenged the gap widens and misconceptions grows.

The solution, OUP suggests in the report, is to change the approach. Remote learning does not need to involve being glued to a screen: it can also be a conduit to help children develop their independent learning skills and foster a sense of agency over their own education.





SHOULD WE HAVE LONGER DAYS?

Education Minister Nadhim Zahawi recently suggested that the government may extend the school day to help with catch-up learning. While this could have some benefits, there are also key challenges.

Existing work and family commitments of parents and carers dictate how long the day can be extended and likewise, teachers may not be able to run after-school extra-curricular activities if the time is now devoted to academic teaching. More importantly, the school day is already packed with catch-up provision for many children and there is a risk of their cognitive load being exhausted. Children need time to reflect on their learning and notice the links to prior knowledge. This would be impossible if we overloaded our children.

NEW SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

During lockdown, teachers adjusted to online education, and we've emerged from the process with a completely new set of skills and learnings. Why not keep that expertise alive by providing catch-up lessons online as a supplement to face-to-face lessons? Instead of a longer school day, a hybrid face-to-face/online school day could assist children and young people to move beyond lockdown's legacy. Learners need as much face-to-face time as possible but when it's not practical for pupils to be present in the classroom, digital platforms could become a standard resource, creating a new, hybrid model of teaching.

As we rethink how we engage with pupils and reposition what a day's learning looks like in theory, and in practice, it is essential that we are building different, practical foundations that can narrow the digital divide for even the most vulnerable children.



**Amber Birsén, Subject Lead,
St Michaels CE Primary
School, Dorset**

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BETT 2022 – Create the Future

EVENT DETAILS

WHERE: ExCeL London, Royal Victoria Dock

WHEN: Wednesday 19 – Friday 21 January, 2022

HOW DO I REGISTER?: Go to: uk.bettshow.com/visitor-registration to book your tickets

Following a year-long offering of virtual events and remotely-delivered professional development and thought-leadership from the biggest names in education, Bett is back, reuniting the global education community in person.

As the education community looks beyond crisis response in the wake of the Covid pandemic, the overarching theme of Bett 2022 is: Create the Future.

When challenged with exceptional, unprecedented problems and barriers to learning during a time of academic disruption, it has been vital for heads and teachers to think outside the box and solve problems creatively. Armed with more EdTech solutions and resources than ever before, educators have the opportunity to reimagine traditional teaching methods so that students can plug into a personalised, future-facing learning experience and become resilient, creative lifelong learners able to harness their knowledge and skills to tackle the challenges of tomorrow.

This year, Bett is hosting over 225 inspiring speakers – across three full days of content – who will be exploring themes that range from students' mental and physical wellbeing, to education equality and the future of EdTech. Some of the exciting keynote presenters include the comic actress and writer Sally Phillips, who will be drawing on her experiences of raising a SEND child and discussing how technology has played a role in inclusive home learning. Meanwhile, Gogglebox favourite and director of Siddiqui Education, Baasit Siddiqui, will be sharing his insights as a teacher with 10 years' of experience, on how to improve social mobility for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Back with a bang, the event brings nine theatres and content features that will offer

over 90 hours of inspiring and CPD-accredited content. From the main arena at the heart of the show, to the new Esports and Ahead by Bett features, Bett's fantastic programme will offer a huge variety of enlightening and thought-provoking sessions.

A new feature for 2022, Bett After Hours, will see opening hours extended on the second day so that visitors who cannot attend Bett during the day can still experience everything that the show offers and more. This will include professional development content and sharing of best practice through Twilight CPD sessions, and an opportunity to connect with your professional peers at evening networking and social events.

The ever-popular student-led Kids Judge Bett will also be back for its seventh year, where pupils and parents from primary and secondary schools, as well as SEND and FE students, are invited to get involved in exploring stands, exhibitors and their products to choose their favourites across 10 categories for judging. The Bett 2022 awards winners will also be revealed, celebrating the EdTech game-changers who have excelled in genuinely innovative ICT provision and support for educators, with a clear focus on transforming education.

It's also not too late to be at Bett 2022! With this year focusing on bringing everyone back together in person again, go to our website at <https://uk.bettshow.com/welcome> to register to visit for free.

See you at the Show!



New for '22



HOSTED LEADERS PROGRAMME

Curated one-to-one meetings between education leaders and relevant solution providers. Brought to you by Bett and Learnit.



LEADERS @BETT THEATRE

A new theatre! Home to sessions on policy, digital strategy, whole-school management, school transformation, and more.



ESPORTS @BETT

Showcasing how schools can engage with this growing industry, engage students, and support teaching and learning objectives.



BETT AFTER HOURS

Grab a coffee, because Bett is running until 8pm on Thursday 20 January, so that visitors who can't make daytime sessions can still experience the show.

THREE TO WATCH

THE SAFEGUARDING COMPANY

STAND NL63



The Safeguarding Company makes the Queen's Award-winning MyConcern; the easy-to-use solution supporting safer recruitment and training, with outstanding customer support and best practice advice. See how the latest solution, CONFIDE, has been developed to help schools manage allegations and low-level concerns against adults in their organisations. Visit: thesafeguardingcompany.com/bett

LEGO
GALLERY
SUITE NG7



LEGO®
Education
launched
SPIKE™

Essential for primary pupils in 2021. SPIKE Essential is a series of hands-on STEAM learning experiences for pupils of all ages. On 20 January 2022 in Teaching & Learning Theatre, hear from the Fulham School in London on how they engage pupils. Visit LEGO Education in Gallery Suite NG7 from 10–11am and from 4–5pm every day.

LAPSAFE
STAND SB51

LapSafe® provides all your storage and charging needs for multiple devices such as laptops, Chromebooks

and tablets. LapSafe® will be launching its new Self-Service Lockers that offer 24 x 7 device loans without staff intervention, a 'drop off and collect' service as well as class-set reservations. Also at the show will be the new Diplomat™ UV-C Sanitising Station which sanitises a laptop in just 15 seconds. Pop by and visit the team. lapsafe.com



Lessons from Covid 19

Al Kingsley takes a dive into what worked – and what didn't – in EdTech during the pandemic

For years, the EdTech discussion has been bubbling away in schools but it's never really been a priority – not because of a lack of appetite but capacity. But one of the biggest surprises of the pandemic has been the ability of schools to implement a baseline of technology to allow educators to be more flexible in their delivery of teaching and learning delivery.

CAPITALISING ON PROGRESS

We all need to accept – and that includes the government and agencies such as Ofsted – that the pandemic is not over. The sooner that is accepted, the sooner it will shape interventions and support, as well as an appropriate inspection process.

During the pandemic, there was investment in technology from the Government and schools' funds. EdTech now needs to be kept fully updated. Digital skills are a fundamental part of ensuring children leave school with competencies for the workplace.

A THIRD WAY?

There are times where technology can add impact and facilitate – and there are times where it serves no real purpose. There must be ways for technology to play a role, not just in the classroom, but in a supporting capacity, whether it's personalised learning, effective communications or sharing curriculum content for learners to consume at different times. Finding the middle ground between all these strands is where schools will be most successful in moving their journey forward.

GREATER ENGAGEMENT

The consensus is that teaching and learning are always best in the classroom – but it depends on the cohort. No two schools or cohorts are the same. In some settings, the biggest challenge is getting learners across the threshold into school every day and EdTech provides an opportunity for greater

engagement – whether it's through a synchronous remote session or by developing skills through gamified applications and resources.

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Edtech can be tailored to children with additional needs as well as help the teacher and TA provide input and support as part of the digital learning journey. If a child is learning from outside the classroom, technology can ensure consistency, connectivity and engagement with the teacher and positively impact their education and wellbeing. For some, the ability to dip into pre-recorded resources can be advantageous.

WHAT NEXT FOR EDTECH?

The industry has been on a learning journey – and we have learned about solutions that are fit for purpose and relevant to schools' current needs.

The most successful developers embrace co-production and get their products right from the start. They also recognise that, alongside greater choice, comes more challenge in how schools select solutions. Savvy vendors have focused on building relationships – not just engaging and delivering a product but nurturing ongoing collaboration. Customers benefit from the ongoing support and developers learn from schools and shape their solutions accordingly. It's one of the fundamental strengths of co-production.



Al Kingsley is CEO of the NetSupport Group of companies and chair of the BESA EdTech Group. He will

be speaking in the Leaders @ Bett Theatre and welcoming visitors to the NetSupport stand.

NOT SURE WHAT TO EXPECT AT BETT 2022?

Martin Bailey shares his 15 years of experience attending the show



MARTIN BAILEY

Role: Digital enrichment leader
School: Lanchester EP Primary School, Co. Durham
Attending Bett for: 15 years

Which EdTech developments do you predict as having the biggest impact on pupil outcomes over the next five years?

Bett for me will always be about the people, and I can't wait to meet up face-to-face again. The organisers did a fab job with 'Bettfest' online last year, but there are many people who I only ever see at Bett and, after two years, it will be wonderful to reunite.

Top advice for a newbie?

Until you first visit Bett you can't appreciate the enormity of it. Planning is everything! Make a list of vendors you want to visit and plan a route – there are many different zones! Make a timetable, too, of the talks you want to see, but do allow yourself some time to simply wander. One of the beauties

of Bett is discovering those new things! Wear sensible shoes (you will definitely get your steps in) and pack some water. You will most likely be taking photos on your phone and posting on social media about your Bett experiences too, so it is well worth taking a phone charger.

If you could only have one thing with you during the show, what would it be?

A colleague! Bett is most definitely an experience best shared and I would recommend all schools to send more than one staff member if they can. Things are always far better articulated and disseminated back into school when there has been more than one person visiting, and it also allows you to view more of what is on offer. Ideally, try to visit for more than one day too.

Favourite Bett memory?

There are lots and lots! I remember my first Bett trip fondly and have happy memories of those early Bett shows at Olympia. These were days before social media and you often became aware of products for the first time at the show. I used to love the smaller, more independent companies that you discovered upstairs at Bett, and often came away with some great quirky products. My first experience of presenting at Bett is a particular highlight, as is taking my pupils for the first time. However, my standout highlight will be presenting alongside my pupils at Bett in 2020 to a crammed-full arena. Very memorable for me, but such a fantastic experience for the pupils too.

Tell us a bit about your school

We have a system of Digital Leaders at Lanchester, a role for which the children have to apply in Years 3-6. We have about 30 of them in school at the moment, and they attend a weekly club where they learn about the latest apps and technologies, and try new things out and then give feedback. They also make sure that the technology in the classroom is working properly and looking after it. I take a small group to Bett every year to give them the opportunity to talk about their work in a public forum – and we always take in some sight-seeing while we're in London. It's a great experience for them.

WHAT NOT TO MISS AT THIS YEAR'S BETT SHOW:



NOW>PRESS>PLAY

I first discovered this company in the Bett Futures zone a few years ago, and my pupils instantly loved it. In my 20+ years of being a computing subject leader it is probably the best product I have ever introduced to a school.



LANCHESTER DIGITAL LEADERS

My Lanchester pupils will be presenting in the Bett Academy Live (North Hall) at 3pm on Thursday 20th January. They will be presenting 'Coding Across the Curriculum' and will be sharing how students can shape their learning.



BETT FRINGE

Lots of vendors run sessions in bars and restaurants on the outskirts of Excel, and this is a great way of networking and meeting other visitors. The Bett Teachmeet is also fantastic and I can highly recommend it.

BETT IN NUMBERS



20K+ VISITORS



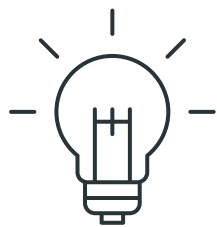
500+ EXHIBITORS



50 COUNTRIES



225+ SPEAKERS



THE PRESSING ISSUE

SMALL THINGS MATTER

Recording and reporting low-level concerns can provide a better understanding of the safeguarding, pastoral and wellbeing issues within your school

[THE TREND]

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST STAFF

In any school establishment, a key concern is ensuring staff are working together to create a safe environment for the children and young people in their care. A good whole-school safeguarding culture will further include robust management of complaints made against staff and volunteers, including low-level concerns and malicious allegations.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

A series of critical updates and changes in government guidance for schools in England have increasingly emphasised the importance of effectively managing allegations made against adults working within an education setting, including teaching staff, supply teachers, volunteers, and contractors.

It's critical that all allegations made against staff are recorded and dealt with appropriately, including the reporting of 'low level' concerns. Low-level concerns refer to those nagging doubts, however small, that a member of staff may have acted inappropriately, or in a manner inconsistent with a setting's code of conduct, but in a way not considered sufficiently serious to warrant referral to an external agency.

Examples may include being over-friendly with children, having favourites or engaging with a child one-to-one in a secluded area.

WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

Ensuring that you have, and continue to develop a positive safeguarding culture in your organisation can help prevent serious safeguarding risks. The case of William Vahey should serve as a warning to all about what can happen when so-called low-level concerns aren't reported or acted upon.

Vahey hid in plain sight, using his role as a teacher to abuse hundreds of children in not just one, but many different schools. Multiple concerning behaviours exhibited by Vahey, as described by former colleagues following his arrest, could have been classed as 'low-level' concerns, thus demonstrating the importance of recording all such doubts.



WHAT'S NEXT?

By recording low-level concerns, patterns can emerge which may subsequently help formulate a bigger picture of the events occurring within your school. It is therefore critical that all such

concerns are recorded to prevent future harm and exploitation of the students in your care. Dealing with concerns in an effective and timely fashion will also help guard against false allegations and misunderstandings.

The safeguarding culture in your school should convey the message that anyone reporting a concern, or any individual who becomes the subject of an allegation, can be assured of a professional response, and that anyone potentially subjected to false allegations or misunderstandings will be protected. This is particularly important at the moment, in light of recent news stories concerning the use of TikTok to target teachers.



Contact:
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thesafeguardingcompany.com

Find out more...

The Safeguarding Company helps schools take a Total Safeguarding approach, by combining the very best safeguarding practice and technology with award-winning customer support and advice. Readers can book a consultation by visiting **thesafeguardingcompany.com**

TAKE ACTION

At The Safeguarding Company, we recognised the need for schools to effectively manage staff allegations and low-level concerns, so we created Confide – a secure software solution for recording and case-managing allegations and concerns regarding adults working in, or with your organisation. Confide enables you to easily record concerns in a secure environment, as well as all other aspects of your investigation. Relevant documents can be uploaded and used as the basis for accurate reports and surveys of trends. Confide also lets you tailor access to the system, providing reassurance that the data stored will remain confidential and available only to users with appropriate permissions.

WHAT IF YOU CAN'T GO?

Can't make it to Bett IRL? You can catch up later, says Terry Freeman

Bett is back – but not all of us will be able to make it, and seminars won't be recorded this time. Here are some ways you can keep abreast of what's happening before, during and after the show.

BEFORE BETT

The Bett website is live at bettshow.com and you can sign up to receive a notification every time a new article is posted on the official blog. Go to bettshow.com/bett-articles and subscribe.

Next, register for Bett, even though you can't attend in person. You should start to receive updates as the event draws nearer.

Make sure you're up to date with newly added speakers and exhibitors by signing up to the mailing list at bettshow.com/sign-up-to-the-bett-mailing-list

DURING BETT

If you have a Twitter account, follow Bett at @bett_show. The official hashtag is #Bett2022, but #Bett, #Bett22 and #CreateTheFuture are also in use. Search those hashtags to find out what people are talking about.

If you're on LinkedIn, you can follow Bett at [linkedin.com/company/bettshow/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/bettshow/)

There is also an official Bett YouTube channel, [youtube.com/user/bettshow](https://www.youtube.com/user/bettshow). Even better, search YouTube for **bett2022** or **Bett 2022**, for unofficial Bett news and advice, including interviews and personal impressions.

Bett Radio from NetSupport and Anderton Tiger, will be streaming interviews and reporting on each day of the show. You can listen live, or use the 'listen back' feature.

More information at netsupportradio.beezer.com/bett-2022

AFTER BETT

If there are any exhibitors whose products you'd like to have seen, it's worth getting in touch with them. You'll find the list of exhibitors at uk.bettshow.com/bett-suppliers-list and presenters' slides might be available directly from speakers, whose list is at uk.bettshow.com/speakers



Terry Freedman is an edtech writer and publishes the ICT & Computing in Education website and newsletter at

ictineducation.org

Computational thinking

Computational thinking drives the computing curriculum in the UK, but how is it approached in other countries?

Sarah Horrocks takes a look

At the Connected Learning Centre in London, we've been delving into this question through Co-think, a three-year Erasmus+ project exploring inclusive practices in teaching computational thinking to primary school children in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, UK and The Netherlands.

England's computing curriculum has a focus on computational thinking rather than just programming, and other European countries have also been rethinking how they teach information technology and digital competencies.

Our interest was in supporting children's computational thinking, and differences in the level of scaffolding that teaching systems

offer. The most heavily scaffolded way to learn is by rote, through copy code. However, this provides limited opportunity for design and debugging.

At the other end of the scale, there's tinkering – letting children play with the code freely. The downsides? The development of bad programming habits and the risk of unfocused or misleading learning experiences.

Most teachers and education systems mix up these approaches without being aware of them.

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Exploring different approaches to computational thinking in countries where it is either recently (UK, Sweden and Finland) or not yet (Netherlands and Denmark) integrated in primary school curricula has been a valuable element of the project. Together, we are gaining deeper understanding of how computational thinking can be taught across school curricula.

The theory is then put into practice in learnathons – using hands-on creative learning activities drawn from the work in each country, with teachers sharing practice and co-delivering lessons across the five countries.

THE FINNISH EXPERIENCE

Linda Liukas, the Finnish children's book illustrator, computer scientist and creator of

The Connected Learning Centre supports schools to use technology creatively and critically. It won the BETT Award for service and support to schools in 2019 and 2020 and was a finalist for the award in 2021. The team will be delivering five CPD sessions at Bett 2022:

- **Being AI ready: what leaders need to know about the personalisation of learning through analytics, adaptive technologies and AI**
- **The Power of Partnerships for Schools**
- **Supporting teacher's digital CPD**
- **Rethinking the curriculum: blended teaching beyond the pandemic**
- **Making personalised learning with technology real: the challenge**

the Hello Ruby resources, explains computational thinking as: "Thinking about problems in a way that allows computers to solve them. It is something people, not computers, do. It includes logical thinking and the ability to recognise patterns, think with algorithms, decompose a problem, and abstract a problem."

Finnish schools focus on problem solving, developing logical skills, digital competence and teaching computational thinking within what they call 'transversal competencies'.



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Leadership & HR

FLEXIBLE WORKING BOOSTS EFFICIENCY

Nicki Harris highlights how one primary school adapted to the needs of its staff and pupils



“When someone needs flexibility, they know their needs will be met with kindness and compassion”

Flexible working is now a widely accepted practice. Opportunities in schools are less obvious than in the business world because children need face-to-face contact with their teachers. The key to success is to introduce flexible options tailored to the needs of the school, teachers and pupils.

MOULSHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL IN ESSEX

Marie Staley, head teacher of Moulsham Junior School in Essex, wanted to ensure her staff could give their best to the job. “When a member of staff asks to work flexibly, we listen to their needs and try to accommodate them but it has to be in the best interests of the children,” says Marie. “We consider requests as fairly as we can.”

This case-by-case approach means that staff feel comfortable asking for flexible options, knowing they will be supported if it works well for pupils.

JOB SHARING

Job-sharing is one of the main requests for flexible-working. While they are not always popular with parents, they can benefit children if well-planned.

“We aim to marry up teachers’ strengths and skills in a job share,” explains Marie. “For example, one of my current job-share teachers is creative and artistic, the other is knowledgeable in science and technology. They complement each other.”

Communication is at the heart of a successful job-share. “I tend to have job-share teachers working with my job-share heads of year too, so there is an understanding of the challenges involved.”

SMART APPROACHES

Staff have the freedom to do their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) at home.

“They can go shopping on a Wednesday afternoon and save their planning for Sunday morning if that works for them. Everyone can choose how to manage their time as a professional.”

When staff are trusted to manage their time, they have the space to focus, which is reflected in the quality of lesson planning and pupil feedback.

Moulsham Junior School takes a flexible approach in the way it structures staff meetings too.

“We plan our professional development meetings so they are succinct and focused. We also keep two of those sessions free, so a group of teachers might go off and do an activity together, or they might choose to go home early to walk the dog or meet a friend for coffee.”

IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

A positive consequence of flexible working is on work-life balance and wellbeing.

“I encourage colleagues to find solutions and make arrangements that work for them,” says Marie. “If someone needs to take their cat to the vet, they can ask a colleague to take registration for them, for instance.”

As a result, Marie noticed that the working relationships have become stronger and more supportive.

“When someone needs flexibility, they know their needs will be met with kindness and compassion. They can balance with family life and mental health needs, making them better colleagues and better teachers.”

KEEPING GOOD TEACHERS

Flexible working also means teachers take less leave during term time.

It is also a factor when it comes to teacher recruitment and retention.

“It is important to give candidates a clear view of the school's ethos when they apply for a role. Candidates know they will be well supported with flexible options for teaching and PPA time, and in return, we expect them to meet our high standards.”



Nicki Harris is schools HR manager at Juniper Education.
junipereducation.org



“COVSTED” IS COMING!

John Cosgrove has advice for head teachers waiting for the dreaded phone call

Covid and Ofsted – let's call it Covsted – are the two big stories in education at the moment and a combination that is spreading terror.

With the pandemic far from over, Ofsted has resumed full inspections introduced in 2019 but suspended early in 2020 – a decision that has brought alarming reports of large numbers of teachers, and particularly heads, resigning in distress.

Newspaper reports have quoted several head teachers in despair at the combination of pandemic and inspection.

The truth is that, right now, everyone in schools is drained of all energy – completely, utterly, totally, exhausted. When we are staggering on the ropes, being asked to concentrate on inspection, particularly under an unfamiliar framework, can be enough to send us sinking to the canvas or make us throw in the towel.

Teachers who have worked hard under unprecedented pressure over eighteen months may not have expected recognition or thanks. But nor do they have the resilience to swallow their resentment and shrug when the Chief Inspector outrageously remarks that some schools have seemed too ready to focus on feeding children rather than teaching them.

Covid aside, Ofsted's framework itself presents issues. Previous emphasis on pupil attainment drew widespread criticism, but attainment is at least easy to measure. This new framework says: “Inspectors will evaluate evidence of the impact of the curriculum” thus giving those inspectors a much less straightforward task.

Dame Alison Peacock of the Chartered College of Teaching described Ofsted's approach as a “reign of terror” and claims Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman wants us

to “all be like robots”.

There are also concerns that a framework used to inspect all schools seems designed for secondary. EYFS teachers have complained that some inspectors seem to have little knowledge of their sector, while primary schools are nervous of the “deep dives” into foundation subjects.

Amanda Spielman made things worse by commenting that this round of inspections would halve the number of outstanding judgements, a remark taken to mean the new framework is “harder” than in the past, though she was actually making a different point – that exempting outstanding schools from inspection artificially inflates their number.

I have been a critic of Ofsted for many years, but my advice to school leaders at this time is “Don't Panic”. The big problems with Ofsted remain what they always were: the huge consequences of being judged less than good, the inconsistency of judgements and a complaints process not fit for purpose. Inspections are often unfair, and while there are certainly horror stories circulating on social media, I have not seen evidence that these are worse this term than before.

My advice is this: be true to your vision and do your best for your children. Do nothing special, false or forced just for the inspectors. Playing their game does not mean doing things differently, or putting yourself or your staff under unnecessary pressure.

It means presenting what you do in Ofsted friendly terms. You will already be doing what Ofsted demands, you just need to explain how, which means knowing the inspection framework, the handbook and the research.

John Cosgrove is a retired headteacher, author and writer.

How ability groups affect behaviour

Eight out of 10 UK primary schools group children by ability but, says Professor **Eirini Flouri**, this can have a harmful emotional effect on the low achievers

New research from UCL Institute of Education found that, compared to counterparts who were not ability-grouped, children placed in the bottom group in Year 2 did worse both emotionally and behaviourally than their peers.

Previous studies on ability grouping examined the impact on academic attainment. This one, however, the largest UK study of its kind to date, showed that seven-year-olds in the lower group experienced more emotional symptoms and more hyperactivity all the way to Year 9. The psychological impact remained even after taking account of factors such as special educational needs, longstanding illness, ethnicity, parental education and family structure.

Importantly, it remained even after school moves, school size and fee status, whether the child was in a mixed-age class, and the child's position in other types of grouping such as streaming and setting, were considered.

HYPERACTIVITY

Proponents of ability grouping – around 80% of UK primary schools – may argue that the psychological impact will be offset by the psychological boost afforded to those in the top set. There was no evidence for this. All 7,000 children were screened for conduct problems, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms and peer relationship difficulties but the only clear benefit for the top group was slightly less hyperactivity.

The questions then become: how does the reduction in hyperactivity in one group compare to the increase in hyperactivity in another? Which group's hyperactivity carries more weight in determining harm or benefit, when a majority of primary schools use this practice?

The answer is clear. Those in the bottom group have over one standard deviation more hyperactivity compared to those not grouped. Those in the top group have a third of a standard deviation less hyperactivity than those not grouped.

So, in absolute terms, the deterioration in behaviour in the bottom group was larger than the improvement in conduct in the top. Ability-grouping had no effect for those in the top group but carried a significant emotional cost for pupils in the bottom.



So why does ability-grouping apparently take its toll on the behaviour and emotional state of those in the bottom group?

SOCIAL DEMANDS AND EXPECTATIONS

To answer this, we must consider what social demands and expectations do for the human condition. Take the ancient Greeks. Aristotle's world was deeply competitive, fiercely confrontational and intensely public, with citizens jockeying to maintain or improve their position in terms of possessions or status. In this world, self-esteem depends on social interaction.

It is no different in schools. Small and intimate, the classroom is where children spend their days with peers. But if it is ability-grouped, it becomes deeply hierarchical, and evokes acute social comparisons.

HUMAN NATURE

How do humans generally fare in such situations?

According to social comparison theory, we evaluate ourselves by comparing to our in-group peers. Since pupils placed in ability groups are all members of the same class, it is likely that those in the lower-ability groups feel inferior because comparison is unfavourable for them.

The context of the classroom makes these children particularly visible. In turn, the more visible a stigmatising condition,

the greater its (negative) impact on the individual. Social psychology would therefore expect a steep emotional cost for those in the inferior position – as our study found. It would also expect a different, but related, reaction: anger.

Our study did not have any data on perceived slights, betrayals or offences nor on dreams, plans or acts of revenge in response to them. But we could measure behaviours, closely associated with anger in children, such as disobedience, unruly and defiant behaviour.

We did not find evidence that those in the bottom in-class group were more likely to exhibit these behaviours. We did find however that this group showed increased hyperactivity, related to defiance and aggression in children.

In other words, children in the bottom in-class group became more hyperactive after the placement.

Hyperactivity gets in the way of learning. When grouping pupils, this is something that schools should consider.



Eirini Flouri, Professor of Developmental Psychology, UCL Institute of Education and co-author of Ability grouping and problem

behaviour trajectories in childhood and adolescence: results from the UK population-based sample.

DEALING WITH PREJUDICE AT PRIMARY

After a Hope not Hate investigation identified 50 UK towns at risk of far-right extremism, Owen Jones outlines how the organisation works with primary schools to tackle discrimination

Hope not Hate Charitable Trust's Education Unit works in primary schools across England, Wales and mainland Scotland. We work with Key Stage 2 pupils to give them a holistic understanding of what prejudice and discrimination is, how it forms and the consequences.

Our main focus is on 'low-level' prejudicial language, such as 'don't be so gay', and 'that's girly', based on our pedagogy from a concept known as the Pyramid of Hate.

THE PYRAMID OF HATE

The Pyramid is an illustration of the range of biased behaviours, growing in complexity from stereotyping and belittling jokes at the bottom, to violence at the top. Like a real pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If pupils, or schools and teachers, treat incidents on the lower levels as being acceptable or "normal," it results in the behaviours at the next level becoming more accepted. The Pyramid of Hate therefore demonstrates that discrimination and violence against minority groups is built upon the acceptance of conduct described in the lower levels of the pyramid.

The most important thing we can learn from the Pyramid is that by using prejudicial language and stereotypes, we are upholding the rest of the structure. If we can destroy the bottom layer, the rest of the Pyramid will collapse.

The aim of our work in primary schools is to nip biased behaviours in the bud. We want pupils in their formative years to have a good understanding of why teachers and others pull them up on this language so that, firstly, it can stop it developing into worse problems later in life and, secondly, they can create a self-policing culture within their friendship groups, so they can help each other with their understanding of what are inappropriate jokes or comments.

We believe that the majority of pupils who make these comments are not racist or sexist but simply lack the understanding needed to not repeat comments they have heard elsewhere.

DEALING WITH PREJUDICE

Dealing with prejudice in the primary classroom provides us with a unique challenge found in our sector.

It is safe to say that a majority of pupils who come out with these comments have picked them up elsewhere in the community, rather than formed the opinion themselves, and are just reusing it. Many teachers we work with report that when pupils come out with these comments, they use a different 'voice' that is not their own.

"Tapping into the emotions of your pupils, especially their empathic understanding, is really important when tackling prejudice"

Pupils living in prejudicial environments have two options growing up. One is that, as they learn more about the world, they can start to realise that these opinions are problematic and unhealthy and then remove them from their outlook on life. The other option is to look at who they are hearing these comments from – parents, siblings, best friends – the people they love most in the world. They refuse to believe that these important people in their lives can be wrong. So instead of rejecting these views, they find ways to rationalise and internalise them. The unique challenge this poses to us in the classroom is that when we pull a child up on making these remarks, we are not just asking them to reflect on themselves, but to go home and tell their parents/guardians that they are wrong. This is a big ask of any young child.

However, there are ways to do this, and our Education Unit provides free CPD training on such matters.

When looking to challenge prejudice in a primary classroom, one important aspect to consider is how humans understand the world. It is worth looking into your early years teaching practices for advice. Humans are emotional creatures and we understand the world through emotional responses first, rather than cognitive reactions, and our early years' curriculum often reflects this. When dealing with prejudice it is important to remember this.

Tapping into the emotions of your pupils, especially their empathic understanding, is really important when tackling prejudice. Try and get them to empathise with the victims of the comment, by asking pupils how do you think it makes them feel. Stories and anecdotes are a great way to deal with racism in primary pupils, as it should help them relate on a deeper level and ensure that what they learn stays with them for a longer period of time.

We also promote a whole-school approach when dealing with these issues. Being sent out of the classroom to speak to a senior leader, or the designated safeguarding lead, can be extremely intimidating and end up causing the pupil to reflect on how they feel, whether it's upset, angry or embarrassed, rather than the consequences of their actions. Dealing with it there and then can be a much more effective way of ensuring the pupil fully understands why they are being pulled up for their behaviour. It is worth reflecting on which members of staff are most likely to overhear these comments. Are the catering and site staff given the right training to deal with these issues along with the teachers and TAs?

BEING VIGILANT

The extreme right has its own language and customs that is worth knowing about.



The language has evolved a lot in the past few years, especially around the Involuntary Celibate (Incel) movement, to a point where we think that pupils could be openly talking about extreme material in the classroom without the teacher being aware.

This is why we produced our Signs of Hate book, to help get the education sector up to speed with the new words and logos of extremism. A copy of Signs of Hate has been posted to every secondary school in England and Wales, but it would also help primary heads to identify some of this terminology.

Although racism is certainly prevalent in primary schools, actual extremism is pretty rare. So, while it is unlikely that a pupil at

primary school would be fully involved with the movement, with the ease of access to extremist material online it is possible they could come across the material and lack the understanding of how dangerous it is.

We would advise schools to keep on top of various extremist themes so that if any pupil does mention it, it can be spotted and dealt with. If you need help identifying these themes, please contact us.

There's a range of training and resources available from Hope not Hate.

We offer free CPD sessions and classroom lessons in primary schools, covering three areas – how to deal with prejudice in the classroom, a deeper understanding of

structural prejudice, and a safeguarding session around the extreme right (which covers part of the required Prevent duties).

To learn more about Hope not Hate's Education Unit and to get in touch, go to: hopenothate.org.uk/communities/in-schools or follow us on Twitter @HNHEducation.

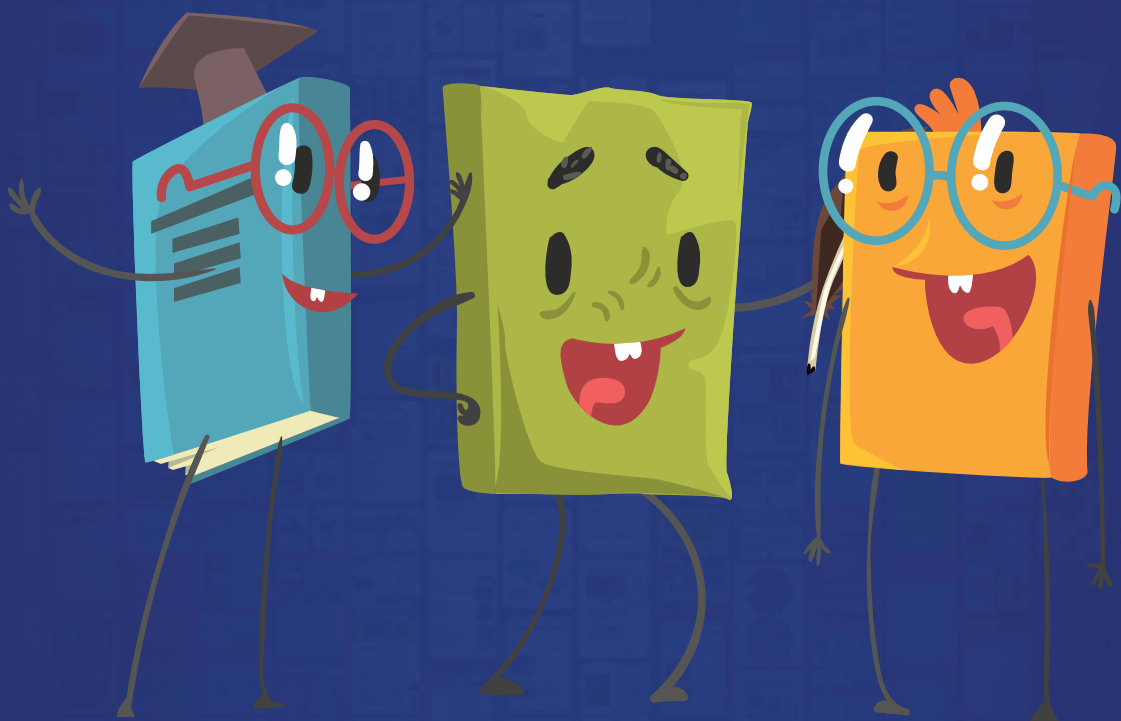


Owen Jones, Director of Education at Hope not Hate Charitable Trust.



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CREATING A CULTURE OF TRUST

Rae Snape believes kindness, a sense of community and a ready smile from school leaders will be repaid many times over

I applied for my second headship in June 2019. The interview process was a two-day affair – a gruelling endurance course of tasks and activities designed to test the spirit and mettle of even the most hardened school leader.

After the preliminary bouts, candidates were free to tour the school, to meet the children and staff. It was lunchtime and so I wandered into the dining room. One of the supervisors, Nazimah, said to me: “What this school needs is this!” and as she spoke, she drew her hands together to form a perfect circle with her fingers.

What she meant was that this school needed everyone to come together as a community or team. Overnight, and before the second day of interview I reflected on her words, and adapted my PowerPoint presentation accordingly.

I cannot be sure that it was Nazimah’s words that secured my new position, but what she said certainly chimed with my own view that in a school, teamwork and community is everything.

TEAMWORK

Recently I was at a Whole Education conference listening to James Pope, founder of Headsup4Hts, talking about team work. He reminded us that team work is not simple and cannot be boiled down to pithy aphorisms such as “Team Work Makes the Dream Work” or “There’s No ‘I’ in Team.” Creating a strong committed team with shared ambitions and goals takes thought, time and effort.

A book that influenced my thinking and practice in this area is by Professor Amy C Edmondson (Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy) where she talks about psychological safety, which is the enabling condition for cohesion, teamwork and team learning. Only if everyone in a team feels genuinely safe and confident enough to share ideas, and have challenging conversations, can a school

create a culture where everyone collaborates, is willing to take risks, to innovate and effectively move towards the school’s shared goals.

So how do we do this? How do we as leaders create a culture of psychological safety and trust?

BE VISIBLE

The word bureaucracy comes from the word bureau – office desk. There may be much to do that requires us to be in our offices, but we are not bureaucrats, and we should not be office tied, for we are educators and we should do what we do best; communicate and connect with our learning community. So, leave your office at regular times during the day, and walk the corridors, go onto the playground, visit classrooms, support your colleagues, sit with the pupils, connect with your community – and be visible.

SMILE

The second thing to do is to smile. Or if you already smile – smile more! It is contagious, a powerful way to build connection and trust. Charles Darwin was one of the first people to suggest facial expressions may intensify feelings. You may notice that even if you are not feeling particularly chipper putting on a happy face can instantly lift your spirits. Fake it till you make it! Your colleagues, seeing your sunny disposition will then, due to the power of mirror neurons, be inclined to smile back at you and in that instance you will have created a moment of limbic connection.

Smiling reduces stress, lowers heart rate and blood pressure. Not only is smiling good for your health and longevity, but leaders who smile are seen as more trustworthy

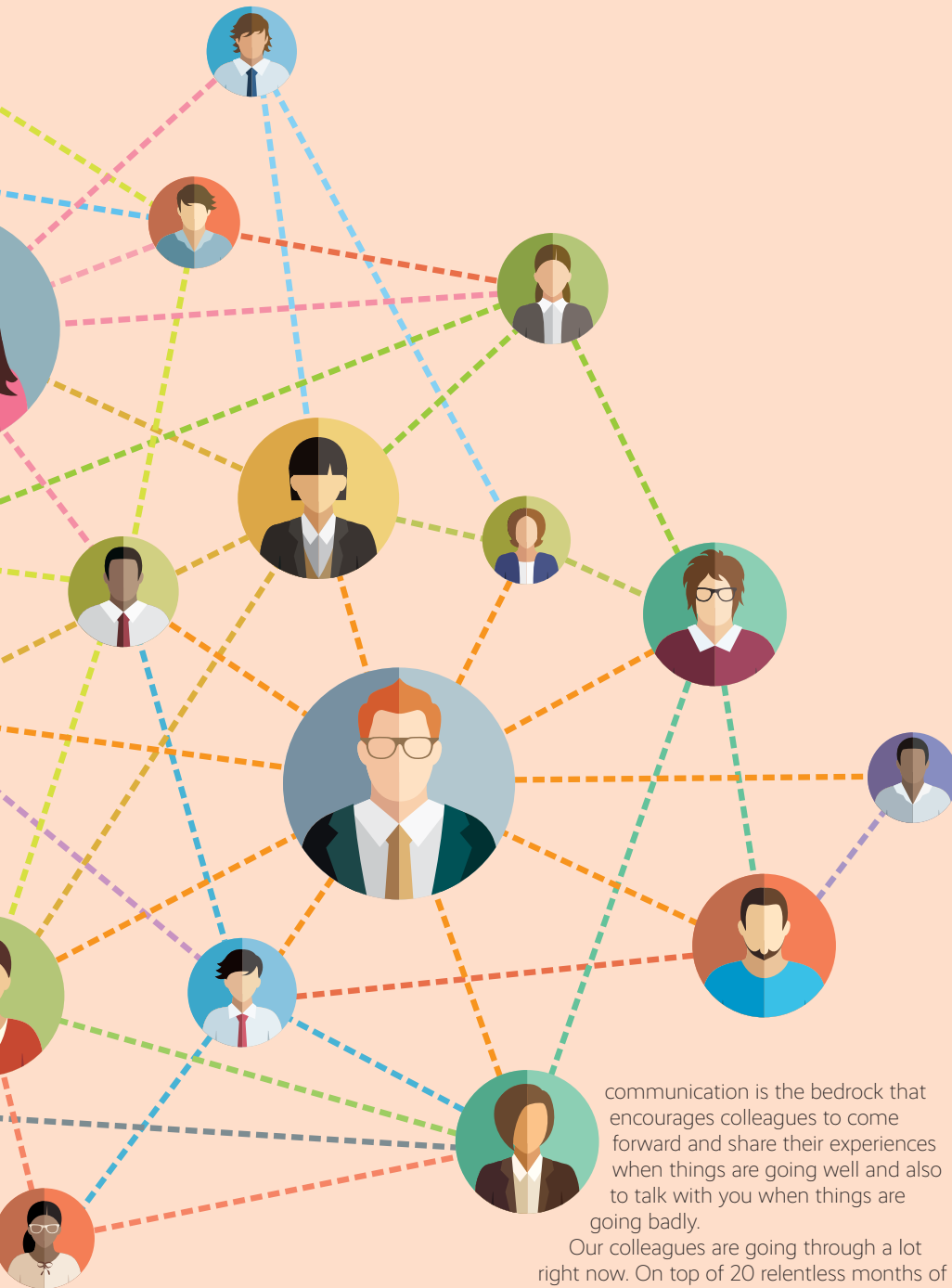
CHECK-IN REGULARLY

My next suggestion is to regularly check in with colleagues. This should be more than a perfunctory “How are you today?” but a moment of authentic connection and deep listening.

Finding out about your colleagues, their likes and dislikes, interests and pastimes as well as home circumstances, takes a few minutes of your time but gives a very powerful indication that you care about them and not just as co-workers.

Ask supportive questions to show that you are there for them and want your colleagues to be happy and fulfilled in their work. “Is there anything I can do to help you today?” “Do you have everything you need to be





successful?" Once you have built up trust and psychological safety, you can then ask more searching questions: "Is there anything that made your day difficult today?" "Are there things we could be doing better?"

When checking-in, make sure you include everyone, the site manager, the midday supervisors, the office team. Do not miss anyone out. Everyone in the school community needs to feel valued, appreciated and seen.

BE KIND

Humour, joy, playfulness and a lightness of touch lowers cortisol, makes people relax around you and will make you appear approachable.

If your colleagues see that you are prepared to share amusing anecdotes about your life, they will feel safe to reciprocate. This foundation of open, trusting

communication is the bedrock that encourages colleagues to come forward and share their experiences when things are going well and also to talk with you when things are going badly.

Our colleagues are going through a lot right now. On top of 20 relentless months of working through a pandemic, there are all sorts of unseen stresses and strains that are part of the human condition. Births, marriages, illnesses, divorces, financial insecurity, deaths. As Plato (allegedly) said, "Be kind for everyone you know is fighting a hard battle."

FEEDBACK FOR BREAKFAST

In order to build a positive staff culture based on trusting respectful relationships, it is necessary to make time for feedback and to celebrate success.

As Ken Blanchard, author, business consultant and speaker, famously said, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

Being an educator at the present time is very challenging, with relentless demands. But it is also hugely rewarding. Generally, every person you meet today in your organisation is there because they want to do a good job and to make a positive

REMEMBER TO:

- Be visible
- Smile
- Check-in
- Build rapport
- Feedback frequently

difference to the lives of young people. Assume the best of people and they will show you what is possible.

Creating a culture where everyone, including you, is open to feedback supports individual professional growth as well as the development of the whole school. If we look for it we will see that feedback is all around us, and is there all the time. Just as we would do with pupils, as leaders our privilege is, in the words of Bill Rogers, behaviour management consultant and author, "to catch our colleagues doing good."

"I really value the way..."

"Thank you for taking time to..."

"I noticed that you..."

Feedback builds trust and strengthens relationships, it is a way to encourage and motivate others, it improves performance and is a vital tool for creating a learning community.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

In addition to individual feedback, also make time to celebrate team success. Many head teachers find ways to acknowledge the work of their team through treats in pigeon holes or a plate of cakes on a Friday afternoon.

I have taken to making an arrangement of delicious sweet treats and fruit and go around the school to hand deliver them to each member of the team and, as I do so, I take a moment to acknowledge their contribution and specifically to thank them for their work. This takes place in classrooms, in the dining hall, in the office and in front of the children.

Not only are the children seeing that the grown-ups are valued, but they are getting a vital lesson in understanding that we should appreciate the efforts and talents of those around us, and not take them for granted.



Rae Snape is headteacher of Milton Road Primary School, Cambridge, National Leader of Education and author of *The Headteacher's*

Handbook published by Bloomsbury Education

SAFEGUARDING THE FUTURE

A potential change of designated safeguarding lead needs to be planned carefully to ensure continuity of care, says Hannah Glossop

Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2021) makes clear that the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) must be, “an appropriate senior member of staff, from the school or college leadership team.” The DSL takes “lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection (including online safety). This should be explicit in the role-holder’s job description.”

This stipulation can leave headteachers and governors with a very small pool of colleagues to choose from when they are appointing a DSL, with some heads deciding to take on this responsibility themselves.

Safeguarding needs exceptionally strong leadership. The DSL often juggles and holds a wealth of information, from context for individual students to staff training records. A new DSL, either due to a resignation or a shake-up in leadership responsibility, must be able to step into this role seamlessly and have all the tools they need to ensure children continue to be safeguarded effectively.

RECORD KEEPING

One of the most important areas when considering continuity between DSLs is record keeping. Whether your school uses electronic or paper records for children’s safeguarding files, the system needs to be clear and to be picked up by someone else in the future. It is imperative that ALL records are saved centrally and coherently. Records should be saved in one place for each child, so that any new DSL can look at this and quickly extract the exact chronology. When we delve into inspection reports where safeguarding has been found to be “not effective”, poor record keeping is a common contributing factor.

Among the key problems are that records are not detailed enough, or that schools do not record small concerns routinely. Schools should assume that their DSL may have a period of absence in the future or even leave the school, and therefore ensure that record keeping is robust enough for someone else to read through the relevant record, and have a full and accurate picture for a child. Regular spot checks of safeguarding files should be encouraged, so

the safeguarding team can ensure that files give the full picture to anyone who may need to read them in the future. This also helps with transition, so that the child’s new school will have details of historical concerns.

REGULAR UPDATES TO OTHER LEADERS

Another key area to reflect on is the regularity and depth of the updates that are shared with the other members of the senior

leadership team (SLT). The overarching knowledge of safeguarding can sometimes be held in the head of one DSL, and this should be avoided. Though not always part of the safeguarding team, other members of SLT should have a clear picture of the overall safeguarding trends. For example, if mental health concerns are coming up as your most frequent concerns, the wider senior team should be aware of this and know that resources, including curriculum changes, may be needed. Likewise, your



governing body should also be aware of these overarching trends, either via the headteacher's report or via feedback from the safeguarding governor's visits. Governors should also be kept up to date on what safeguarding training has taken place for staff. By keeping clear staff training logs and the details of any staff who have missed any training, the DSL can easily hand this information to a colleague taking on their role in the future, and therefore ensure that any gaps are filled.

EFFECTIVE USE OF SYSTEMS

In recent years we have seen many new electronic systems popping up to assist with the management of safeguarding, including online safeguarding files and Single Central Record packages. These systems can greatly help a DSL, but the knowledge of how best to use these can often sit with one person. As the DSL, it is important to ensure that other members of your safeguarding team or senior team know how to use systems in your absence. Likewise, appropriate staff should be

familiar with the workings and any issues with the Single Central Record, so that they can step in and oversee this key area if needed to in the future.

USING THE SAFEGUARDING TEAM

One of the best ways to build a strong culture of continuity is to ensure that a wider safeguarding team is in place, with well-trained Deputy DSLs. Though Deputy DSLs are optional for schools, KCSIE makes clear that that "the activities of the designated safeguarding lead can be delegated to appropriately trained deputies." It is important to remember that "appropriately trained" means that any deputies should be "trained to the same standard as the designated safeguarding lead." Once Deputy DSLs have completed their training, they can be an incredibly useful resource to ensure that the safeguarding load is spread beyond one person.

EFFECTIVE HANDOVER

If you are preparing for your current DSL to

leave their position, an effective handover with the new one is essential. The new DSL should spend a significant amount of time with their outgoing colleague and at the very least should have a clear list of all the children who have an open case with children's social care, including those who are looked after. Equally, the outgoing DSL needs to share information on the relevant key safeguarding contacts, including the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), school nurse, police officer and the safeguarding governor.

The incoming DSL should have clear knowledge of how safeguarding works locally, including any particularly prevalent safeguarding issues in the local area. The outgoing DSL should also share a clear picture of the management of safeguarding and the outcomes of previous audits and/or visits, so that the new DSL knows what their priorities are. Other things to consider are simple but important steps, such as ensuring all contact details for social workers are correct, and that the correct name and contact details for the DSL are shared with the necessary stakeholders, to ensure key communication goes to the correct person. Access will need to be given to the new DSL for any electronic systems, including any that the Local Authority uses – for example for Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings for looked after children.

CONCLUSION

In summary, your school should contemplate a time when it will need a change of DSL. Though this may not be on the immediate horizon, it is important to consider these five areas and constantly evaluate whether records are detailed and clear enough for someone else to follow in the future. Multiple Serious Case Reviews have highlighted that information sharing between agencies has been a problem greatly exacerbated when one professional does not properly record, or share, the vast swathes of information they hold. It is already too late to prepare for many elements of this handover at the point where the DSL resigns or suddenly needs to be away from school for an extended time.

Thinking of the five areas above in advance of any transition can therefore not only help to improve your current safeguarding practice, but also prepare for a situation where a new DSL may need to step in at very short notice.



Hannah Glossop is a former Designated Safeguarding Lead who now heads up Judicium's safeguarding service. Further information

is available at judiciumeducation.co.uk/safeguarding-service and by following @JudiciumSG on Twitter



STAY IN YOUR LANE

After a poll found that most school business managers were thinking of leaving the profession, we must set reasonable boundaries for staff, says Stephen Morales

Going back to first principles, why is school business leadership necessary?

- To safeguard assets
- To effectively manage resources

School business professionals (SBPs) deal with much more than just finances. Resources are everything we touch and have at our disposal. When we talk about resources, it's easy to think of classroom consumables, equipment, facilities and perhaps technology. But knowledge, talent and leadership capability also form part of the range of resources available to us.

SBPs have a portfolio of responsibilities and skills that equip to them to have unique oversight of the optimal deployment of these precious resources. They are, therefore, able to supplement and complement the skills of other school leaders.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

With increased autonomy, schools and trusts are not only making the majority of decisions about how to use their funds and deploy resources, but also need expertise to help them to do so. This ensures pedagogically focused school leaders are free from the distraction of operational matters for which they have little knowledge or training.

There is now universal acknowledgement that schools and trusts need access to a competent business professional, and therefore it is essential to ensure there is enough supply to meet the need. Additionally, this community of education professionals need systematic training to ensure the quality and effectiveness of their practice remains high.

In assessing the capability of the current workforce, we need to ask the following questions:

- What does the sector need from the SBP workforce?
- How big is the capability gap?
- Do all education stakeholders – SBPs, heads, CEOs, governors and trustees – recognise a skills and knowledge gap?

- Do school leaders and governing bodies/trustees know what they need?
- Do we need to be more prescriptive about minimum standards and professional qualifications?
- What is the ambition and improvement appetite for SBPs across the sector?
- How do we incentivise continuing professional development (CPD) and continuous improvement (bursaries, encouragement from trustees and other senior leaders, the role of the Department for Education)?
- Does the existing CPD provision respond to both the needs of practitioners and, perhaps more fundamentally, the needs of the sector?

DEREGULATED INDUSTRY

In a deregulated environment, we are asking individual schools and trusts to decide for themselves whether the school business leadership arrangements they have in place are adequate. Only when institutions run into problems related to compliance, financial solvency or misappropriation is the question of competency and capability really brought into sharp focus.

This often results in damage to reputations, emotional turmoil for those involved or, worse still, career jeopardy. By proportionately responding to the questions posed above we can perhaps mitigate against such scenarios often not born out of deliberate negligence but a lack of understanding, a misguided view of accountability and insufficient access to technical expertise.

We know that many education professionals are considering exiting the profession. In many cases, this is not because they have lost their passion for their chosen vocation but because the demands being placed on them are unsustainable. Teachers are tired of the reporting and accountability burdens; heads no longer know which way to turn when drowning in a sea of new directives, ever-changing guidance, high-stakes accountability and problems



WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN RECRUITING A SCHOOL BUSINESS MANAGER:

- Leadership qualities
- Business management skills
- Customer service skills
- The ability to work well with others
- Flexibility and openness to change
- Maths and financial skills
- An ability to accept criticism and work well under pressure

associated to teacher attrition; school business leaders are spread so thinly trying to take up the slack whilst managing an already impossible workload – the system is at breaking point.

This gloomy picture is further exacerbated where there has been no honest audit of competency and capability. In order to survive and thrive during periods of turbulence, such



as the one created by the pandemic, it is important to develop organisational resilience.

This means having the right people doing the right things at the right time. It requires schools and trusts to assess competency and capacity across the pillars of pedagogy, governance and business. It requires the careful and strategic deployment of talent: teachers teaching according to their specialism and responding to the identified needs of pupils; leaders leading in the areas in which they are equipped to add the most value; a business professional or team with the appropriate skills to cover the non-pedagogical areas of a school or trust; and governance arrangements with sufficient professional diversity to offer appropriate challenge to the executive.

These skills might include being qualified to a level that ensures adherence to any regulatory or legal frameworks and with sufficient business acumen to confidently safeguard assets and optimise resources.

PLAYING TO YOUR STRENGTHS

There should be no ambiguity over lines of

accountability, no blurring of areas of responsibility, and no mission creep, with each of the actors understanding their contribution to the school or trust's aims and staying in their metaphorical lanes. This is not to say that governors, business leaders and pedagogical professionals shouldn't lean into each other's worlds and take an interest. It's simply about playing to your strengths and not being drawn into activities that could distract you from your core duties.

My next observation is slightly anecdotal, but I suspect that the stress and workload suffered by many SBPs is a result of trying to be "all things to all men". Whilst trying to stay on top of a very demanding job involving financial oversight, HR compliance, procurement and premises management, it is then a huge ask to expect involvement, for example in pastoral care, safeguarding and perhaps even some pupil supervision. That's why staying in your lane is so important.

Larger structures and MATs, in particular, are now introducing more specialist roles to support their generalist and, where functions can be centralised, some of the administrative burden is being taken away

from the local context. In smaller schools, this is not possible, so if we want to protect the wellbeing of our SBPs, we need to be much clearer about what we expect from the role – and indeed where they can add the most value. But this requires discipline both on the part of the head teacher and the SBP.

The system is evolving, complexity is increasing, and the sector is suffering. But if we pause and recalibrate, we can weather this turbulence. We need the professional confidence to set our own expectations of our role and set reasonable boundaries in terms of what others expect of us.

Agree the lane you're swimming in and stay in it!



Stephen Morales is chief executive of the Institute of School Business Leadership (isbl.org.uk). A research report looking at the

'post-covid exodus' of school leaders is available from the National Association of Headteachers. You can read the full document here: tinyurl.com/SBLshortage

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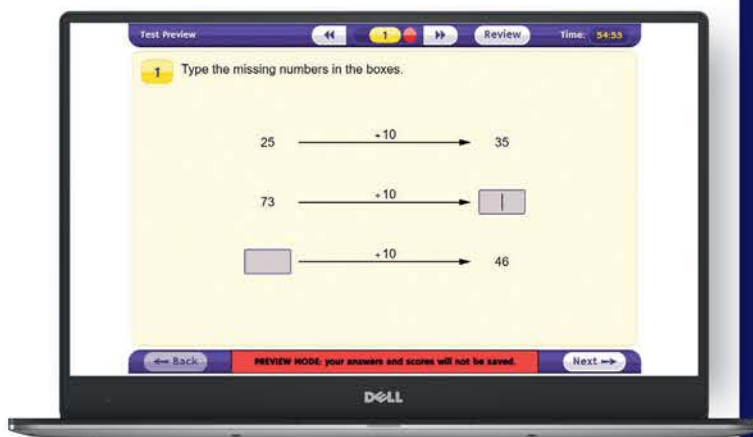
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Step 2 Identify knowledge gaps



Area of Learning	Suggested Learning Sequences	Pupils	Score
Behavioural	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	Selena Blake	3/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	Gary Bradley	2/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	William Brown	3/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	Nancy Chen	3/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	Hannah Cooper	3/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	Constance Hughes	3/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	Carl Jones	2/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	George Miles	4/5
	Star 5, PIRA 5, Fiction 2	Nancy Prince	4/5

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Learning Sequence	Pupils	Score
Grammar: Word classes: Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, Adverbs, Conjunctions, Prepositions, Punctuation: Apostrophes to mark singular and plural nouns, Apostrophes to mark contracted forms	Selena Blake	3/5
Spelling and Vocabulary: SHG: The first two letters of the word, the first letter of the word, the first letter of the word, the first letter of the word	Gary Bradley	2/5
	William Brown	3/5
	Nancy Chen	3/5
	Hannah Cooper	3/5
	Constance Hughes	3/5
	Carl Jones	2/5
	George Miles	4/5
	Nancy Prince	4/5

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RS ASSESSMENT
FROM HODDER EDUCATION

TO WEE OR NOT TO WEE

Toilet trips during lessons – basic human right or a right nuisance, asks Alina Lynden

Lunchtime is over and a Year 4 lesson is in full swing. “Any questions before we get going on our starter activity?” the teacher asks. An eager hand shoots straight up: “Please Miss, can I go to the toilet?”

Whether or not permission is granted will depend on the staff member’s assessment of several factors: the who, when and why. Is this a one-off request from a usually attentive pupil? Or is it a repeat offender, a serial disrupter? A child who, if allowed to go, will spend 10 minutes wandering the corridors before eventually finding their way to the toilets.

The decision will be based on the teacher’s intuition, knowledge of the ‘ones to watch’ and the overall school policy around toilet breaks during lessons.

TO GO OR NOT TO GO?

When a child asks to go to the toilet during a lesson, should they be allowed to go? What if the repeat offender was actually struggling with a urine infection and proceeds to wet themselves?

Working for ERIC, The Children’s Bowel and Bladder charity for the last 10 years has given me an insight into the argument from both sides. Battle lines are frequently drawn between parents on the one hand fighting for their child’s human rights and teachers trying to minimise classroom disruption.

BEHAVIOUR VS BLADDER CONTROL

It’s not unreasonable to think that children should be able to use the toilets at breaktimes. After all this is how we as adults have learnt to behave.

Leaving the class in a middle of a lesson causes disruption, lost learning time and there will always be children who use it as an excuse to mess about. Some schools have even taken the extreme step of locking toilets during lesson times with access being patrolled to curb bullying and vandalism.

WHAT IF YOU CAN’T HOLD ON?

Continence conditions are among the most common health issues affecting children, with one in 12 young people aged between

five and 19 living with a bowel or bladder condition. A third of all children struggle with constipation.

So, in the average class, there will be two or three children who are affected by an issue related to using the toilet. Embarrassment and stigma attached to things relating to wee and poo means the true extent is hidden.

Restricted toilet access can cause significant anxiety in all children, but particularly those with a pre-existing continence condition.

There’s also the fundamental way our bodies work to consider. Did you know that 20 – 30 minutes after eating is when we are most likely to need a poo? This is worth bearing in mind when you consider the time children have after eating their lunch and before afternoon lessons begin.

start having periods from the age of 8 or 9 years.

More children are also now starting school without having fully mastered bladder or bowel control. Unsurprising when you consider the average age we now start toilet training has risen to 3.5 years.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

As adults in the workplace, we don’t need to ask our boss for permission to have a comfort break during our working day. So why are the rules so different in the classroom? Access to clean, appropriately stocked toilets whenever the need arises, is a fundamental human right and necessary for good health and wellbeing.

“Continence conditions are among the most common health issues affecting children”

BANNING TOILET BREAKS DURING LESSONS

Numerous surveys have shown that children frequently avoid eating and/or drinking in school so that they are less likely to need to use the toilet. This is more likely if they feel that toilet access is restricted, they feel the need for additional privacy, or school toilets are poorly maintained.

Medical conditions such as chronic constipation, wetting and urinary tract infections (UTIs) can be caused or aggravated by the avoidance of, or limited access to, school toilets.

Children with additional needs, such as autism, are prone to dealing with constipation and may have difficulty in recognising the signals from their bladder or bowel in time.

Not drinking enough water during the day can cause and aggravate problems with the bladder and bowel, and lead to dehydration and lack of concentration.

Alongside those children who have an invisible, possibly undiagnosed health condition which can cause them to need the toilet urgently, it’s not uncommon for girls to

Ultimately, it’s the responsibility of individual school leaders to decide on a consistent, fair toilet policy that meets the needs of everyone. This is particularly important for those learners known to have a related health problem. There is value in providing a system which allows open access as soon as children need it.

Blanket rules and toilet bans carry implications for all, but particularly for those children who have difficulty controlling their bladder or bowel or are feeling anxious about using the toilet away from home. Continence problems are more common than many of us realise, and can have a devastating effect on a child’s mental and physical wellbeing.

Open access to clean and safe toilets encourages pupils to value themselves and their facilities. It also has a positive influence on their willingness and ability to learn, as well as their behaviour, morale, and attendance levels.

ERIC, The Children’s Bowel & Bladder Charity, is dedicated to helping all children manage and overcome distressing continence conditions. Support for professionals includes training for the education, early years and social care sectors. Helpline: 0808 169 9949. Email: web@eric.org.uk. Website: eric.org.uk



PRACTICAL WAYS SCHOOL LEADERS CAN CREATE A POSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE POLICY AROUND SCHOOL BREAKS

- Ensure you have a School Toilet Policy, invite the children to contribute to it and make sure it's reviewed regularly.
- A scheduled toilet break for younger children can lead to a decrease in children going during lessons whilst limiting disruption.
- Allow children to use a non-verbal sign that they need to use the toilet, as many are too embarrassed to put up their hand and ask.
- Ringing the bell five or 10 minutes before the end of lunchtime and advising the children that this is their chance to go to the toilet can act as a prompt.
- Don't hesitate to raise concerns with parents/carers if a child is repeatedly asking to go. Check if it's something they've also noticed at home and suggest they see their GP to rule out an underlying condition.
- Encourage children to remain hydrated throughout the hours they are on the school site – they should have half of their daily fluid requirement in core school hours.
- Children should have access to clean, well-stocked toilets at intervals appropriate to the needs of the individual child.
- Learners who are known to have continence difficulties should be offered a care plan, to ensure their individual needs are met in school.
- Use assembly or circle time to explain why it's important that they look after the school toilets and respect the behaviour codes, for everyone's benefit.



Alina Lynden,
Communications Manager
for ERIC, The Bowel and
Bladder Charity and co-
author of best practice

guidance document: *Managing
Continence Issues at Nursery, School and
Colleges.* eric.org.uk

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algorithm, the programme delivers consistent, adaptive, multimodal learning. It's perfect to use in class and as homework, since Bedrock Learning allows students to work independently, and learning is tracked via an online knowledge organiser and teacher dashboard. Contact bedrocklearning.org or request a trial at app.bedrocklearning.org/trial

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VEGAN-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

January will see the launch of The Vegan Society's new education officer role and Education Network. In the new year, your staff will be able to collect CPD accredited points for vegan-inclusive education training sessions; both in person and online for free. In addition, The Vegan Society and Network is developing a number of practical and innovative resources to support the implementation of a vegan-inclusive curriculum. If you would like to be part of the Education Network, and collaborate to support vegan inclusion in education, or you would like more information regarding CPD training, please contact Laura Chepner at

education@vegansociety.com



3

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Timotay Playscapes creates inspirational outdoor spaces for schools and early years settings. To support the PE and Sport

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8 RELIABLE PROGRESS DATA

Working in partnership with school leadership, Whizz Education creates mutually agreed implementation plans for maths provision. It provides head teachers with reliable data that can be submitted to OFSTED and the board of governors to demonstrate progress and attainment.

By building teacher capacity and using context and data to drive course correction, Whizz Education gives schools the confidence that all students are receiving the same high-calibre teaching.

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5 BETTER ICT SUPPORT

Since 2003, turn IT on has worked exclusively with schools. The company provides a comprehensive range of hands-on ICT and MIS support, GDPR services and training to more than 950 schools, local authorities and MATs across the UK.

Consultants at turn IT on become another

member of your team and will always go the extra mile to help you make the best use of ICT across the curriculum. With over 18 years' experience delivering ICT support to primary schools, they know how to ensure schools get real value for money from their edtech investment.

turniton.co.uk



7 AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY

School Necessities is a brand new primary school educational supplier with a product launch that has been specially commissioned for the company – highlights include a front

of class, double-boarded whiteboard easel that is both colourful and practical to use. For a limited time, School Necessities will be offering a generous 20% discount to all schools and local authorities, who will have an automatic 60-day credit account opened on their behalf. **schoolnecessities.co.uk**

Curriculum Maestro

An online platform that gives schools the freedom to design, teach, assess and manage their curricula, all in one place

AT A GLANCE

- The most comprehensive primary curriculum package available on the market.
- Powerful planning, assessing, evaluation and analysis of curriculum in one system.
- Navigable content and easy access to resources and data.
- Fully integratable with school MIS.
- All content completely modifiable to fit every context.
- Over 100 fully planned, resourced and mapped projects for Primary phase.

Reviewed by: Adam Riches

Curriculum Maestro is a **one-stop package** for your Primary curriculum needs. Brought to you by Cornerstones Education, it is already being used in over 1,500 primary schools in the UK.

The fully online package allows you to have everything you need to plan, track, adapt and evaluate the quality of your curriculum at your fingertips. With over 100 fully planned and resourced projects, the content offer of this alone is astounding. But, Curriculum Maestro is much more than a bank of resources.

At its core, Curriculum Maestro encourages **ambition**. The content is focused around National Curriculum content and each project is composed of sequences of lessons. These are fully adaptable and can be removed (or added to) with ease. The lessons are knowledge focused and have clear intentions, formatting and access. Essentially, you can use Curriculum Maestro to map out and plan every lesson that is going to be taught in your school and disseminate these lessons to the teachers in a few simple clicks.

The core content is what Cornerstones Education call their **interconnected skills and knowledge framework**. This framework is the summarisation of all of the learning that takes place within the curriculum. Everything is trackable across the curriculum enabling leaders to see progression, teaching and outcomes against this framework for each child.

The real power for leaders comes from beyond the mapping and planning though. The fully automated interface allows teachers to attach plans and resources to their timetables so that teachers can plan collaboratively and evaluate the learning of pupils against the objectives that they are

being taught. Not only this, but the system encourages both organisation and collective efficacy around planning and even shows teachers what they wanted to teach and if they actually were able to teach it. Curriculum Maestro is designed to work in harmony with your MIS, meaning that pupils and teacher lists can be quickly and easily imported.

Another factor that makes Curriculum Maestro stand out is the **integrated assessment system**. The interface shows leaders how many planned objectives have been taught to children. In addition, the system shows the skills that classes and individual pupils are stuck with, giving rich insight into what is happening on the journey of each pupil. The obvious question would be, at what cost in terms of workload? The answer is simple - minimal. Quick judgements allow teachers to record data on pupils which is then accumulated and analysed. From a leadership perspective, you have access to cohort objective attainment on a group or individual level as well as the ability to run reports at the click of a button. The system comes with a full suite of tests and these make for exceptional end of unit assessments.

In terms of usability and functionality, the interface is relatively **intuitive**. In just a few minutes, you are able to exploit basic functionality, and with some more exploration, the advanced functionality comes relatively intuitively. Not only do classroom teachers get a quick access to their timetable (or any other widget they or you choose) but they also are only a handful of clicks away from thousands of lessons. The lessons are searchable by topic or by **learning intention** - another massively powerful tool, especially if you are asked where and when topics are

covered in the different key stages and also when evaluating where there might be gaps in your curriculum.

What really struck me about this product was the **power** it gives leaders in terms of supporting their staff and reducing workload. By streamlining planning, tracking and assessment, there is a much greater sense of collective responsibility with staff. Curriculum Maestro informs you what is happening in your school and allows you deep insight into things you may not always be able to access first hand.

the
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LEADING SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

VERDICT

- ✓ Exceptional functionality
- ✓ High quality content
- ✓ Designed with teachers and leaders in mind
- ✓ A great way to streamline your assessment and teaching

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking to support staff with planning and assessing or if you are looking for a full curriculum rewrite. Also consider if you are looking to build collective efficacy and consistency in your school.

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REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL

What is a school necessity to you? For me, it has to be the humble A-frame easel because it is perfect for that all-important close work. Yes, there is still a place for low-tech teaching apparatus because it makes learning more personal and interactive.

The thing is, the easel I purchased was bought on the cheap out of my own pocket and it soon looked sorry for itself. It was also a basic wooden design and fixed at one height so could be awkward to manage.

There are of course some better ones around and a superior easel I've currently got my hands on is an absolute cracker.

This is a large A-frame mobile magnetic drywipe easel that comes in three separate parts: the A-frame, the whiteboard and two sturdy plastic trays.

The sturdy frame is lightweight and the 90cm-by-90cm whiteboard is pretty hefty but when combined and assembled, the easel can be moved without difficulty thanks to the castors (which are lockable) and so it is very safe and stable.

What makes this multipurpose easel a joy to use is that it has four quick and easy height adjustments of 190cm, 170cm, 150cm and 130cm which means the whiteboard can be perfectly positioned for children of all ages, sitting or standing. It simply moves up and down and clicks into place.

This is a first-class product which has been designed with real care and engineered to

suit all classroom situations so is perfect for a range of teaching and learning interactions.

The whiteboard is magnetic and dry wipe clean, and comes with a full-length pen and book ledge with enough space to hold markers, erasers, and magnetic pieces. It also has flipchart fittings included too.

The two plastic trays that fit at the bottom of the easel are big enough and strong enough for plenty of your bits and pieces and so offers handy storage.

This best-selling easel is built to withstand some heavy classroom use and comes with a 25-year guarantee, so easily justifies the £319 price tag.

You want a classroom easel to be sturdy, dependable and able to cope with classroom bumps and knocks. Well, this easel is tough and easily one of the market leaders.

Easels are dynamic front-of-house teaching tools that are engaging and encourage conversations because they can be positioned at children's eye-level and so make learning accessible.

They also allow children to indulge their creativity as they can be used more freely than an interactive whiteboard for exploring learning and play.

This best-selling premium quality easel is a perfect teaching aid for front of class, for display and for training. It is a reliable and versatile workhorse and I'd happily make this an essential piece of classroom furniture.

SCHOOL necessities



the headteacher teach co
LEADING SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

VERDICT

- ✓ An extremely versatile and adaptable teaching, learning and assessment tool
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THREE SCHOOLS THREE LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS

Teach First explains why stronger school leadership in disadvantaged areas helps entire communities.

There's strength in numbers, and this rings especially true when it comes to leading a school. But leadership training for staff is sometimes seen as a lesser priority beside other more pressing school challenges, such as staff absence, pupil behaviour and governance.

Research shows that schools with strong leadership are 10 times more likely to improve overall at their next inspection according to Ofsted data.

The Headteacher spoke to three schools to hear what impact Teach First's free Leading Together programme has had on their leadership teams, pupils and schools.

BROADLEA PRIMARY

When Sharon Freeley joined Broadlea Primary on the Isle of Wight in 2016, she was faced with a community that had lost faith in education. Parents had high expectations of their children's pastoral and personal development, but not of teaching and learning.

"Together with the deputy head, we set plans to turn that around. By 2018, we were rated 'requires improvement' by Ofsted, so we knew we were heading in the right direction. But our tight senior management team was also working against us. The middle leadership team didn't feel part of decision-making and resisted some of the changes they felt were being imposed.

"The reason Leading Together has been so successful for us is the part Jane, our Achievement Partner, played. She's delivered continuing professional development (CPD) and helped us make decisions together as a leadership team.

"She's also worked one-to-one with senior, and middle, leaders. She helped strengthen and develop communication and the understanding of our roles, because it's been quite hard to break that 'us and them' feeling between senior leaders and the rest of the extended leadership team.

"Jane helped us focus on important, strategic parts of school improvement. Previously, we would be interrupted in most of our leadership meetings with something that had happened – a child was misbehaving, a

teacher was having difficulties, an angry parent had come onto the school site – so we never actually stopped and had quality time together for strategic decision making.

"Being able to work with other schools in sessions on curriculum development meant we've had time to talk to others about what they were doing and the approaches they use. Everything has obviously been a bit harder due to COVID-19, but to our delight, the school was rated 'good' in all areas by Ofsted last month. There's more work to be done, but we are so proud of where we've got to."

THE ACADEMY OF ST JAMES

Chris Tolson, head teacher at The Academy of St James in Bradford, joined the school in 2017. It was his first headship role and the school had no leadership team, zero governance and was in special measures.

"I was the fourth head the school had had in nine months. There were safeguarding and behaviour issues, standards were low, as was morale among the staff. I think it would be accurate to say the school was fairly broken.

"It was at this point that I heard about Teach First's Leading Together programme, and when I looked at the details of the programme it sounded perfect. It was about building stronger school leadership teams in disadvantaged areas and delivering sustainable improvements to the whole school. And, on top of that, it was completely free of charge.

"Straight away we were put in touch with our Achievement Partner, Clare, a qualified coach and former school leader, who became an indispensable source of expertise and support from the

outset. To be able to benefit from her experience and connections was a gamechanger. With Clare on hand to guide us, the first thing we did was to look at behaviour and safeguarding. We then looked at attitudes to learning and how we could improve that through teamwork and creating a set of core values.

"In terms of attainment outcomes, we've seen sustained improvements across all year key stages. I'm a big believer that you can't improve outcomes without improving behaviour and ethos first, and Leading Together cemented this notion. But the impact of Leading Together hasn't just been about school leaders – we now run a programme of annual events to improve our connection with parents and the broader community.



“The impact of Leading Together hasn’t just been about school leaders –we now run a programme of annual events to improve our connection with parents and the broader community”

“Within three years, the school’s leadership team was robust, rated ‘good’ at our last Ofsted in 80% of areas. There’s more work to be done but we are so proud of where we’ve got to. I’ve seen newly qualified teachers grow into subject leaders, recently qualified teachers taking on responsibility for teaching and learning, and we now have three specialist leaders in education on our staff.”

“We were always a ‘requires improvement’ school. However, in 2016 we went into ‘special measures’. At that same time, we got a new head teacher. It was Jason Robert who enrolled us onto the Leading Together programme with Teach First.

“Networking was invaluable. Being able to talk to people who know what you’re going through as a school, who understand the stresses and the continuous cycle of inspection and external visitors, and getting their perspective on learning to adapt to all of that – it was amazing.

“Through Leading Together, we’ve learnt to be open and honest with the students about what we’re trying to achieve and how we’re trying to get there. We have student voice sessions, where we ask pupils how we can make things better for them. For example, when we did English and maths intervention sessions, we originally planned for five 30-minute sessions a week. When we spoke to the students, they said they found it too much. So, we

5 WAYS AN ACHIEVEMENT PARTNER CAN HELP YOUR SCHOOL

1. Provides bespoke support matched to your school’s needs
2. Develops your entire leadership team with individual and group coaching
3. Accelerates your school’s improvement journey with sustainable change
4. Aligns with the interventions you’re currently doing in school
5. Provides evidence-based learning that’s grounded in the latest research, delivered in manageable chunks online and in person

changed it down to three a week, but added two one-to-one support sessions, which worked really well.

“It’s so important to get staff buy-in to move the school forward. Everyone has ownership of our issue. Because it’s not my issue. It’s not the senior leadership team’s issue. It is our issue, as a school. Leading Together brought us all together, not just the senior leadership team, and made it clear how important it is to bring everyone with you on that journey.

“Ultimately, if you’ve got better teachers and learning, you will get better outcomes. And our outcomes as a school have significantly improved. We are seeing the fruits of our labour now we’ve come out the other end. And it’s been acknowledged by Ofsted as well.”

Find out more about Teach First’s free Leading Together programme here: teachfirst.org.uk/school-leadership

GATEACRE SCHOOL

Gateacre School in South Liverpool serves one of the most disadvantaged communities in England. Assistant head teacher, Paul Creed, says, “Our biggest educational barrier is deprivation. We have high levels of students on free school meals – the national level is 12%, and we have 40%.

The four pillars of effective engagement

Karen Dempster and Justin Robbins look at what underpins effective relations with parents

Decades of research confirms that involving families and the community contributes to children's academic success – and this is easiest to achieve in primary.

However, there remain challenges that face primary school teams and parents. For example, it's assumed that a parent understands what their children are studying, a myth that has been dispelled in the past 18 months of enforced home-schooling. There are language barriers in multi-cultural communities when children are often the interpreters.

Parents will also have different levels of engagement in their child's education, reinforced through their own school experience.

UNDERSTAND WHERE YOU ARE NOW

It's easy to make assumptions about parental engagement with a school, but what you see from within the school gates may not be how it feels on the outside. Putting a mirror up to better understand the outside view can be a valuable exercise to ensure you understand what is going well (your strengths) and areas of concern, or even frustration (where you need to improve).

Are you making the best use of your data? For example, do you look further than whether your pupil retention rate is higher or lower than last year? When pupils choose to move to another school, do you just check if it's more or less than last year, or do you find out what has driven them away? Have you looked into what parents and others are saying and hearing about your school online? What does your attendance rate at parent events tell you?

Think about whether the systems are in place to support strong parent-pupil-school relationships. For example, if parents are receiving messages from various sources in various ways, it will be overwhelming and confusing.

Listen to the views of your school team and, importantly, listen to parents through surveys and focus groups, or less formal drop in coffee type events. Have the same level of listening for pupils too. Some of the older pupils will be able to explain what

support they need from their parents and how school could help.

KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GET TO

Consider what you want to achieve through your relationships with parents. What does active parental engagement mean for your school? How will these relationships help you achieve your business plan and ensure pupils are at their best?

We recommend that you:

- Focus on what you want pupils to achieve.
- Consider what challenges you face as a school and a local community that are influenced by parents.
- Understand what is and is not working right now for each party – parents, pupils and the school team.
- With this in mind, what would active parental engagement look and feel like from your perspective?

DEVELOP A PLAN TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

Remember that in every new school year you gain a new cohort of parents and lose a set of parents who know what to expect. So, you need to keep doing the basics, such as explaining why parents make such a difference.

Once you know where you are and where you want to be, you should start to understand how to close any gaps. These will fall into the areas of Knowledge, Environment, Culture or Communication.

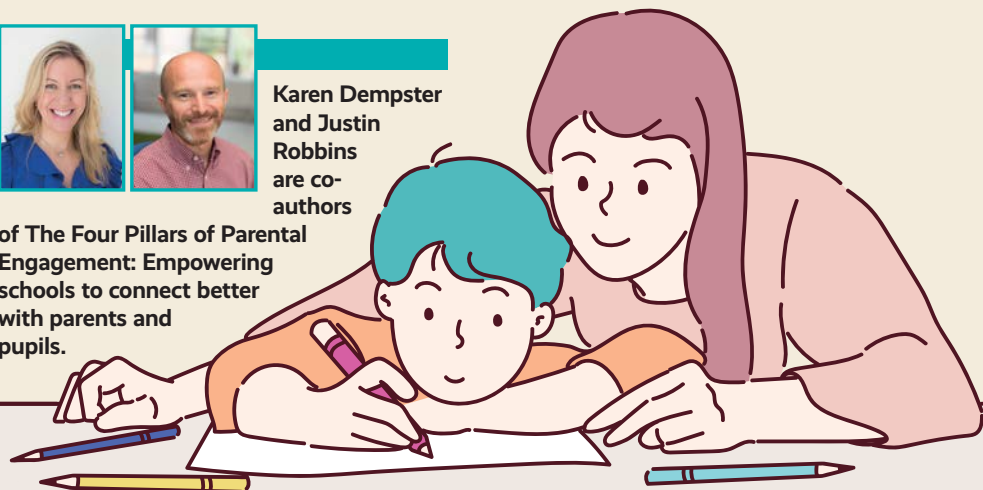
ACTIONS TO TAKE:

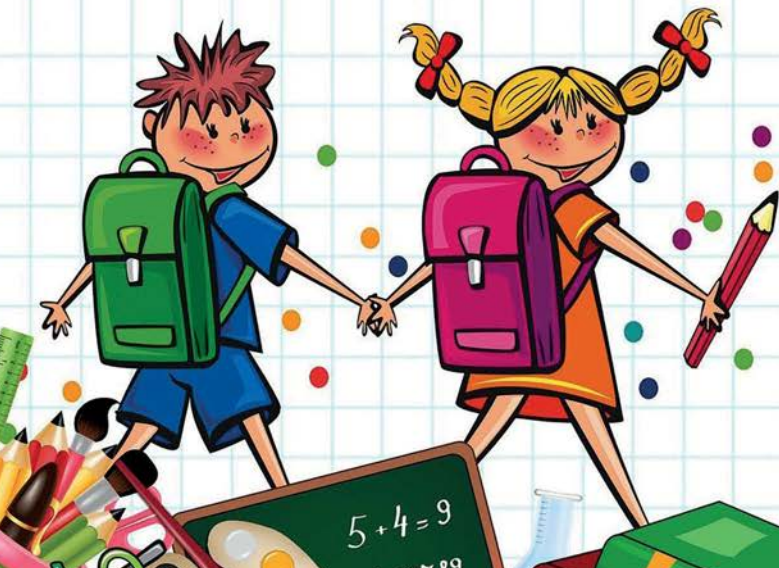
- **Knowledge:** communicate regularly to parents about why their support is so critical and what minimum actions are expected. Recruit some ex-parents who are willing to share their experiences to help new mums and dads avoid making the same mistakes.
- **Environment:** make sure your school is 'parent friendly' with appropriate signs to help them to find their way into school, that reception staff are trained in creating a great first impression and that you are on time for meetings.
- **Culture:** build a trusted relationship by showing parents that you really appreciate their support. Find ways to formally and informally recognise, and even showcase, when they have done a great job. Sometimes a simple thank you is enough.
- **Communication:** put yourself in parents' shoes before sharing information with them. Use accessible language in speaking and writing, and make sure to regularly ask for their feedback.



Karen Dempster and Justin Robbins are co-authors

of The Four Pillars of Parental Engagement: Empowering schools to connect better with parents and pupils.





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