

# the headteacher

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## SCREAMING TEACHERS

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# Welcome

**I**t feels like there are winds of change blowing through education as we move into the next chapter following COVID. The application of the Common Inspection Framework was halted as a result of the pandemic, but now the accountability system has fully returned. At the same time, schools have evolved and there appears to have been systemic reflection not only on what a drive on intent, implementation and impact has achieved, but also where challenges have arisen. These hurdles have been COVID-related, but now leaders are thinking about some of the difficulties that would have been faced regardless of a worldwide crisis taking place. Peter Drucker said, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” You could say in education terms that implementation is king over intent. Turning plans into reality – and then ensuring these strategies make a meaningful, positive impact on pupils, families and staff – is everything. The articles you will read over the following pages are focused on this.

Much of this issue is about development and how schools can move forward, with examples and tips from contributors. Colleagues across education have shared their successes, reflections and learnings with regard to CPD, curriculum, digital strategy and much more. Increasingly it seems headteachers are the agents of change, or at least they commission and support colleagues to do so. Securing long-term and sustainable change isn't easy; we can learn from each other, and the experiences of our peers often help us greatly. In the evolving climate in schools, the development of practice for all is vital. The EEF and others are sharing evidence on a large scale. We hope that the experiences shared in this publication will, in conjunction with your own professional expertise, help you to shape further evidence-informed practice and make the impact your schools and communities require. Enjoy!

Adam Lowing  
Guest editor



## This issue's experts



**Antony David**  
Exec head at St Paul's CE Primary



**Sue Byron**  
Founding partner at LB Integrity



**Kieran Mackle**  
creator of the Thinking Deeply about Primary Education podcast



**Lloyd Williams-Jones**  
deputy head at Staplehurst school



**Nick Hart**  
Exec head in Berkshire



**Jo Roberts**  
Senior development manager at Platform 365



**Mary Myatt**  
Founder of Myatt & Co



**Kate Chhatwal**  
Chief exec at Challenge Partners

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# 14%

DfE pay proposals would mean that by 2023 teachers would be paid on average 14% less in real terms than in 2010.

## TWEET NOTHINGS

@David@Nautilus:

If you're a head and sometimes it feels tough, there is good reason for this. You qualified as a teacher and now find that you work in HR, social care, accountancy, data protection and legal. I'm pretty sure you need to be a qualified doctor to understand high needs.

@MichaelT1979:

Just for reference, my prediction for KS2 results is that the main "surprise" will be how well Writing results held up. If I'm right, can we then all agree that TA and moderation is hopeless and we should think again?



## TEACHER BANS

In the Schools Bill, which was announced in mid-May, it was revealed that the Teaching Regulation Agency's powers are to be expanded. Changes to teacher misconduct legislation will widen the body's remit, enabling it to consider serious misconduct and ban unsuitable teachers from the profession, regardless of whether they were teaching at the time of their misconduct.

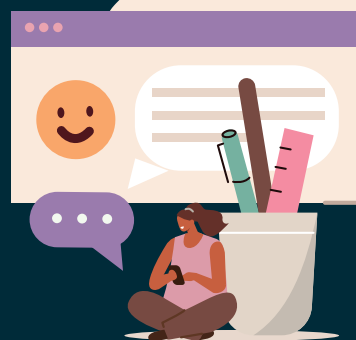
# IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

No time to read the news? Here's your five-minute catch up

## Encourage all to have their say on SEND

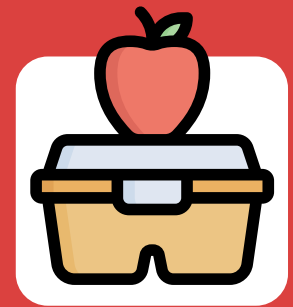
You will be no doubt be familiar with the Green Paper for the government's SEND and Alternative Provision Review, but you may not have heard that the deadline for consultation has now been extended to Friday 22 July. Some colleagues may also be unaware that the plans and thinking laid out in this document are very much subject to this

consultation and that this is therefore an important opportunity for the teaching profession to share its opinions of how changes can be made to the education system's approach to SEND, and on the integration of health and care. Anyone with an interest is entitled to respond – including parents and carers, and children themselves – so all within school communities have a chance to have their voice heard and to give constructive feedback. The government's stated aim is to create a single, national, early-years-to-adulthood SEND and alternative provision system. Visit [sendreview.campaign.gov.uk](http://sendreview.campaign.gov.uk)



## Grade inflation

Statistics reported in the Daily Telegraph highlight both the value of a good degree, and the gender pay gap. They state that, currently, women with first-class degrees earn around £2,200 more than women with 2.1s, while men with first-class degrees earn £4,100 more than men with 2.1s.



## SLIM PICKINGS

The cost-of-living crisis could force schools to choose between offering smaller portions at lunchtime and using cheaper ingredients – that's according to the boss of one of the UK's largest wholesalers: Andrew Selley, the chief executive of food distribution business Bidfood. "Over the last 10 years, the amount of money the government provides for free school meals has only gone up by 1.7%, which is obviously well behind inflation," he said.

## CPD Diary

### COMMUNITY BUILDING

July 9th

Ben Brown (@EdRoundtables) is holding a CPD conference on Saturday 9 July in Birmingham. 'Community building' is the theme, and refreshments and lunch are included. Speakers include Vic Carr, John Magee, Adrian Bethune, Dr Emma Kell, Clemmie Stewart, Chris Dyson, Divya Garg and Gaurav Garg. Visit [educationroundtables.co.uk/birmingham-22-landing](http://educationroundtables.co.uk/birmingham-22-landing) for full details.

### EDUCATION'S FUTURE

July 2nd

The Cambridge Festival of Education 2022 ([cambedfest.com](http://cambedfest.com)), which has the theme 'The Future of Education, the Future is Now', will take place on Saturday 2 July at Milton Road Primary School, Cambridge. The festival team are promising an exciting programme delivered by some of the most inspiring and optimistic thought leaders in education today.

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GEOFF BARTON

# We need funding to tackle pupil absence

The government knows that poor attendance is an issue, but will ministers put their money where their mouth is?

**T**here's no doubt that pupil absence has become one of the big issues of the pandemic. Recent government statistics (available at [tinyurl.com/HDTatt](https://tinyurl.com/HDTatt)) showed an overall absence rate of 11.4% at the end of March 2022. We know that 2.2% of this was Covid-related, and that pre-pandemic the overall absence rate was 4.7%. So, we're left with 4.5% of pupils out of school over and above what we might expect.

There's a health warning with these figures, admittedly. The methodology used to produce them differs from that used in the calculation of the pre-pandemic absence rate – the statistics fans among you can read all about it at [tinyurl.com/HDTatt](https://tinyurl.com/HDTatt). Nevertheless, even accounting for this difference, it does appear to be a commonly held view that attendance has fallen during the pandemic beyond that directly caused by Covid. It is not hard to work out why this might be the case. The disruption of the past two years is likely to have led to more students becoming disengaged than in normal times. Other students may have suffered poor mental health as a result of the traumas and pressures they have encountered during the pandemic. Some families may also be inclined to keep children at home at times when infection rates are spiralling if there are vulnerable individuals in the household.

It all adds up to a worrying picture, particularly as many of the students affected are likely to be vulnerable young people who most need to be in school. The government is aware of the problem and is discussing ways to improve attendance. However, this was, of course, a problem before the pandemic too.

There has long been an issue of persistent absence among some students who become disengaged and whose attendance is increasingly erratic as they get older. The danger is that these young people ultimately drift out of education altogether without meaningful qualifications or prospects.

Clearly, schools are very well aware of who these pupils are, and teaching staff work hard to keep them engaged and in the classroom. But what has made their task all the more difficult is government cuts to funding for local authority education support services over the last decade, at the same as school funding has also been squeezed. The inevitable result of this is



that there is less money available for pastoral support for the pupils who need it. The government's attention on attendance now is welcome, but we might not be in such a serious situation if it had better supported schools and local authorities in the first place.

A recent development on the question of improving attendance comes from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), which published an evidence review in March assessing the efficacy of different approaches to the issue. Overall, it found that the evidence base on how to improve attendance is weak. In an effort to rectify this, the EEF has announced an initiative to build evidence about the effectiveness of different approaches, which will involve evaluating promising initiatives in schools, charities and other organisations.

However, the approaches used by schools are only one half of the picture. As previously mentioned, there needs also to be a focus on resources – in terms of ensuring that schools have enough funding to be able to afford the pastoral support and interventions needed by vulnerable students, and also to ensure that local authorities have what they need to provide the school attendance support services, which have been decimated by a decade of cuts.

In a nutshell, this is about having sufficient numbers of personnel with sufficient expertise and experience to engage with these young people and their families. Without these resources, it will be very hard to make a sustained difference on a national scale. Unfortunately, this is an all-too-familiar problem with government pronouncements on education. There's lots of rhetoric, pledges and targets, but little in the way of extra funding and resources. Schools will always strive to do their best, but there's no getting away from the fact that they need tangible support. **HT**

The danger is that these young people ultimately drift out of education altogether

GEOFF BARTON



is general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders.



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### HOW DO YOU SET GOALS?

There are two ways I approach this. Firstly, it's important to set broader strategic goals and to take the time to consider where the organisation is now, and where it should be in three- or five-years' time. To be successful, this process would ideally involve as many people as is possible. This ensures the team owns that strategy, and plays a part in the development of the organisation. Staff members feel valued and understand their own role in the wider plan. Alongside this, it's important to set annual objectives with every staff member so they know how their role fits into the organisation's strategy.

### HOW DO YOU MOTIVATE STAFF?

Delegating and allowing staff the space to be able to do their job is very important. This is something I've found hard in the past, but I have got better at it over time. Many leaders feel they need to keep an eye on every detail, perhaps because they lack confidence themselves, but this can lead to employees feeling micromanaged and then becoming demotivated.

Once objectives have been set, the leader is there to look at the bigger picture and to plan ahead. Staff need space to flourish, but they also need to be given the opportunity to speak up when they find something challenging. Effort should be recognised through praise and promotion where appropriate.

### WHAT SIGNIFICANT CHANGES HAVE YOU LED SUCCESSFULLY IN YOUR COMPANY?

The biggest change was taking Rising

# I pushed ahead when schools weren't ready

Having built a successful business from scratch, **Andrea Carr** knows how important it is for leaders to listen

### HOW HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM ANY MISTAKES?

There have been times when I've pushed ahead with strategies without properly testing them out first. For example, about eight years ago, I decided that Rising Stars would build an online CPD platform for primary teachers. Nothing really existed that enabled schools to take short online modules to support their teaching and planning. Our research indicated that schools were not ready for online learning, but I felt strongly that it was

needed, and it was the way forward. Now, post-pandemic, everyone recognises this as the new normal, but in 2014 it was still too much of a stretch for most schools. I pushed ahead regardless, we invested quite heavily and sadly it didn't work. Schools were not ready – it was too much technology too soon.

It turned out not to be a catastrophic error, because when things started to move online, we were ready. But it was a salutary lesson that while it's good to be ahead of the curve, you also must listen and tread carefully!

## NEED TO KNOW:

**Company:**  
Rising Stars

**Job title:**  
Founder and  
CEO (2002-2017)

**Time in role:**  
15 years

**No. of staff:**  
28



Stars from an independent business into the arms of a large company. It meant all the staff moved from our own independent bubble to a big corporate environment, with new offices, new systems and new ways of doing things. That was a very tough process for many of the team although the transition (into Hodder Education) was ultimately very successful. There are similarities with the transition of a school into a MAT. It's important to engage all stakeholders, whether staff, customers, students or the wider community. By listening you learn and are more likely to win hearts and minds.

### WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU OVERCOME IN YOUR WORK AS A LEADER?

When you get into a leadership position, you have to accept that you don't know everything and often still have a lot to learn to be effective. One area, for example, in which I had to become pretty expert, quite quickly, was how to effectively oversee the company's finances and to understand cash flow and financial planning. I had to plug those knowledge gaps and I continue to learn. But I also surrounded myself with excellent people with complementary skills. Having a strong SLT is absolutely vital to the success of any organisation. **HT**

## CAREER PATH

**2002-2017**  
Founder and CEO  
Rising Stars

**2014-2017**  
Director, Hodder  
Education

**2017-present**  
Trustee, Causeway  
Education

**2018-2022**  
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Director, Sumdog

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## UNDERCOVER HEADTEACHER

# Ofsted should exist, but the system is too harsh

The vast majority of school leaders accept the need for inspections, but a lack of nuance is causing irreversible damage

**I**f Ofsted no longer existed tomorrow then schools would get worse over time. That's the conclusion you have to draw from a recent Twitter survey of school leaders. Granted, the sample size was only around 500, and the question asked was simplistic. But 92% of those who took part were of the view that an absence of inspection would lead to a worse system. So on this limited data there appears to be overwhelming support of external, robust quality assurance.

Another Twitter source I read recently said that in schools, 15% of 'RI'/'inadequate' judgements led to the headteacher leaving the system. That's not just out of that school, that's out of education all together. I also saw a head say they were stepping down from a serially good school because they could not face another inspection cycle. Though nothing 'wrong' had been flagged for years, they couldn't put their mental health through it.

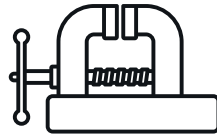
We recently had a school improvement advisor come to my school. She's one of the consultants that Amanda Spielman doesn't approve of. I've worked with her for eight years and her support is invaluable. She's very experienced and has been in and around the inspection system for a long time. We were reflecting on why some schools receive 'RI'/'inadequate' judgements. Her view was sometimes it's due to a school being on a journey, sometimes it's down to ineffectual leadership, and sometimes it's just about circumstances. We fool ourselves in education that we have totally robust contingency plans. But ask yourself, how many of your leadership team on long-term absence would it take to cause significant disruption to your development journey? We talked about how great leaders, or those who are developing at a rapid pace, can sometimes be forced out of both post and education. These people may have spent 10, 20, 30 years reaching that point. They might have so much more to give. But for some, due to circumstances beyond their control, they are compelled by one means or another to leave.

I work in a trust where getting 'outstanding' is everything. My colleagues and I are under constant pressure from trustees that this is the imperative for children, and if you don't achieve the highest judgement

then you're failing your community. They have that view because they listen diligently to Ofsted communication. If they listened to my school improvement advisor, they'd find she talks in a slightly different tone. She still says that children must get the very best education. She still demands the highest standards. But she talks about sustainability, and progress and development, and recognising the situation you're in.

Still, I guess I'm part of the 92% that think we need a quality assurance system. I believe that children deserve a good education. I think the very best practice should be celebrated and signposted for others to learn from. I can

understand why the inspection frameworks end up like they do (though this one is blatantly secondary focused to the detriment of primary colleagues). But something is going wrong. HMIs are often brilliant, insightful professionals who could add so much value to our school system. Many of them do. I'm not challenging them individually; I think they should exist. But the system is too blunt. It's too harsh. It's too binary. Ofsted should be a fantastic agency to facilitate knowledge transfer and drive sustainable school improvement.



**I work in a trust where  
getting 'outstanding'  
is everything;  
we're under  
constant pressure**

Is this the case? Or is there irreversible damage being caused due to a lack of nuance?

Ofsted is a non-profit business unit asked to deliver objectives by central government. My point isn't political. This has been the status quo now for a long time under different administrations. I hope someone, somewhere, stops and thinks about this and looks at a process of reformation and refinement to our system. I'm not calling for abolishment. Nor are other leaders according to my limited insight from Twitter. I'm calling for a proper review of whether the inspectorate model is fit for purpose and the impact it's having on the school system; there are positives but many negatives to our current approach. We can then work towards building a better quality assurance system. My plea is: properly talk to school leaders. Listen. If the ones you're talking to tell you that the damage to headteachers' mental health is caused by school improvement consultants only and not at all by Ofsted, I suggest you talk to some more. Please. **HT**

*The writer is a headteacher in England.*

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ARMANDO DI-FINIZIO

# School leaders need a strong vision

Success is hard to achieve if you don't have a well-thought-through end goal in mind and a road map to get there



**I** imagine that most of the school leaders reading this will have achieved their position because they had a vision and were able to articulate it clearly at interview. A clear vision is for me the number one component of good leadership, providing a school with a consistent philosophy and direction. Why, then, can it so easily be left sitting on the home page of a website or posted on a few walls and given only a cursory glance by a few? It should be the beating heart of a school, influencing every facet of daily life and ensuring constancy of ethos and practice throughout.

A good place to start is to take a step back, be honest with yourself and examine your school vision by asking a few questions. Firstly, do you believe in the importance of a vision? Not one of the schools I've led would have achieved the same level of success had there not been a strong vision in place based on a secure set of related principles, values and beliefs. It sets a challenge for all of us; something to aim for. If the vision is owned by both staff and students, it can serve as a motivator, especially if progress towards it is jointly planned and monitored.

Secondly, is your vision worthwhile? Does it encompass everything your school can do for its students, staff and wider community? How will the school look? How will staff and pupils act? How will your vision manifest itself in terms of success and achievement? If you can't answer these questions, you need to have a rethink with your whole staff body.

Do you have a rationale for your vision, a set of principles, values and beliefs that underpin it? If you're to give staff and students a sense of ownership, then they should be given the opportunity to explore these with you and hopefully challenge you along the way. People will look for cracks in your rationale and that can sometimes be a good thing. It gives you the means to reflect on your direction and practices.

Following on from that, are the principles, values and beliefs consistent with practice? Leave your vision or the principles that underpin it to languish, and a 'pick 'n mix' approach to practices or initiative 'grabbing', will develop. A lack of consistency leads to a lack of clarity.

Is the vision and its rationale fully understood by staff and students? So far, I've mostly referred to the

school vision as your vision, but if you've been able to answer 'yes' to the questions above, then I would hope you now see the vision as being shared: one that staff, students, governors and parents have collaborated upon to varying degrees. There's a fine balance between showing you're clear about the values and principles that are held dear to you (staff expect that of a leader) and showing that you're willing to listen and take on new ideas.

With this in mind, map out your vision, tying it into every aspect of the school and forming it into a long-term strategic plan. A framework that breaks the vision down into components (e.g. the 'What?', 'Why?' and 'How?') will ensure consistency of practice and ethos. Measure progress towards your vision – your quality assurance processes, performance reviews and school improvement plan should all inform the extent to which you are working towards your vision, keeping it alive in the minds of the staff. Finally, regularly evaluate the relevance of your vision. Circumstances change, so you should reassess the relevance or appropriateness of the vision with staff and students.

If there is a resounding 'yes' to all the above questions, then you will have a silent partner, guide and resource there to back up your actions and lead the school forwards consistently and effectively. A school vision may always appear to be just over the brow of the hill, but don't lose patience. It's the road towards achieving that vision that transforms a school.

If you're interested in developing your school's vision further, I discuss the subject in detail in my book, *A Head Full of Ethos: A holistic guide to developing and sustaining a positive school culture* (Crown House Publishing, 2022). **HT**

Your vision should be the beating heart of the school, influencing every facet of daily life

**ARMANDO DI-FINIZIO**



has led three of the country's lowest-performing schools to achieving outcomes well above expectations.

# The Ofsted Report

REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT

City of Birmingham School  
Minerva Centre  
Birmingham  
B45 0DS

@cobspru

## “We never give up on children at our school”

### Preparations

We didn't really a great deal of formal preparation time ahead of the inspection, though we were cognisant of the framework and our school improvement plan, and generally the direction that the school was going. We had recently already carried out a quality assurance review with the head of curriculum to ensure that our offer to pupils was well-sequenced.

I had anticipated we would get the call this year, so I had made a point of speaking to other heads of PRUs and alternative providers to find out what they had been asked and what Ofsted wanted to focus on. It was an opportunity for me to consider on what aspects of our school we'd want to throw the headlights and what we wanted to get across.

We had already worked with a school improvement adviser, who carried out practice sessions ahead of a possible inspection, outlining what staff might be asked and what their responses might be. We were grateful for this input as an inspection can be very daunting for everyone concerned.

### Ofsted's focus

We received the call at 9.30am the day before the inspectors arrived, and we were visited by four inspectors over two days. They were long, full-on days lasting from 8am until about 6pm. However, I felt we were fortunate to get the call so early in the day, as some schools receive it in the afternoon. It meant we had an additional 4-5 hours to prepare and get



everything together.

We were asked for files of information on certain types of students – for example, those with special needs – and this can be quite a big administrative job, so we were pleased to have some additional time.

The inspectors were obviously very focused on teaching and learning, which is in line with the framework and that really formed the bulk of the inspection. They were particularly looking at our provision for English, maths,

**City of Birmingham School**

**STEVE HOWELL**  
Headteacher

<p>Ofsted rating:</p> <hr/> <p><b>Requires Improvement</b></p>	<p>Previous Ofsted rating:</p> <hr/> <p><b>Requires Improvement</b></p>	<p>Pupils on role:</p> <hr/> <p><b>430</b></p>	<p>Income:</p> <hr/> <p><b>£8.52m</b></p>	<p>Outgoing:</p> <hr/> <p><b>£9.64m</b></p>	<p>FSM:</p> <hr/> <p><b>73.5%</b></p>	<p>Pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths:</p> <hr/> <p><b>NA</b></p>
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City of Birmingham School is the City Council's Pupil Referral Unit. In its most recent Ofsted inspection, in March 2022, the PRU was given a judgement of 'Requires Improvement', but inspectors noted it was 'Good' in the areas of behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management.



## “Some of our pupils show difficult behaviours so it is helpful when inspectors are not outraged at what they might be seeing”



science, art and PHSE, and we were able to tell them about our objective – which is that every student should leave with qualifications.

The inspectors were also interested in attendance, but they understood the challenges we face as a PRU, so their focus was not necessarily on the context of percentages and data, but what safeguarding strategies we have in place when students are not here. We are not unusual as a PRU in having attendance rates in the 60% range, but they looked at this very much through the prism of safeguarding. As part of their focus on safeguarding, they visited the three alternative providers that our school uses to deliver part of the curriculum

to review the quality of safeguarding and commissioning and provision.

A third focus was on students' personal development. Being a PRU we have pupils who have significant vulnerabilities, including getting involved in gangs. Their interest was less of a generic look at personal development, and more related to the specific challenges around living in a big city.

It helped hugely that one of the inspectors had experience of an alternative provision setting and the other three were from SEND backgrounds, so they had a very good understanding of the needs of the pupils and the challenges they face. I believe that Ofsted needs more inspectors with

this experience to ensure that settings such as ours can feel reassured that they understand the challenges, particularly around issues such as behaviour. Some of our pupils show difficult behaviours so it is helpful when inspectors are not outraged at what they might be seeing.

### What went well

Ofsted liked the design of our curriculum, which has the needs of children at its core and the fact we are ambitious for their prospects. We offer a good range of GCSE subjects, which not all PRUs are able to do, and we've been doing this for about five years now.

They were also impressed with the leadership and management across the school and the ambitious and strategic approach we have towards driving forward improvement.

The inspectors mentioned safeguarding and recognised we have a relevant approach to this and that this, and behaviour management, is among our strengths.

### Where we can improve

The main areas of improvement identified by inspectors were around meeting the needs of children with SEND, in particular the speed with which we find out about their needs and how we meet those in the classroom. Although the word 'differentiation' was not used, this is really what they were referring to – meeting individual needs and tailoring provision.

Another area for improvement was the curriculum, which they said was still being delivered inconsistently in parts of the school, and support for pupils who had entered the secondary sector with poor reading skills.

Monitoring attendance was another area to address: getting children to attend more regularly and knowing what they are doing when they are not here. We were able to reassure the inspectors that we work with relevant agencies, do home visits and have regular meetings with parents, and that we have a plan in place for monitoring this. **HT**

## BE PREPARED

### What Ofsted asked

#### 1 How has your school changed since the last inspection?

We have re-designed our curriculum and use new strategies to support behaviour management. The school has also been reorganised into seven sites, based on key stages, since we were last fully inspected in 2018. Our school motto says that the community is 'moving forwards together' and, in their report, the inspectors agreed.

#### 2 How do you know children are safe when they're not in school?

What the inspectors wanted to see here was that we were aware of the challenges that pupils face in the community. We work closely with a wider network of other agencies and support services, carry out home visits and pay for taxis to bring them to school. In short, we never give up on our children and try to ensure they are in school as much as possible

#### 3 How do you ensure your curriculum is ambitious?

This was a recurring theme in the inspection and we were able to say that we have an expectation that pupils will do GCSEs or BTecs. Our curriculum is based on mainstream education, and this has been the policy for the last five years. We want our children to leave here with the education and skills to equip them for the next stage of their lives, whether further education or the workplace.

#### 4 How do you meet the specific needs of students?

Pupils sometimes arrive from other schools with limited information about themselves and their prior education so we have to assess their needs, gaps in their knowledge and any other needs they may have. We then aim to structure our lessons, curriculum and teaching to meet these needs.

# THE GOOD AND BAD OF LEADERSHIP PARTNERSHIPS

Balancing the remits of execs and their heads of school requires care, but this is a model that can yield real benefits

**T**

here are some crucial errors that both execs and heads of school can make that either limit or, worse, crush their partnerships.

Get it right and schools can see leadership and school capacity grow; get it wrong

and it can have a whole-school impact, with the real risk of downgraded inspections.

In truth, there's much to celebrate about these partnerships – they provide a vehicle for ambitious leaders to progress and open a path for those who want more than being a deputy, but without the complete 'carry-the-can' weight of being a head. So, how do you make a success of them?

## Strong heads of school

In many cases, these roles grow organically with a successful head taking on the leadership of another school. This can take the forms of federations or less formal partnerships. In this scenario, the success of the partnership isn't on the shoulders of the ambitious executive but the newly instated head of school. In truth, boards must consider carefully who takes on such a position. If they don't have the capacity to lead, then the exec will end up being an operational leader across two schools. This isn't tenable long term and could compromise the strength of one school for the other. At this point there's a risk that one person has spread themselves too thin,

compromising two schools instead of one. An executive model is typically supported by strong heads of school. Then, once a partnership has grown beyond two schools, there is the capacity to support any heads of school with other leaders in the group. However, the risk is in the initial step.

## Overbearing execs

Typically, the type of people who become executive heads are strong-minded, charismatic leaders themselves. They're used to being the figurehead of the school. However, the exec/heads-of-school partnership is far subtler. The role of the exec is to maintain the school's vision, to balance the books and ensure

that resources are deployed effectively – but it's the job of the heads of school to deliver this. Alongside that, it's typically the HoS role to manage curriculum delivery. But this can only happen when a head of school has a clear licence to lead.

Unlike a headteacher, who delivers their vision for education, the head of school is a partnership and therefore can have golden handcuffs. Whilst it's true that every exec/HoS partnership is unique, it's critical that the executive meaningfully delegates roles and that both parties are clear



It's critical that the executive meaningfully delegates roles and that both parties are clear who's responsible for what

who's responsible for what. Failure to do so can undermine the head of school and lead to confusion about who's in charge.

### Leadership costs

There are two reasons why exec/head-of-school models are created: to share strong strategies across more than one school, and to reduce costs. Certainly the exec should expect a pay rise if they're now responsible for more than one set of school duties, but there's a risk here. Due to the lack of transparency to this new model, it's far from clear what an exec should expect to earn.

As a result, some execs can negotiate salaries that far outstrip their worth. This risk will continue until there are clearer national pay grades for executives that boards can establish at the start of the relationship.

### Failure to draw back

An executive will usually have a great deal of input with any new school they work with. The reasons behind this are that they wish to deploy systems, to secure staffing and increase capacity within the school. Typically, they were brought in because there was a risk which has to be addressed with the new role. Once addressed, however, the exec must reassess their position. If all has gone according to plan, then reducing their presence will allow a school to grow independently. There is always the capacity to increase their role should fortunes change, but at this stage they've created capacity which then allows a group of schools to either expand or for the executive to pursue other leadership aspects. Both can grow capacity, but

what boards don't want is an executive resting on their laurels or failing to withdraw. It's the responsibility of the exec to identify when their approach requires a change of tack.

### Leaving an HoS behind

Successful leaders invariably have colourful personalities. As a group grows, so too does the risk of an absent partner. Invites to meetings with the regional school commissioners or to speak at an event of other leaders are all very tempting, but they draw leaders away from their core responsibility. Equally, a rift between the leadership could result in the executive subconsciously moving away from the school. These are risks that leaders should be conscious of and, as grown-ups, address calmly. A rift may require a mediator. Find that person – it's too great a cost to the school to ignore. If an executive is employed to be at a school for half the week, then they should be at that school (they're paying the salary after all).

### Growing beyond personality

With the publication of the White Paper in March, there's the strong chance that small clusters of schools will grow rapidly. This is the greatest challenge for any business: to move from local systems that can be managed reasonably by one person to corporate agreed structures. There are many small businesses who have failed to make this step, and should the group of schools find themselves at this place then it would be wise to consult on next stages as it will be, again, another significant step in leadership.

Finally, the temptation with any growing group of schools is to become myopic. Whilst there's much to be gained by sharing resources and expertise with the group, there are also resources

beyond this that can offer cost-effective support. Ignoring this can result in an echo chamber and a lack of true understanding of impact from a strategy. **HT**

## ADAPT YOUR APPROACH



### A new model

The head-and-deputy model is well established in the UK, and across the world. However, 10 years ago we saw the rise of executive leaders managing heads of school. Looking at the latest job adverts today highlights just how far we've come in the last decade: just 29 deputy roles were advertised nationally versus 461 head-of-school roles. This underlines the importance in understanding how these roles work in partnership when leading schools. It's a bold change – indeed, the most significant since the introduction of Ofsted nearly 30 years ago.



### Key questions

Much is still to be learned about how schools manage these new and rapidly evolving partnerships and the intricacies between the roles, but equally there are plenty of standard ideas that leaders can employ. Ask yourself:

- Are the right people in the right jobs?
- Has the group got the capacity to support the change?
- Are leaders delegating appropriately – can they move from 'do as I say' to 'explore and decide' (or indeed 'just get it done')?
- Are leaders' skills growing rapidly enough for the group to gain capacity for future changes?



### Prepare now

The ambitions of the government's White Paper (March 2022) underline the reality that all schools will find themselves within a new model of leadership in the near future. The capacity we have to make the most of these changes will depend on the strengths of our leaders and the leadership models they employ.



Anthony David, executive headteacher, St Paul's CE Primary School and Monken Hadley CE Primary School.

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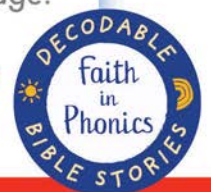
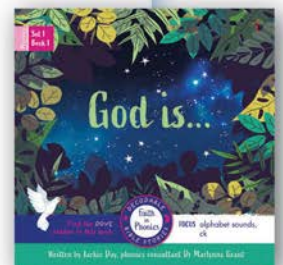
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# “We should not be lemmings of despair!”

A strong partnership between head and business manager is a recipe for success

## MICHELLE WRIGHT

Business manager, Milton Road Primary School, Cambridge

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



## RAE SNAPE

Headteacher, Milton Road Primary School, Cambridge

 @raesnape



### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE RAE IN THREE WORDS?

Passionate, in that she lives and breathes teaching; there's no doubting her belief that education and children can change the world for good. Optimistic: even in challenging times, she lifts with her ways and words. Finally, elegant – everything is always in the right place, for the right reason.

### WHAT MAKES RAE AN EFFECTIVE HEAD?

She sets a clear vision and leads by example. She proves it's the small things that make the big things happen. She sees the role everyone in the school community plays in contributing to its success. I've seen first-hand the impact she's had on individuals to make them feel valued. She really knows her onions!

### HOW ARE YOU PLANNING TO DEVELOP BUSINESS MANAGEMENT IN THE SCHOOL?

I only had two months in-role before Covid hit, so I've had to constantly reset my expectations for what was achievable and needed. I try to apply a strategic approach to everything I do, linking the work of the operations team closely to the vision of the school. Business wise, we're now slowly moving from operational to more financial challenges, so I'll try to retain that approach and think more broadly about how we plan for financial sustainability.

### WHAT DID YOU LAST DISAGREE ON WITH RAE?

I wouldn't say we disagree, but we challenge each other (constructively) regularly. We don't disagree on the principle, but sometimes the approach. The thing we definitely disagree on is the relative merits of Parma Violets!

### WHAT ONE CHANGE WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

I support regulation and accountability in any public system. We need it to provide assurance to the public, not least around safeguarding. That said, I wish those leading us and those who inspect on their behalf would challenge themselves to consider if they're using the right approach, with the right outcomes in mind.

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE MICHELLE IN THREE WORDS?

Michelle is smart, strategic and determined – and also essential (I have snuck in a fourth!). She manages the quotidian thoughtfully, has an eye for the bigger picture, and always works with great positivity and energy towards achieving our aims and ambitions for the school.

### WHAT MAKES MICHELLE AN EFFECTIVE BUSINESS MANAGER?

During her interview for the SBM position, Michelle said the best line that any headteacher could wish to hear; she said, “My job is to help you make the vision a reality!” Michelle has excellent strategic financial and operational skills, she is a great team player and team leader, her reporting to governors is clear and focused, and she is brilliant for bouncing ideas around with! We are a great team and I love working alongside her.

### HOW ARE YOU PLANNING TO DEVELOP BUSINESS MANAGEMENT IN THE SCHOOL?

There are several areas that we're looking at currently – from human resourcing, workforce strategy and line management, to distributed leadership, professional development and learning.

**Michelle said the best line any head could wish to hear: “My job is to help you make the vision a reality!”**

### WHAT DID YOU LAST DISAGREE ON WITH MICHELLE?

It was not a disagreement as such, but I had spotted some fabulous-looking leaf-shaped shelves for our library renovation. We needed quite a few, though, and when Michelle added them all up, the sum was quite substantial – so together we decided to look at an option that would be better value for money.

### WHAT ONE CHANGE WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

We are the system! So, the change I would make would be to encourage all educators to tell the most positive story they can about our elegant, noble and vital calling. Educators are the profession that create all others, after all. We should be #flamingosofhope and not lemmings of despair!

plazoom

Years  
1-6

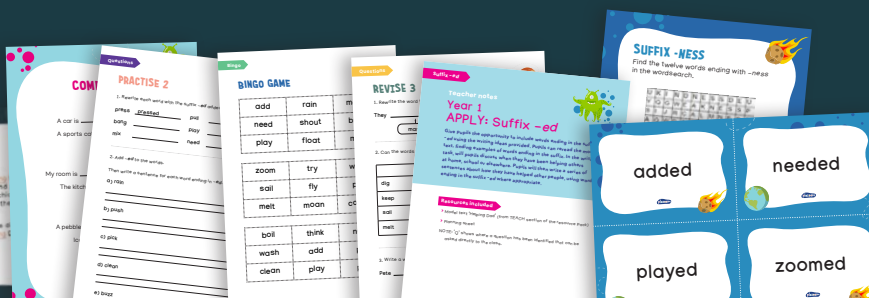
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# HERE'S WHAT your team wants from training

## MORE SUBJECT DEVELOPMENT

Just 27% of primary teachers think that the balance of professional development is right in their school. Primary teachers need to be a jack-of-all-trades, so it's no surprise that what respondents would most like to see is more subject professional development. A similar percentage, 31%, want more key stage professional development too.

# 61%

Some 61% of teachers don't agree that CPD in their school is part of a coherent programme. In fact, teachers without significant responsibility were the least likely to think their development programme was coherent. Just 31% of classroom teachers said their school had a coherent programme, compared with 68% of heads.

# 20+ YEARS

Primary teachers with 20 or more years of experience were the least likely to agree that their school's procedures were making them better teachers. Incidentally, they were the most likely to say they would like to gain a deeper knowledge of the subject they teach. Early career teachers wanted the most focus on classroom behaviour.



## HOW STUDENTS LEARN

Despite the pessimism, there are several areas teachers have been supported to improve over the past year: 34% of primary teachers say they have a better understanding of how students learn and 24% have developed their knowledge of assessment. So, for a single action to improve CPD, our survey says 'Subject knowledge'!

# 7%

Very few primary teachers said that the reason they entered the profession was to pursue a strong interest in their subject (just 7%), so teachers wanting more subject-specific development makes sense. Instead, three in four said that the main motivation for their career choice was that they wanted to work with young people and make a difference in their lives.

Supporting staff to improve their teaching practice is crucial, but what should school leaders focus on? TeacherTapp shares its findings

Professional development can be challenging to get right. Staff all have different strengths and weaknesses and so targeting development accordingly can be difficult, to put it mildly. Even so, many teachers feel like their school's performance management could do more to help them improve their classroom practice. Some 49% of primary classroom teachers say that performance management procedures haven't at all helped improve their classroom practice. So, what can heads focus on to shift this perception?



Iain Ford is senior data and reporting analyst at TeacherTapp. You can take part in and see the results of regular teacher surveys by signing up to the TeacherTapp app ([teachertapp.co.uk](http://teachertapp.co.uk)).



Thoughtfully  
designed  
classrooms to  
enrich the  
curriculum

# A new space for learning



**Liz Marden, Founder & CEO**  
Early Excellence  
[www.earlyexcellence.com](http://www.earlyexcellence.com)

**Do your Early Years' classrooms truly reflect your vision for learning? Have they come together by accident or been carefully planned to offer rich, meaningful and joyful experiences for young children? Here we take a look at a few things to help you reflect on your environments and share the impact story from Stockport Grammar School.**

## Securing the Development & Progression of Skills

As well as encouraging children's independence and nurturing a wide range of learning behaviours, a well-planned and carefully resourced environment supports the acquisition, development and progression of knowledge and skills – promoting mastery learning.

By creating spaces that are appealing, continually available and familiar to young children, you support deeper levels of learning as children return to, repeat and extend their ideas over time.

And when each resource is chosen to not only connect with children's interests and their natural curiosity to investigate, but also with its curriculum purpose in mind, we ensure that what is made available to children in continuous provision, supports learning across the curriculum.

## Offering Core Learning Experiences

Planning these core learning experiences is essential and best not left to chance. The intelligent classroom provides a blend of teaching and learning strategies with continuous provision used to empower children to learn through hands-on experiences on their own, with their peers and with supportive, skilful adults.

Alongside continuous provision, using enhancements to focus on particular aspects of learning brings new and exciting opportunities to enrich language, deepen understanding and embed prior learning in new and diverse contexts – and of course directed activities, both small group and whole class, are vital for teaching key concepts and helping children to practice skills.

If we consider the words of Julie Fisher then we have the opportunity to create classrooms that truly support young learners.

**"The quality of early learning is stimulated, supported and provoked by the quality of the environment in which young children are being educated."**

**Julie Fisher**  
Starting from the Child

## Contact Early Excellence for Advice & Support

To gain help in developing your practice and provision, talk to one of our Curriculum Consultants today.

Contact our team on:  
**+44 (0) 1422 311 314**  
[admin@earlyexcellence.com](mailto:admin@earlyexcellence.com)

## Case Study

# Inspirational Learning with Stockport Grammar School

"The whole process to refurbish our indoor learning environment in partnership with Early Excellence worked really well from start to finish. We worked with an experienced curriculum consultant to plan how to use our space and we were really impressed with the innovative ideas we achieved.

Once set up, we saw immediate benefits and impact. The children are calm, settled and fully engaged with the resources. It is definitely "their" classroom! The provision areas make the children feel safe and secure and play and talk evolves quickly throughout the day. We are thrilled to see deeper levels of learning and a clear impact on children's progress and their levels of development.

Our parents are incredibly impressed with the learning environment, which looks so inviting and welcoming but also purposeful and with appropriate challenge. They often comment that they want to stay, play and learn too.

The Early Excellence environment has not only transformed our provision but also helped to deepen our understanding and develop our practice."

**Catherine Hampson**  
EYFS Teacher  
Stockport Grammar School





# Transforming Early Years Classrooms



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# Is your school accurately assessing your students?

Emma Ringe - Schools Director, Whizz Education



**R**eal-Time Assessment and reporting on children's progress across the whole school, are some of the most significant challenges facing schools today. It can come at a substantial cost yet often does not provide the information needed to gain the insights to make robust decisions.

**What if there was an education consultancy who could provide you with:**

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- The same reporting quality across every class
- A standard learning metric that benchmarks every student in your school
- Data-driven instruction embedded in the school day
- An Education Success Partner dedicated to your school to determine the best format of the tutoring sessions

Whizz Education collaborates with schools across the UK to identify specific learning objectives and develop strategic implementation plans which encompass; high impact maths tutoring, continuous formative assessment and course correction, driven by combining quantitative learning data with an understanding of our partners' local context. An added benefit to Whizz Education is our ability to support Special Educational Needs and disabilities students (SEND) for in school and at home learning. Whizz can remove barriers to promote equity and inclusion to ensure that every student can achieve in maths!

As a long-standing education partner accountable for learning outcomes within international schools, Whizz Education can support you and your school through a consultative process

that takes into account the unique context of your school, to recover lost learning experienced by your students during the pandemic, rapidly.

**Lorna Blackhurst**, former Deputy Head Teacher and Gordon Farquhar Head Teacher King James Academy: *"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."*

**Sarah Clafin**, deputy headteacher and subject leader in maths St. Michael's VA Junior School: *"Whizz Education partnered with St. Michael's to help them enrich their classroom teaching with Maths-Whizz, providing personalised learning for students and empowering teachers to instantly track every student's progress. Since starting with Maths-Whizz, our year-on-year SATs results have got better and better; our scores shot up!"*

**Jess Morris-Marsham**, Maths Leader, Team Leader for Years 3 and 4 and Year 5 Teacher at Roskear Primary: *"Every half term, we assess standardised age scores. The results have shown accelerated progress. For example, our most recent assessments identified the Year 2 pupils who were below ARE in the autumn. Following the after-school interventions, where children used the Maths-Whizz virtual tutor for two hours per week, each one of those children had reached ARE within six weeks."*

Whizz Education uses analytics generated by the virtual tutor Maths-Whizz, synthesised with qualitative feedback and reflections from our Education Success Partners to enable the implementation plan to be refined so students and teachers realise the full benefits of individualised tutoring. We refer back to the objectives of improving

ARE and increasing the Maths-Age for example, by working in collaboration with schools to understand the context, any challenges and behaviours, and then we develop a course correction to improve performance.

Data can also be used to compare students' progress with performance in a school's chosen third party assessment. Reliable data can be used to supply to boards of governors and OFSTED.

Whizz Education collaborates with schools across the UK to identify specific learning objectives and develop strategic implementation plans. By working together, we can make a significant contribution to recovery through data driven, continuous assessment programmes designed to spot learning gaps and enabling teachers to give targeted support without additional burden.



**Emma Ringe**  
School Director  
Whizz Education



The Head's Guide To...

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

# 40

## You don't have to be the expert

The art of distributed leadership

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## Developing your curriculum

# WHY TAKING IT SLOW WILL RAISE RESULTS



**A**s leaders, we are often tasked with effecting rapid school improvement. But prioritising pace over sustainability carries risk and has undermined school improvement in many schools around the country. This is not to say that their leaders haven't been doing the right thing; the reality is that too much pressure has been placed on many of them to increase the pace and volume of their school improvement work. We can and should challenge this counterproductive reasoning in a way that ensures sustainable improvement to the curriculum without overburdening leaders and teachers.

We all have school improvement/development plans, and hours are poured into these each year to ensure that we are focusing on the priorities validated by all stakeholders. However, while we still create these plans at my school, they have now been significantly condensed into a set of streamlined priorities to avoid the pitfalls described above while continuing to drive development. Alongside this, we have also developed an overarching, longer-term plan that specifies our phased approach to school improvement.

### Key outcomes

- Subjects that have been through phase one are now well sequenced, and history and geography are understood by staff.
- Leaders can talk confidently about their subjects.
- Stakeholders are committed to the direction of development.



### 1. ENSURING THE NEEDS SHAPE THE PLAN

Firstly, it is important to step back and review the curriculum, through a lens of subject development and status. In the first instance, I met with our middle leaders and spent time discussing and evaluating where each subject was on its journey. From this, I was able to ascertain which subjects needed a 'focus' or 'spotlight' (see Nick Hart's podcast featuring Kieran Mackle, Thinking Deeply about Primary Education: [tinyurl.com/HDTtdpe](http://tinyurl.com/HDTtdpe)). This decision was determined by whether the curriculum for the identified subject was 'off the shelf' or developed in-house. From here, we were able to place subjects into three phases of development. Some subjects would be focused on immediately in phase one. Others would come later in either phase two or three. We decided that humanities would be at the heart of our project and placed both history and geography into phase one alongside science. The meaningful links that can be made between these three subjects and the overlap of key concepts made them an excellent springboard for later curriculum

development. They were also curricula that we intended to develop in-house rather than customise from an off-the-shelf curriculum. There's nothing wrong with a bought-in product, but having the ability to shape a curriculum allowed us to control the sequencing and make local links to ensure that these curricula reflected our community.



### 2. ORGANISING IMPLEMENTATION – HOW TO MAKE SURE YOUR SYSTEMS ARE CLEAR

With our subject development priorities in order, we put systems in place to ensure that the curriculum work could be done. As a leadership team, we carved out protected space in the timetable for curriculum



development. Relevant subject leaders were given release time one afternoon a week. When required, they worked with me or an external curriculum expert to clarify our goals. On other occasions, they used this time to work independently on their curriculum area. The EEF guidance on professional development mechanisms ([tinyurl.com/HDTepd](https://www.tinyurl.com/HDTepd)) supported our work here and continues to be a useful reference point. In each phase, some subjects are not focused upon in the way described above. The headteacher and I meet the 'non-focus phase' subject leaders to help them with their implementation plans, so that they're primed for when their subject becomes the focus. This all feeds back to our leadership team.

Having this mixture of distributed leadership and

centralisation ensures that things are still being developed, but not at the cost of other priorities. This also prevents teachers from becoming overwhelmed by too many changes at once. Having weekly time and communication with the 'phase focus' middle leaders allows us to determine the 'active ingredients' which form the mechanism for improvement; this is then reflected in our phased strategic curriculum development plan.



### 3. IMPLEMENTING 'RESPONSIVE FIDELITY'

Beginning with history and geography, our humanities lead worked hard to promote buy-in and outline the 'why' of our curriculum development goals. We wanted to move

towards a 'knowledge-rich' approach, and it was essential that staff understood what this meant, alongside the vision for implementation. The humanities lead was asked to specify the knowledge that pupils would learn through our history and geography curricula. The active ingredients here were that this substantive knowledge needed to match our goals for the curriculum and be coherently sequenced. The challenge lay in supporting the subject leader's understanding through opportunities to play with ideas while still ensuring that the active ingredients were preserved. This required what we call 'responsive fidelity', which entailed being clear in our minds about what needed to be tightly controlled in the final outcome while recognising the temporary slack needed to respond to teacher development needs. In order for teachers to implement change effectively, we moved to a model of 'planning days', whereby each year group team has a day each term to focus on subject knowledge, sequencing and task design for the following term. This mechanism allowed staff to work together and gave them time to research and understand the knowledge they aim to help children learn.



### 4. REVISIT, REVIEW AND REFINE YOUR CURRICULUM

As we moved through phase one, it was important to build in mechanisms for review. Subject leads carried out surveys with staff and also visited year groups at the start and end of planning days. This feedback was then centralised back into the leadership team and discussed, allowing us to make decisions related to responsive fidelity. This process enabled us to identify that we needed more work on the design of our units to better support the pupils' writing of essays at the end. This resulted in a change to our INSET schedule so that we could focus on the consolidation of sequencing for planning, rather

## WHAT WE LEARNT

- It is often argued that a 'lesson' is the wrong measurement of time to frame learning. We would argue that the same principle applies to school improvement. Don't let arbitrary time frames dictate the pace of your implementation.
- Make sure that you consider the active ingredients of curriculum development through the lens of 'responsive fidelity'. Stay true to the principles, but allow slack when implementing to match the developmental needs of your subject leaders. Be tight, when it's right.
- Being responsive and understanding where your staff are on your journey is essential. It's this that sets the speed of implementation.
- We underwent a section 5 inspection in January. The report noted favourably our 'measured' approach to curriculum improvement. I believe that by slowing down in the short term, our curriculum development has been built on solid foundations that allow for quicker progress over the long term. Our experiences so far are testament to this.



Lloyd Williams-Jones is deputy headteacher at Staplehurst School in Kent.

than the intended session on spelling.

We're now well into phase two of our curriculum development, but that doesn't mean that phase one subjects are 'done'. They too are now in a 'non-focus phase' with leaders being primed for further improvement when they next move back into focus. Teachers still have the dedicated planning days to continually revisit, review and refine the curricula for the subjects they lead. We hope this sustained investment of time and expertise will continue to bear fruit. **HT**



## How to improve your curriculum by

# ENSURING IT IS BROAD AND BALANCED



**T**here are several reasons why curriculum quality has risen up the agenda. For one, there's increasing recognition that the curriculum is more than preparing pupils for end-of-key-stage tests. It goes without saying that it is important for children to become competent in literacy and numeracy; however, if the wider curriculum is pruned in order to focus on SATs, then many will miss out on their full curriculum entitlement. We also know that pupils who don't do as well in the English reading test at the end of Year 6 generally stumble due to a lack of vocabulary. So how do we develop pupils' vocabulary? Well, by providing them with a rich, broad and balanced curriculum. And then the latest inspection framework ([tinyurl.com/HDTeif](https://tinyurl.com/HDTeif)) contains the quality of education judgement with a focus on the curriculum, which has provided the impetus for many schools to review the extent to which their curriculum is truly ambitious for all pupils.

Given the increased interest in the curriculum, John Tomsett and I wrote *Huh: Curriculum conversations between subject and senior leaders* ([tinyurl.com/HDThuh](https://tinyurl.com/HDThuh)) because we wanted to provide examples of how great subject leaders approach thinking about and planning for pupils' success in their specialisms. It quickly became clear that a primary book based on similar conversations with subject specialists would be welcomed, and so now we have *Primary Huh* ([tinyurl.com/HDThuhp](https://tinyurl.com/HDThuhp))



### 1. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT SHOULD NEVER STOP

The curriculum is a never-ending story, which means we need to become comfortable with the fact that our work will never be done. However, instead of thinking of that as a chore, it is far more productive to regard curriculum development as a stimulating, intellectually interesting piece of work to get your teeth into. We have found that colleagues become excited and that their passion for sharing important and interesting material with pupils is ignited when they come to realise just how fascinating it is. And if the curriculum is a never-ending piece of work, we simply can't rush to get it all done quickly; we need to pace ourselves, and work on it over time. And so how does this all relate to 'Huh'? Well, John discovered that Huh is the Egyptian god of endlessness, creativity, fertility and regeneration, and we think that it is a pretty good metaphor for our work on the curriculum!



### 2. CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LEARNING AREN'T ALWAYS POLISHED

If revisiting the curriculum feels like a daunting prospect, then

one of the most helpful things we can do is to talk to other people about how they have developed the curriculum for their subject or key stage. The conversations that form the heart of this book have been genuinely inspiring to engage with. Gadamer said, "No one knows in advance what will 'come out' of a conversation [...] a conversation has a spirit of its own, and the language in which it is conducted has a truth of its own so that it allows something to 'emerge' which henceforth exists." (Gadamer, 1991) The book's intention is to try and model how those conversations might go. We wanted to get away from so many professional learning materials that are polished to within an inch of their lives. Instead, we wanted

## Key Insights

- Signposting to high-quality curriculum resources is vital.
- Conversations about curriculum are at the heart of school improvement.
- Developing the curriculum takes time; think what you can cut.





something that accurately reflects the reality of the professional conversations that take place in schools up and down the country.

The upside of a book like this is that it contains the insights and ideas of individuals working hard to work out what to include and what to leave out. The downside of a book like this is that by presenting one take on a route through the potential minefield of curriculum design, it might be regarded as the only way to do it, which isn't the intention at all. We invited colleagues to critique and consider these conversations in the light of their own experiences and contexts. The films which formed the basis for the individual chapters are available to view on the Myatt

& Co website (visit [myattandco.com](http://myattandco.com)). This means that teachers and leaders have the chance to hear and watch how these conversations went and make their own assessments: they certainly weren't polished, and we think this is a good thing. As Sir Tim Brighouse says: "At the heart of school improvement is teachers and leaders talking about teaching and learning."



### 3. WHY LEARNING EACH SUBJECT IS VITAL

In the spirit of Huh, the intention is that the subject chapters contained within the book form the fuel for endless, creative, fertile and regenerative curriculum conversations in

primary schools, and that from those conversations clarity and truth emerge as we all work to provide our young people with rich, challenging, ambitious curricula, whichever school they attend. We wanted to articulate what is unique about each subject, how it develops pupils both intellectually and emotionally, and what they might be missing out on if they came to school and were not taught that subject. And so, each section begins with passion and clarity about why learning in that arena matters – not just to society in general but also to our pupils and the communities served by our schools.

Each chapter provides insights into the importance of individual subjects and the unique contribution each one makes to pupils' cognitive and personal development. The subject chapters discuss the steps colleagues take to ensure that there is a coherent thread across the year groups, as the discrete subjects deliver, collectively, the primary curriculum.



### 4. CONSIDERING THE BIG IDEAS

We have tried to make the book as helpful as possible, so in addition to the conversations with subject leaders, we have also included the background to each subject – why we believe it has a place in the curriculum. In addition, there are extracts from the purpose of study and importance statements for each subject. We have included these because we believe that there is sometimes a tendency for teachers to go straight to the programmes of study to see what needs to be taught, without considering the big ideas which underpin the subject. There are also links to professional communities and subject associations, as well as links to helpful websites to further support subject development and high-quality materials. [HT](#)

## WHAT WE LEARNT

Creating a balanced, high-quality curriculum is no simple task, but it is well worth the effort...

- John Tomsett and I are secondary practitioners. While we have both done extensive work in primary schools over the years, we knew that we needed additional primary expertise to bring our project to fruition. So, we enlisted the help of a handful of primary colleagues to support us: Rachel Higginson, Lekha Sharma and Emma Turner. Alongside this, we also interviewed more than 30 primary practitioners about how they go about designing the primary curriculum.

- Considering the diverse nature of primary schools in this country, you probably won't be surprised to hear that we were soon confronted by numerous context-dependent curriculum complexities that we needed to unpick. The conversations we had as part of this process confirmed that shaping a primary school curriculum can be a really tricky business!

- Along the way, we also learned that primary subject experts are truly alert to the beauty and power of their subjects: they know how to make it local and relevant to their children; they know how to extend the boundaries so that pupils can engage in and contribute to the world beyond their classroom.



Mary Myatt is the founder of Myatt & Co and the co-author of Primary Huh:

Curriculum conversations with subject leaders in primary schools (John Catt Educational, £11.55), which is available now.

# Maths-Whizz

Headteacher Claire Birkett explains how Whizz Education is supporting Beckermet CofE Primary School to accelerate pupils' progress

## PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

Inevitably, we had noticed gaps in maths knowledge following the disruption caused by Covid. We were looking for an education partner that could provide a solution specific to our children's needs across our whole school and which supplemented and complemented our teaching of the curriculum. We were recommended Whizz Education, which helped us plan an approach to tackle this pressing challenge.

Part of the plan included use of Whizz Education's award-winning virtual tutor Maths-Whizz, which has enabled us to assess and identify precisely where the knowledge gaps are and now empowers our teachers to step in and provide more support and resources so children can hit targets. Rather than a bolt-on, Maths-Whizz has already become integral to our teaching of the curriculum.

Whizz Education provided teacher training and also a virtual parental session to guarantee understanding and engagement and ensure we could maximise our investment.



### Contact:

0203 328 65646

[support@whizz.com](mailto:support@whizz.com)

[www.whizz.com](http://www.whizz.com)

## IN PRACTICE

We timetable the use of Maths-Whizz in class in addition to normal lessons. All of our 73 pupils from Y1-Y6 use the virtual tutor for up to an hour per week. Teachers are able to analyse the data created automatically by the tutor to inform lesson planning. The Teachers Resource, which is a library of printable worksheets, supplements planning too.

We monitor the progress of each individual or groups of children while they all work at their own level and pace. This is great for the range of abilities within each class and has been helpful for SEND students too. We also set Maths-Whizz for homework. One benefit is that no marking is needed – the tutor runs itself, automatically adapting and identifying strengths and weaknesses so children progress across the whole maths curriculum. We can also send motivational messages, which ensure engagement.

## THE RESULTS

Our children are rapidly gaining confidence. They love the online nature of the platform and it's become part of their routine. We can already see how knowledge gaps are being identified and filled. Children are in the range they should be in areas which they previously found challenging.

We can also demonstrate accelerated learning: of our pupils using Maths-Whizz for more than 45 minutes per week, 75% have made accelerated progress. The average improvement across the whole school in Maths Age (a bit like Reading Age) is 17 weeks, which at the time of writing has been achieved with just 11 weeks' use so far.

As we continue to work towards filling in the learning gaps left by Covid, we're now confident that, with the support of Whizz Education, our children have the best opportunity to achieve their full potential in maths.



**THE PLACE:** Beckermet Church of England Primary is a school in Cumbria that aims to give every child the opportunity to shine and achieve their full potential.



**THE CHALLENGE:** Covid disruption had inevitably led to lost learning, and thus the need to fill gaps in maths knowledge. We needed to find an effective solution.

## Did we mention?

Working in partnership with school leadership, Whizz Education creates mutually agreed implementation plans for maths provision. It provides headteachers with reliable data that can be submitted to Ofsted and boards of governors that demonstrates progress and attainment. Confidence that all students are receiving the same high-calibre of teaching across the school is facilitated through teacher capacity building, and a combination of context and data that drives course correction.



## School Profile



**Name:** Charles Dickens Primary School

**Headteacher:** Michael Eggleton

**Location:** Southwark, London

**Ofsted rating:** Outstanding

**Size:** Approx 483 pupils

**Extra info:** Part of The Charter Schools Educational Trust



**MICHAEL EGGLETON, HEADTEACHER**

# “It’s important for children to have their voices heard”

Pupils are encouraged to understand their own rights as humans and citizens at this south London primary, finds Charley Rogers





f I asked you what knowledge or skills you'd most like your

pupils to take away from their primary experience, what would you say? Perhaps self-confidence, awareness of the world around them, or respect for themselves and others? Well, Charles Dickens Primary School prides itself on providing all this and more.

Back in 2016, Charles Dickens became a Rights Respecting School, for which it adopted the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (or UNCRC for short). The Convention is a series of articles outlining the rights that children legally have as humans and as citizens. It includes some stipulations that you might expect, such as the right to an education, and to shelter and food, but also some more modern developments, such as the right to information from the media, and the right to express their feelings in all matters relating to them. The UNCRC also stipulates that governments must 'actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention'. Charles Dickens Primary is certainly doing that.

"We knew that our children were getting a good quality education," explains headteacher Michael Eggleton, "but also that that's not the case for everyone in the world, so it's good to open their eyes to how privileged they are, and how we can support others."

That's not to say a lot of the children at the school aren't disadvantaged, says Michael, or that they don't have certain areas they need to work through, but the staff wanted pupils to be able to learn about other areas of the planet, and hear about things they may not otherwise come across.

### Embedding change

Instead of just surfacing these globally conscious conversations through PSHE lessons, at Charles Dickens knowing your rights is embedded throughout the entire curriculum. "We're a knowledge-rich school," explains Michael, "and once we had decided we were going to pursue the Rights Respecting School route, we thought the best way to embed it would be to make our own curriculum booklets." These booklets not only provide a deep knowledge for pupils in every subject, but also seamlessly embed the Rights of the Child into lessons. Deputy head David Windle elaborates: "It's all woven in. One booklet, which covers the Amazon Rainforest, is about logging and deforestation, and empowering people to make changes. Another classic Year 5 topic looks at the



abolition of slavery, however it's not just about the history, but the personal empowerment as well, which leads to social change."

Societal change and influence are not only theoretical at Charles Dickens. Children are encouraged and supported to play an active role in their community, and have taken part in projects such as protest marches and sending letters to MPs to oppose development over local park land, (it

### SPECIALIST LEARNING

As well as embedding the UNCRC within the main curriculum, Charles Dickens Primary also employs specialist teachers for subjects such as music, PE, French, and art. "We think it's essential that our children get access to this kind of cultural capital, no matter their background," says Michael. "We have after-school clubs for things like karate, boxing and street dance, which are all free, and we provide heavily-subsidised music lessons." The goal over the next three years, says Michael, is to double the amount of music lessons on offer, using Pupil Premium funding to make as many free as possible. "We want all pupils to have a fighting chance," he explains, "and part of that is offering subjects their peers in independent schools may have – traditionally – better access to, as well as making sure they're as qualified as possible for secondary school scholarships, if that's their goal." A dedicated, specialist music teacher and rehearsal space means that every child has a chance at picking up an instrument. "Depending on the day, you could walk in and see every single pupil with an instrument in their hand," says Michael proudly. On top of this, Charles Dickens also has a dedicated art studio, where children are encouraged to get messy and explore their creativity, and a spacious, purpose-build gym, where coaches from Southwark Gymnastics teach classes every week.

is still there). A major moment of activism also happened for Year 6 children when they were invited to speak with prime minister Boris Johnson ahead of his trip to Norway for a climate conference in 2021. Michael says: "The children had written letters to the prime minister about the conference, and were subsequently able to interview him on the topic. It was important for them to have their voices heard like that." Ongoing community projects have also seen Charles Dickens pupils grow vegetables and donate them to Dickens Pantry, a community foodbank run from the school that supports local families.

But surely all these extra activities take precious time away from an already-packed curriculum? Not really, says Michael. "Any change is always a challenge, but because we have created the curriculum booklets, everything is laid out for teachers and they don't have any extra reading to do," he says. Teachers no longer even need to take training for the approach, because it's been fully distilled into the curriculum, and new staff have everything they need from day one in the booklets.

### Encouraging agency

What is entirely evident at Charles Dickens Primary School is the high level of agency at play; both for the staff and for pupils. The school has been judged as Outstanding by Ofsted since 2008, which has allowed a

certain amount of freedom in their approach, and means that staff are able to adapt their provision to the needs of the class.

All this to say, the UNCRC doesn't just have an impact on the children's school activities. It is a wide-ranging benefit that will hopefully carry through their lives, into secondary school and beyond. "The great thing is that children know how to stay safe,

what they should expect from us as adults, and how to tell when something isn't quite right," explains Michael. From a safeguarding point of view, this is hugely helpful – both for the school, and for children and their parents.

Daniella Jamois, one of the assistant heads at Charles Dickens and current Reception teacher, says that teaching children about their rights and responsibilities helps to strengthen the local community, and bring different kinds of families together. "We're a very mixed community," says Daniella, "and so there are pupils in social housing who live in close proximity to those who might have much fancier accommodation. Their parents often have very different professional backgrounds too, so the school has become a real hub for them to mix and learn to understand each other, and we have a very strong parent community."

But it hasn't always been the smoothest ride. "When we began using UNCRC, some parents were a little bit fearful," says Michael. "A bit worried that we were putting too much ownership on the children to understand their own rights, and that perhaps they might even use that as a weapon against their caregivers. There was the odd occasion where children had tried to use lines at home like "I know my rights! I don't have to brush my teeth!" But, of course, that's a misconception, and once we fine-tuned our communication with parents, and they understood we weren't teaching their kids that they could stay up and eat chocolate all night, they were on board," Michael chuckles. "Now they're aware we're teaching the children about our responsibility as carers and teachers to keep them safe and give them what they need, and in turn, that pupils must respect their responsibility to work with us."

## Positivity breeds positivity

It makes sense then, that another of the Charles Dickens Primary School



## MEET THE STAFF



**DANIELLA JAMOIS**

Assistant head & Reception teacher

We have such a strong community here. There are all sorts of children, from all sorts of backgrounds on roll, and we're a real hub, allowing for that community crossover. We have a close parent community.



**LUCIA NARVAEZ**

Year 3 teacher

It's my first year of teaching and everyone is so supportive. Lots is done for you, like with the booklets, so you can spend your PPA time actually adjusting to the needs of your class, which is really valuable.



**ROBERT PAUL**

Year 4 teacher & year leader

It's always great, during School Council elections, how seriously the children take the exercise, and how empowered they are by it all. They perform a speech if they'd like to be a councillor; then they vote.



**AGGIE MESMAIN**

Early help manager

I've worked at Charles Dickens for 35 years, so I've seen a lot of changes – all for the better! The children know their rights, what to expect from adults and each other, and how to talk about it all.

## Teachers found that children not receiving after-school marking in books weren't at any disadvantage academically

initiatives, alongside being a Rights Respecting School and Research School, is the Behaviour Hub. Last summer, the Department for Education (DfE), along with its lead behaviour advisor, Tom Bennett, began identifying schools who were marked as Outstanding by Ofsted, and had very strong behaviour, to lead as support hubs for the rest of the country. The leadership team at Charles Dickens decided to apply, based on their strong record. "The newspapers at the time were reporting on the idea that behaviour hub schools were these zero-tolerance, no-talking-in-corridors, sent-home-for-imperfect-uniform-type environments," Michael explains. "But that's not what we're about, and not actually what the hub is about, either. There may have been some schools that were quite hard-line, but certainly not all of them." The aim of the game for Charles Dickens, says Michael, is for children to be "safe and respectful".

This goes for the staff, too. In order to help maintain work-life balance and wellbeing for teachers, the school has a no marking policy. It might sound radical, but as Michael explains, children still get the feedback they need, without teachers having to spend hours of their own time poring through books: "Around five years ago, we were part of a study looking at the efficacy of marking," he says. "When we delved into it, the average teacher was spending three hours after school every day marking, and we started to wonder about its true impact for children." For a primary setting, Michael explains, after-the-fact marking meant that children had to be able to both read the comments and be able to effectively respond to them, which wasn't always possible. Instead, he says, after looking at a variety of methods, the school decided the best evidence was for live marking: "So, giving feedback to the children when they're in the classroom – whether that's writing out challenges on the board and finding a common solution as a class, or the teacher walking around while pupils are working and providing in-the-moment comments." This allows children to react immediately to feedback, explains Michael, increasing its efficacy, and means that teachers

can spend their after-school time prepping for lessons or winding down, rather than endlessly marking.

After some trialling, teachers found that children not receiving after-school marking in books weren't at any disadvantage, academically. Rather, they were performing at exactly the same level as they were when their books were marked every day.

The team at Charles Dickens Primary School, then, leads by example; teachers give pupils the room and the agency to express their feelings and opinions, and in turn, children are (as much as children can be) well behaved and eager to learn.

I get the feeling that Mr Dickens himself would approve. As he wrote in his novel *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*: 'No man can expect his children to respect what he degrades.' **HT**



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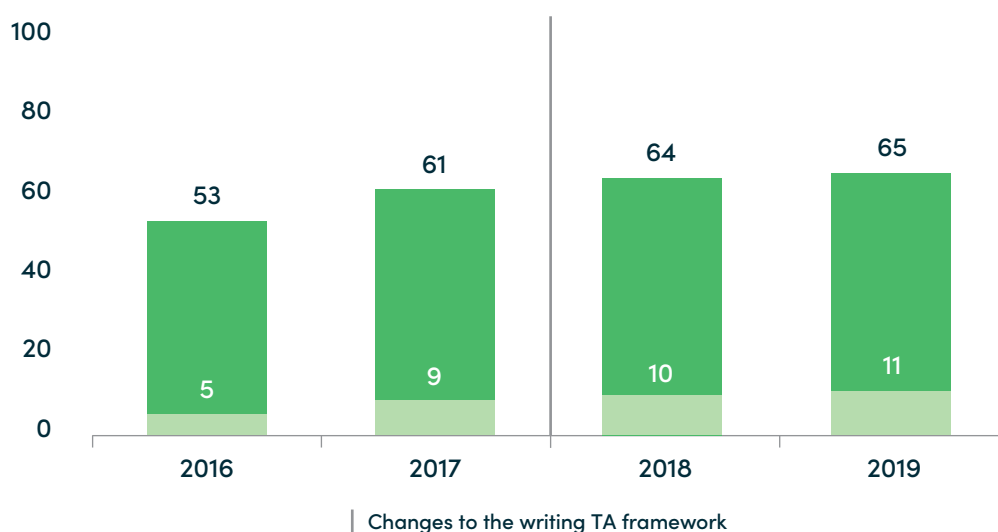



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# WHY DATA SHOULD FIRST BE USED AS A ROUGH FILTER

## NATIONAL CURRICULUM ASSESSMENTS AT KEY STAGE 2 IN ENGLAND, 2019 (provisional)



Expected  
standard



Higher  
standard

# 65%

Reached the expected  
standard in reading,  
writing and maths  
(combined) in 2019.



If you've seen a GP lately, you'll have been routinely asked how much alcohol you drink. It can be difficult to answer. Unless you're one of the one in five adults in England who say they're teetotal, the answer is generally a guess. Depending on your disposition, you might overestimate your consumption. More worryingly, you might underestimate. You might wonder what typical consumption is before answering. In the first instance, most of us would simply want to know how far off the norm we are. Once you know that, you might ask further questions. You might celebrate drinking less than typical. Being roughly typical probably means you can carry on and not worry too much. But if the amount you drink is higher than the norm, your GP might want to know so that they could help you to improve your health and wellbeing. The good news is that most of us don't drink too much. Figures suggest that around 75% of adults are fine. They either don't drink, or they consume alcohol at volumes which are not detrimental to health. We see a similar situation with schooling. Most children and young people are fine; the vast majority comfortably make the grade at all levels of the education system, from the

80% of those who achieved the expected standards in each of the assessed subjects at Key Stage 2 (with 65% achieving the expected standard in all three subjects) to the two in three GCSE candidates who are awarded grades 4 and above in their Key Stage 4 assessments.



When it comes to supporting those who struggle with alcohol, the evidence we have suggests that the best use of public health money in this area is to use some kind of rough filter to screen out those who don't drink too much and then to do something to help those people who do. Given what we know about education, this approach makes sense in schools too: use a rough filter to work out who seems to be thriving and who needs support, then put most of our time and effort into helping the latter. This is where smart use of data comes in. Fortunately, we're now in a period where schools are expected to take control of their use of data to make decisions, having moved on from the era of dubious measurements of 'Expected Progress' and 'Value Added'. Whilst the government continues to create numbers against which to assess educational outcomes, these are largely simplistic

measures between various key stages which are, ultimately, out of our control. We're no longer expected to measure progress; we're expected to use data to inform clear actions.



In school, high-quality assessment data (e.g. from a well-designed standardised assessment) can be used as an excellent rough filter to broadly identify which pupils need support and which of our learners are thriving in school. Once this group has been identified, further fine filters (in the form of additional, more specific assessments) can be used to support those children and young people who need extra adjustments to enable them to make the most of their time in school. It's well understood that on average adults under report their alcohol consumption, which does make the GP's rough filter very rough indeed. Fortunately for those of us in schools, regular assessment is part of what we do. It's up to us to maximise our use of that data. [HT](#)



Richard Selfridge is a teacher and together with James Pembroke is co-author of *Dataproof Your School* (Sage Publications).

# WE CAN DO MUCH MORE FOR STRUGGLING READERS

By offering the right support at the right time, mainstream schools can make learning to read painless for every pupil

**H**aving a ‘no excuses’ policy to all pupils leaving school with a functional reading age – it should be a given, shouldn’t it? Well, I’m still meeting teenagers with a reading age of 5–7 years who have been excluded from mainstream education. Many of them attended school for eight years plus before ultimately being placed in special schools. The government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England (sendreview.campaign.gov.uk) states that “Children and young people’s needs are identified late then escalate and become entrenched. In some cases, a child or young person may be incorrectly identified as having SEN when in fact they have not had sufficient access to high quality teaching, particularly in reading and language.” This conclusion was drawn in 2022, but for how long has it been the case?

“Educational trends come full circle” has echoed around staffrooms over the years. As a ‘special needs/remedial kid’ of the 1980s, I know only too well what it feels like to be a struggling reader. No surprise then that I can spot them a mile off! If only my teachers had noticed: I was always the one who chose the books with the best front-cover designs in the school bookshop, never actually reading them. I spent most of ‘quiet reading’ times in the book corner, finally selecting the thickest book just as the

session was finishing. My heart would jump out of my chest as I was called up to my Year 6 teacher’s desk to do a reading test, involving a list of words

Give your hardest-to-reach pupils the most experienced and qualified teachers

that got progressively harder. I deliberately ‘failed’ an eye test to get glasses so that I could then ‘forget’ the glasses and get out of reading out loud in class. At secondary school, when we had a class novel and everyone had to take a turn reading a page, I paid no attention to the story as I was too busy predicting the page which would land on me

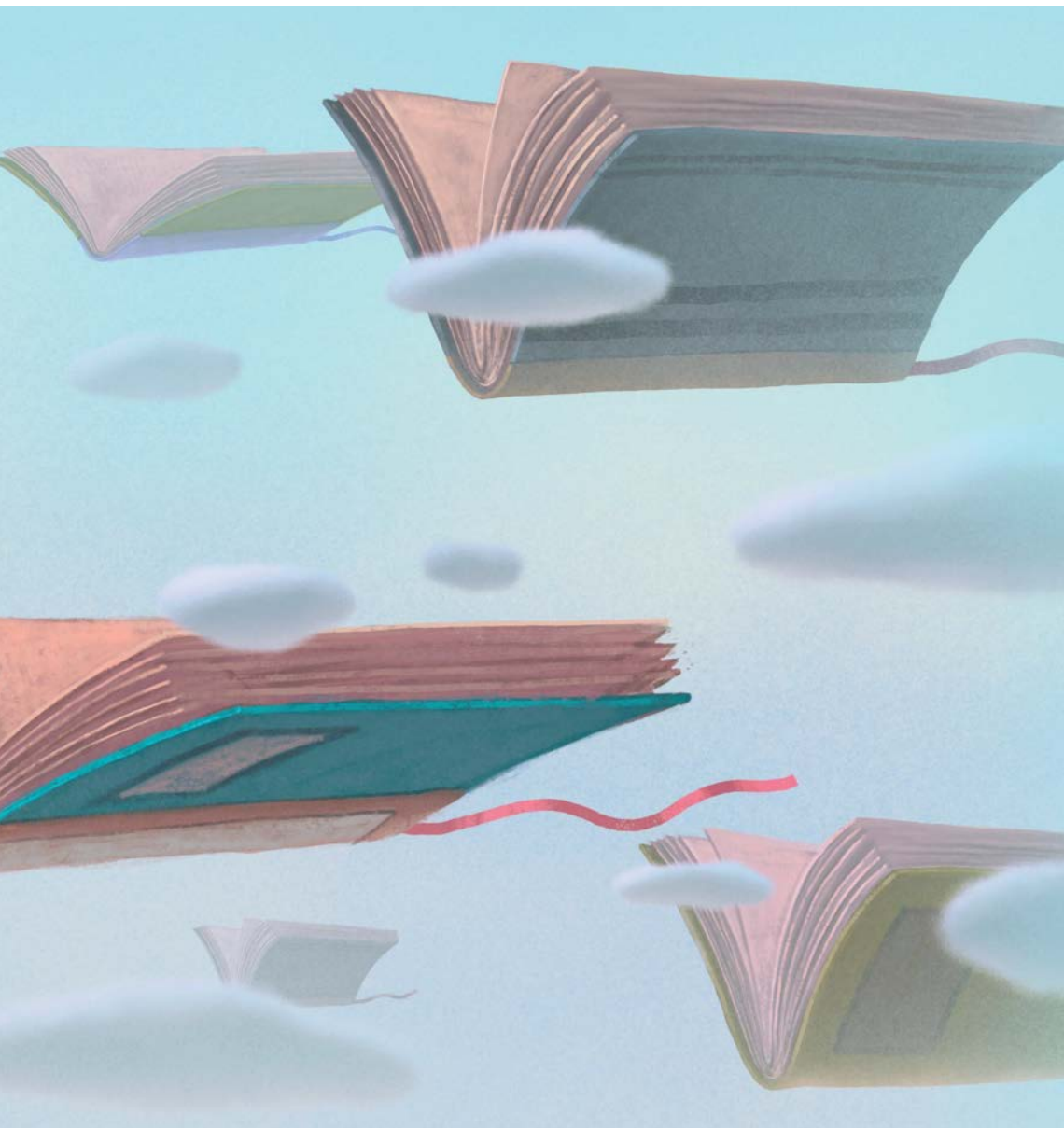
and frantically rehearsing it; or I would time my request to go to the toilet to avoid my turn altogether. Finally, at university, I was called in after my first essay submission and asked if anyone had highlighted my dyslexia...

## Unlocking potential

What can we learn from the 1980s ‘special needs kid’ who was taught from behind the orange hessian curtain? What worked for me? Well, I loved listening to stories. My dad read them to me at bedtime. My mum struggled with reading herself, so delegated this job. She subscribed to the audiobook/magazine ‘Story Teller’ and I listened to every one of the books she had... several times. She also bought the Ladybird book scheme and I read them over and over again too, without the humiliation of them being ‘too young’ for me. Familiar books provided much comfort as I enjoyed ‘sounding like a reader’. I loved author visits. I remember the car Gumdrop (from the Val Biro books) came to our school and I proudly stood next to it for a photo. The author Helen Cresswell visited, and every class produced a creative piece based on one of her books, ‘The Bogleweed’, and ‘My Aunt Polly’s Scarf’ was displayed in the hall (every family knitted a section). My class had ‘Lizzie Dripping’ puppets and put on a show.



Despite coming from a relatively working-class family – my mum was a cleaner and childminder and my dad was a printer – an annual pantomime trip was always prioritised. Although my academic achievements in formal tests were way below age-related standards at primary school, I didn’t feel the pressure from my school or my family. I remember my mum’s mantra, “As long as you keep trying, you can’t do better than your best.” Relationships were everything to me. It wasn’t until sixth-form college that I found a teacher who recognised my true potential and helped me to unlock that. I put my trust in her and she recognised and celebrated my learning difference.



## 9 STEPS TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING READERS

*Dear headteacher, please help me. I can't read. I want to learn. I've tried, but it hasn't worked. I need a different way to learn. Here's how you can help. From, T-O-M*

- Find an experienced, kind, funny teacher, who tells me that it's not my fault that I can't read.
- Get that teacher to find out everything I know already about reading, and to teach me the bits that I don't know – but only when I'm ready.
- Get them to help me understand how I learn best; teach me the way I learn.
- Use books and resources that match my age and interest (I don't like using things that look babyish).
- Make reading fun and encourage me to talk a lot about the books I read.
- Let me read my favourite books over and over if I want to.
- When I get stuck, please try not to give me the word; I like to work it out for myself using all the things I know at that moment in time.
- Help me to understand why reading is so important in life.
- Celebrate with me when I find reading easy and fun.

Fast forward to 2022 and the phonics method dominates our reading landscape, with school sheds becoming the graveyard of whole language books. But even though you've spent tens of thousands of pounds on phonics schemes/resources, be honest – ask yourself, “Are my most struggling learners really grasping the skills and knowledge they need to become confident and competent readers?” By this I mean, do they know that print carries meaning and that is the main purpose of reading, or are they little robotic decoding machines? I asked my four-year-old niece recently, “Can you read?” Her answer was not “yes” or “no”, or even the recall of her favourite book, it was this: “B-i-g, big. Z-o-p, zop.”

I'll just leave that there.

### Support strategies

So today, with all the promise of reform, what can you as a school leader do for your struggling readers? How can you provide the right support, in the right place at the right time? Here are some good places to start.

- If you keep repeating the same intervention and it hasn't created a reader, try something completely different.
- Carry out robust assessments that take stock of existing skills, knowledge, learning style and any barriers to learning.
- Despite spending thousands on a whole-school phonics programme, accept it is not working for some pupils and that they need something more

bespoke and relevant.

- Use the strengths, interests and learning style of your pupils – teach them the way that they learn, don't expect them to learn the way that you teach.
- Use age-appropriate resources – always!
- Use multisensory/dyslexia-friendly resources.
- Tell your pupils that it's not their fault they haven't learned to read up until this stage and it's not their problem any more; it's your problem to solve.
- Bring stories/information books to life – inject creativity and relate to each pupil's experience whenever you can.
- Nurture skills and knowledge that the pupil can transfer independently the next time they read a new book.

- Give precise, positive feedback to encourage successful strategies to be repeated.
- When adults are supporting readers, promote ‘prompting’ not ‘telling’ if a pupil gets stuck.
- Give your hardest-to-reach pupils the most experienced and / or qualified teachers. **HT**



Deborah Salsbury is a qualified teacher and the founder of The Reading Doctor. Visit [thereadingdoctors.co.uk](http://thereadingdoctors.co.uk)

# THREE WAYS TO EMPOWER YOUR MIDDLE LEADERS

By promoting wisely, encouraging teachers to engage with research, and signposting effective subject support, you can develop leadership throughout your school

**B**efore we consider how we might empower middle leaders, it's essential we establish that we should. School leadership is a collective endeavour and if we're to succeed in our aims, we must surround ourselves with leaders who have the capacity to contribute towards the meaningful development of our schools. Of course, strong deputies and senior leaders are essential travelling companions, but we must give equal consideration to the strength of leadership beyond the SLT.

As they are typically classroom teachers with additional responsibilities, middle leaders drive change in a physical sense. They're our proverbial bridge to the classroom, and the lens through which they view strategic decisions will be planted firmly in the day-to-day practicalities of school operations. They live and breathe our ideas, can relay messages in both directions, and are perfectly placed to support our efforts to be responsive and reflective in real time.

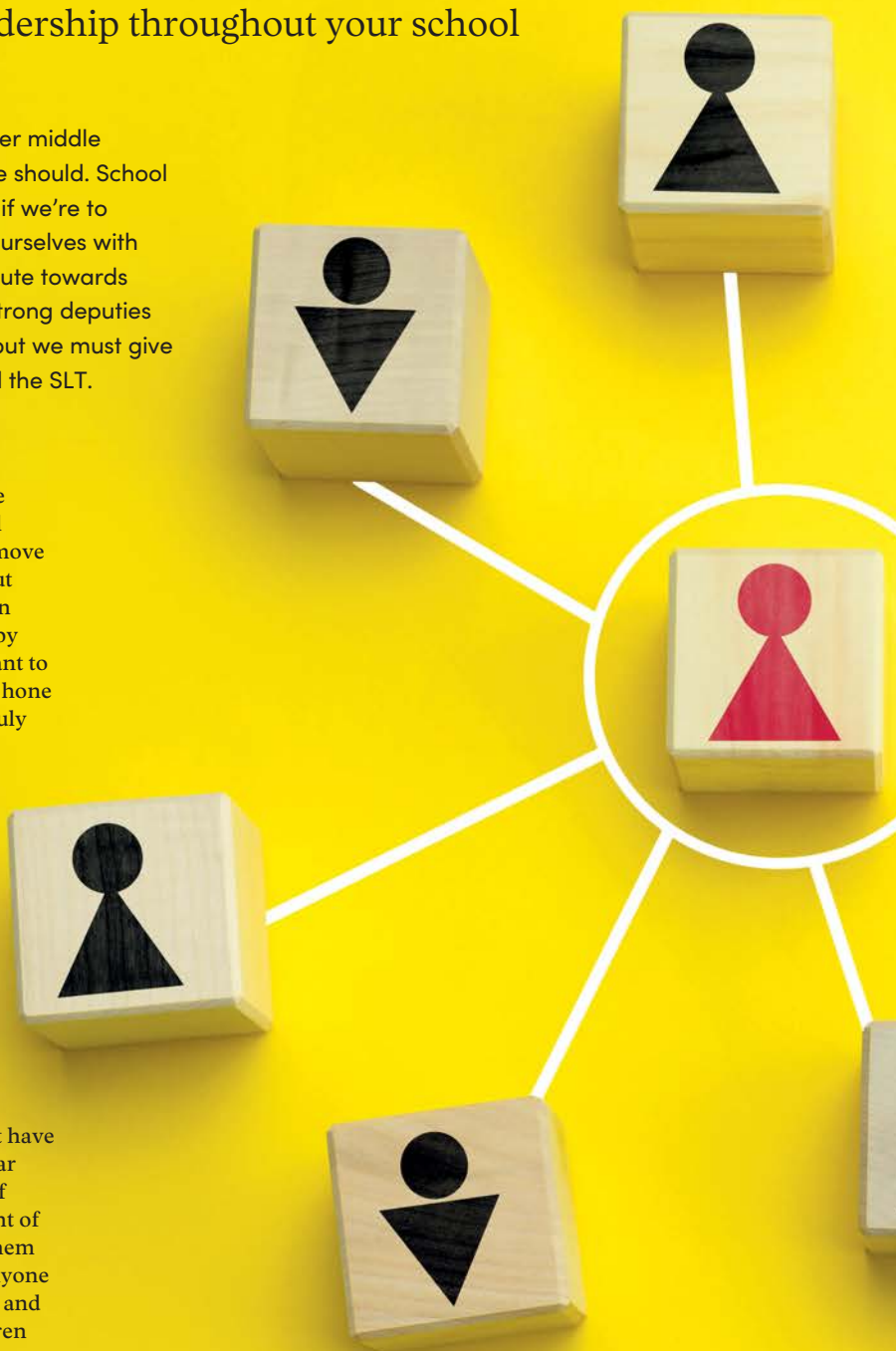
Increasingly, it should be said, they're an essential cog in a curricular machine which seems to grow year on year. There are limits to how much subject and pedagogical content knowledge one person can possess and we must place our trust in our middle leaders that they will fill in the gaps where necessary, so that our pupils are in receipt of a rich, vibrant and complete education.

## Find the right match

It's imperative that those we ask to take on middle leadership responsibilities are suited to the role. Leadership isn't for everyone, and that's okay. The

system might be skewed in such a way that it more readily provides financial reward to those who do move into school leadership, but we should do what we can to try and stem this tide, by celebrating those who want to remain in the classroom, hone their craft and become truly masterful teachers.

At the same time, we should also consider the reasons why the pieces might not quite fit, so that we can take steps to support those with an interest in taking the next professional leap. Whether our future leaders lack personal organisation, are the primary carer for young children, or do not have the passion for a particular subject, our best course of action is the establishment of systems which support them in reaching their goal. Anyone can learn to be organised and think strategically. Children grow up, and some of the most passionate mathematics leaders I know despised maths when they were at school. What astute





heads recognise in them is the potential for effective leadership and the empathy that comes with understanding the plight of the struggling pupil.

As senior leaders we should pay attention to the smallest of clues that will, in time, allow us to make those connections between passionate members of staff and areas of middle leadership. We should talk to our teachers about what they need from us and what we need from them. If we make the boundaries of the relationship with middle leadership clear and the operational routines transparent, we're more likely to see our leaders flourish in the way we hope they will.

## Subject knowledge

Subject leaders are the first port of call for teachers in search of subject knowledge support. Thus, they will need to know the breadth and depth of their curricula to execute this aspect of the role effectively. The greater the subject knowledge of our middle leaders, the greater their capacity to think in a deep and meaningful way about how they can realise their ambitions for their pupils.

To support our leaders in developing their own subject knowledge, we must initially provide them with access to the relevant subject associations. The stellar offering from the Historical Association, for

instance, is central to the development of any history lead and the same is true for the associations covering the expanse of the national curriculum.

Equally, the wise headteacher understands that there are countless experts sharing their wisdom daily, usually for free, and will know who to follow on Twitter. For starters, I would recommend Neil Almond (history/geography), Tom Brassington (geography), Adam Smith (religious education), Lekha Sharma (curriculum), Shannen Doherty (mathematics) and Emma Turner (curriculum), but there are countless others who will, no doubt, be engaged in regular conversations with those listed here. Combine this with the audiovisual content provided through education podcasts, the Complete Mathematics CPD College and at Myatt and Co., and you have a

## 4 WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH EDUCATION RESEARCH

### Take it slow and steady

Rome wasn't built in a day, and your education research prowess will take time to grow too. Employ a little-and-often approach to engagement: five minutes a day is perfect in the beginning. As your knowledge grows, so will your capacity to draw meaningful inferences from what you read.

### Check your biases

The human mind has evolved a set of checks and balances to protect us from our own consciousness. You might know them better as cognitive biases and while I'm sure they were essential at some point, they're a hindrance when it comes to engaging with research. You can't overcome your biases, but you can be aware of them. Ignore them and you might as well not engage at all.

### Print, read, scribble

Nothing beats a printed manuscript and a highlighter! There are thousands of documents on our computers at any one time, what's to say you'll get round to opening an article before diving into your emails? Print a paper and build the habit of engaging with education by reading for a few minutes while Windows loads in the morning.

### Abstract, methods, conclusions

There are three key areas in every research paper: the abstract, the method and the conclusions. Each in turn outlines what the researchers wanted to test, how they planned to test it and what they think they found. Start with these areas, ignore confusing equations and functions, and ask yourself if the method really allowed the researchers to find out what they claim they have.

CPD treasure chest with the capacity to drive meaningful improvement at a fraction of the typical cost.

One thing that the teachers listed do so well, and that's worthy of emulation, is connect classroom teachers with education research. Providing our middle leaders with the tools to engage with research, such as those highlighted in the panel here, will not only help them develop their understanding of the wider conversation at an academic level, but also encourage them to think critically about their whole-school responsibilities and develop their own opinions on some of the most important debates and themes in education discourse.

leaders throughout, moving things forward or holding them in place, ready to move forward when called upon. When something new is introduced, it's common to survey the thoughts of our middle leaders, but where are they when the plans are finalised?

We should look to extend the opportunities we give for reflection, discussion and planning – opening the door, perhaps, to our senior leadership meetings, so that our middle leaders might be both present and able to contribute. We should touch base regularly, have systems in place for doing so, and routines that are refined to the extent that they make the process of leadership seamless. **HT**

## Close the loop

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of empowering middle leaders is a closed strategic decision-making loop. We must avoid creating an inner circle within the hierarchy, for they are guaranteed to eat away at our schools in the long run. An effective school has



Kieran Mackle is a maths consultant and the creator of the weekly Thinking Deeply about Primary Education podcast. New episodes are released every Saturday at 9am, wherever you get your podcasts from.

An effective school has leaders throughout, moving things forward or holding them in place, ready to move forward when called upon

# WHY IT'S TIME TO LEVEL UP YOUR IT INFRASTRUCTURE

The government's new digital standards should be the push all schools need to embrace the benefits of 21st century connectivity

**W**

ith the publication of the DfE's 'Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges' (23 March 2022), a high-quality, stable, secure IT infrastructure moves from the 'nice-to-have' to the 'necessary' list for leadership and governance teams. Many schools will already meet or exceed these standards – and arguably, for

these, the focus may turn to whether they're making best use of this IT-backbone to enhance teaching and learning. For other, often smaller schools – particularly those in remote areas – is this expectation going to be difficult to meet given the logistical and financial challenges they might face?

## Potential benefits

The advantages to both teaching and administration in schools of having fast, reliable internet connectivity aren't in doubt, particularly as our reliance on cloud-based ecosystems and apps continues to grow. The DfE's newest standards set out a requirement for a core infrastructure which will allow schools to take full advantage of the range of technology resources available. If your school continues to struggle for broadband capacity or suffers from Wi-Fi blackspots, then, like it or not, these standards probably provide the push needed to prioritise investment in infrastructure.

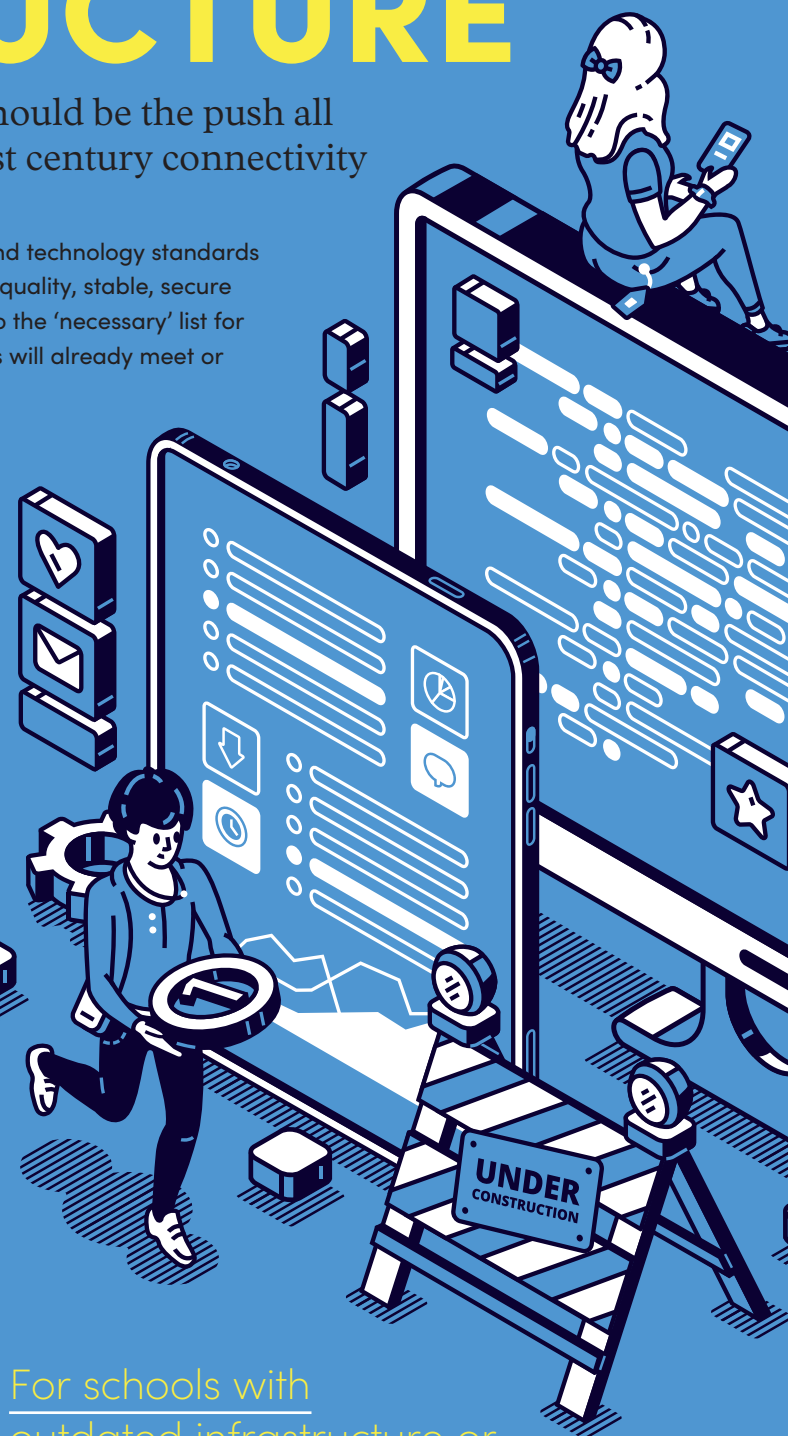
The benefits to be gained from having improved digital access in schools can't be underestimated. Having confidence that the technology you've planned to use in the lesson won't let you down, that you won't freeze on a video presentation, or that your finance systems will interact smoothly with third-party banking software are all important factors in staff wellbeing and the overall effectiveness of your school.

There are so many more

chances to develop learning opportunities, create economical workflows for staff and better communicate with parents and carers if your core infrastructure is effective. Enabling improved accessibility through appropriate technologies for learners and staff with SEND can become much easier. A whole year group logging on to devices simultaneously can be achieved in seconds without loss of data for anyone else. Live streaming lessons to allow you to reach absent pupils or enable split-site classes can be achieved effortlessly. These, and much more besides, are all made more possible with reliable internet and Wi-Fi.

## Setting the standard

Currently, four sets of standards have been outlined, with more to follow in the coming months. Briefly, they cover broadband internet, network switching, network cabling and wireless networking – along with all the security, management and performance



For schools with outdated infrastructure or those without much at all, the investment costs will be outweighed by the benefits it brings

expectations associated with these technologies. If these terms make you glaze over, that's okay; this isn't a project for a school leader to take on in isolation. As with any whole-school development project, it should be approached as part of a bigger picture, with a willing, knowledgeable team around you and specialists involved from the outset. The minimum technical specifications are clearly set out, and you can expect your IT provider to audit your systems and give you a clear report as to whether you are currently meeting these or not, and an action plan of any necessary remedial action.

## Digital divisions

Schools are each already on their own digital transition path. Start point, intended destination, budget, staffing capacity and IT confidence are some of the many factors influencing the speed at which they can embrace technologies and develop their use for students. The promise of high-speed internet to schools across the country by 2025 is encouraging but places constraints on some areas until then. In the short term at least, we may experience a widening of the digital divide between schools as they address these standards at different rates.

Each of the standards comes with a section entitled, 'When to meet the standards'. These appear to range from as soon as you can (Broadband internet standards) to when you need to upgrade an underperforming or unsupported solution (Wireless network standard). Given the lack of specifics, let's



assume that all schools find the time, capacity, finances and IT support services to meet the standards set out by the DfE in the next few years. Bringing equity of access to infrastructure is one thing, but will this translate to similar experiences of technology for all students?

Time and money must also be found to allow research into, and procurement of, hardware and software solutions that

capitalise on the infrastructure, along, of course, with the staff development needed for each new technology if they're to have maximum impact on outcomes.

As schools comply with the standards, will it be enough to benefit students whose homes remain in digital poverty? What can you do as part of your school's digital strategy to address the disparity amongst students who lack suitable digital access at home?

## The cost of progress

Financing a project to meet these standards will, for some, be significant. The government is dovetailing this with the 'levelling up' agenda, and it's suggested that some form of funding will be available to schools in the 55 education investment areas – though this may still leave some with a large pot of money to find. The cost to be borne goes beyond the purchasing of hardware and signing of broadband contracts. The leadership and IT time to scope, agree and implement the solutions, and, in the coming years, the maintenance and renewal costs, should all be factored in to avoid any unwanted financial surprises.

For schools with outdated infrastructure or those without much at all, the investment costs will be outweighed by the benefits it brings. One of the best ways to understand the options available to you is to collaborate with other schools – to learn from their experience and seek recommendations to help you make informed purchasing decisions and avoid costly mistakes.

## Long-term considerations

While announcing the introduction of these standards at BETT, Nadhim Zahawi made mention of the possibility of changes to assessment practices in the future. As school leaders, if your core IT infrastructure is ready to meet the demands of digital assessment, that's one thing you can tick off your 'to do' list right now.

## 5 STEPS TO MEETING THE STANDARDS

- First, take a look at the DfE's publication to become familiar with the expectations.
- Next, work with your IT support team to identify whether your infrastructure meets the standards. Pre-empt the inclusion of cybersecurity standards and include these in your review. If you fall short, identify all areas for improvement and get costs for these.
- Now, identify the project as a priority within your development plans:
  - What positive impact to other areas of your school could enhanced digital connectivity bring?
  - How does it sit within your procurement planning cycle? Bear in mind that upgrades and maintenance costs will be ongoing.
- If you haven't already, develop a digital strategy with the support of your IT supplier to ensure that the investment in infrastructure is maximised in terms of benefits to teaching, learning and administration in your school.
- In the coming months, organisations and schools will be offering support on how to meet these standards, so reach out and benefit from their experience – it may save you time and money in the long run!

There's uncertainty around whether the standards will, in time, become tied up as part of a judgement on the quality of an establishment's provision. For now, though, let's consider this the catalyst to get the less exciting, less obvious side of schools' IT to the standards that you and the students can benefit from – an opportunity for nationwide equity of connectivity. **HT**



Jo Roberts is senior development manager at Platform 365 (platform365.co.uk),

which provides expert IT support for schools.

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The Head's Guide To...

# FACILITIES & FINANCE

# 46

## Under cyber-attack?

One school's quest for the perfect DPO

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## THE MISSION:

# TO FIND A DPO WHO COULD CHANGE OUR DATA-PROTECTION CULTURE

SCHOOL: [King's Farm Primary School](#)

HEAD: [Chris Jackson](#)

## A

s a school we know that cyber security is important. We rely on the internet, IT and other connected systems, all of which, without the appropriate protection, are at risk from attack. There have been recent

high-profile cases in which the education sector has been targeted, and it's difficult to ignore the exponential rise of ransomware and data breaches. As such, protecting personal data must be factored into everyday planning. It's shocking that perpetrators of cyber crimes are willing to disrupt the quality of education children receive, yet this forms part of a headteacher's duty of care to pupils and staff. We had previously outsourced a Data Protection Officer (DPO), but we wanted more from our virtual partner: for them to be proactive, tailor their support to us, and respond swiftly to our engagements.



## 1. Choosing our virtual DPO

Before we started our search, we defined our criteria. We wanted to feel confident that our new, independent partner would be engaged and bring significant expertise to our relationship. We also knew that we wanted support to help us develop in this area; we didn't just want to tick a box, we wanted to change the culture. Before commissioning we wanted to meet with our new potential DPO and understand how we could work together. From these conversations we chose TenIntelligence.

TenIntelligence acts as a DPO for many clients in many different sectors, including the education sector. As part of its role as a virtual DPO, the team starts with an information audit

across the organisation as this helps both parties identify, assess and understand what, where and how organisation and personal data is being stored and/or processed.



## 2. Risk-mitigating measures

To protect our assets from cyber-attack, the TenIntelligence team first needed to help us understand what we were protecting: personal, sensitive or operational data. They asked us three questions: first, what is your data? Second, where is your data? And third, who has access to your data? Once we did that, we could then plan to improve the culture of how staff members treat personal data and reduce the risks of breaches and loss through awareness and training.



**“It is during these audits that we can help organisations highlight any clear vulnerabilities and address them immediately”**

Neil Miller, managing director at TenIntelligence

### What is your data?

TenIntelligence helped us to review, identify and assess what data we kept. Most of it was personal information regarding pupils, staff, parents and third-party suppliers. The rest was educational (achievement/outcomes, etc.) and financial.

### Where is your data?

A data flow assessment was essential here. We needed to map where and how our data was processed and flowing. For example, our pupils' personal data is stored within management information systems, email exchanges, teachers' notes and



laptops, cloud storage areas and third-party software providers. There were many questions to ask, for example, was personal data being duplicated unnecessarily? Were the same data sets being stored in multiple areas? In terms of our cloud storage areas or physical servers, TenIntelligence asked us where these were located and whether we had undertaken assessments to ensure those areas were secure. We had to consider whether we had backups of our data and how regularly we kept these up to date.

**Who has access to your data?**  
Access to personal data must be

assessed, controlled and agreed by the senior leadership team. TenIntelligence stressed that external or internal IT teams should not set the rules here. For example, teachers only need access to their pupils' personal data, and only the pupils they teach. The SLT should determine which non-teaching staff have access to personal data. We had to consider whether our support and administrative teams should have access to everything. TenIntelligence helped us understand that access control rights should be determined by undertaking data protection impact assessments.

We considered whether any of our suppliers had access to the school's data, and if so, how they were ensuring data protection compliance and security. We learnt lots by performing our data flow assessments, and this helped identify access control weakness, strengths and areas for development.



### 3. The impact

The data audit enabled us to review and assess gaps in our processes and helped to highlight our strengths and areas for development. As with any school, the key risks we face are the loss of staff laptops, devices and paper records which hold personal information; email communications to unauthorised third parties with staff, pupil or sensitive data; unauthorised access by non-teaching staff and external contractors of school servers or paper records; and phishing and ransomware attacks. Since TenIntelligence has been our DPO, we've reviewed and updated our risk register with a schedule of potential risks, so we can implement appropriate technical and internal measures when required. As part of the service, TenIntelligence reviews this register and provides us with a clear road map for regular review of controls. We've also implemented a staff training and awareness programme to help reduce the risk of cyber intrusions.

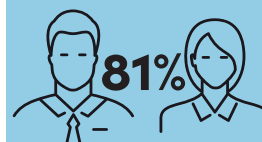
Our school is now in a healthy position where we can monitor our compliance with data protection policies and, where necessary, update our security controls. The senior leadership team can concentrate on ensuring the quality of education for children, knowing that staff are aware of cyber risks and understand how to protect pupils' personal data.



### 4. Other considerations

All schools must implement appropriate technical and internal security measures to ensure data protection is designed into all their

## In numbers



Had a data protection officer (DPO) in place with designated responsibilities for data protection compliance.

**72%**

Cases where the DPO had appropriate reporting mechanisms in place to senior management.

**36%**

Had an inadequate overarching policy framework.



**70%**

Had not maintained an adequate record or log of all data sharing decisions for audit, monitoring and investigation purposes.

**63%**

Where information risks were not sufficiently managed throughout the organisation.

*Statistics taken from a 2020 report from the Information Commissioner's Office, involving 11 MATs.*

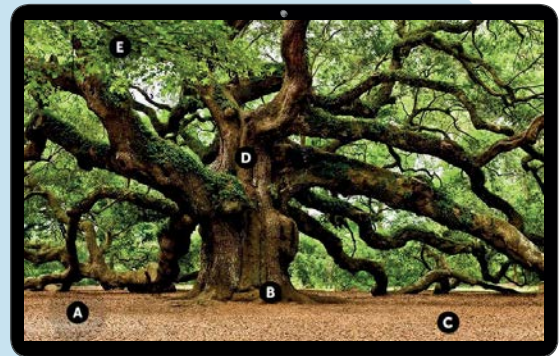
processes. Governors should be reviewing the risks on the risk register. You need to develop policies and procedures to ensure GDPR audit compliance and monitor your ongoing compliance with data protection policies, while regularly reviewing the effectiveness of handling/processing personal data, updating security controls as necessary. I really recommend that you develop a staff training and awareness programme and think about how your team is going to engage with this. **HT**

ICT IN ACTION:

# EDTECH IMPACT

These three software solutions have upped engagement, encouraged inclusion, and boosted outcomes across the LEO Academy Trust

1



2

3



## 1 | TEXTHELP



Christopher Perrott, vice principal, Cheam Common Junior Academy and director of English for LEO Academy

**“ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IS EMBEDDED IN THE FABRIC OF OUR TEACHING, SUPPORTING ALL LEARNERS”**

### The Problem

All staff at Cheam Common Juniors are committed to inclusive practice for all learners. With financial constraints and increasing numbers of high-needs children requiring support, the school had to think carefully about how to support all pupils to be independent learners.

### The Solution

As Cheam Common is an EdTech demonstrator

school, assistive technology is embedded in the fabric of our teaching. From lessons learnt during the pandemic, teachers have adopted a hybrid ‘blended teaching model’, using applications such as Wakelet, Nearpod, Now Press Play, and ThingLink; these have been transformative, providing audiovisual experiences that help children to meet or even exceed objectives.

One application that has proven invaluable is TextHelp.

Used as part of a ‘whole-class teaching’ approach, it provides students with a platform to access texts independently in several ways. For example, for those who struggle to read fluently, it can read aloud any PDF-converted document via its ‘text-to-speech’ tool. Difficult or unknown words can be highlighted and explored through a picture dictionary that offers pupils either a ‘visual widget icon’, a definition, or a synonym and antonym,

all of which can be read aloud through the audio tool. Furthermore, words can be selected and placed in a bespoke word bank that’s accessible for students in all lessons to support with their fluency, comprehension and writing.

### The Outcome

TextHelp has increased access to the curriculum for all learners, providing opportunities for all.



## 2 | THINGLINK



Christopher Perrott, vice principal, Cheam Common Junior Academy and director of English for LEO Academy

**“A KEY BENEFIT OF THINGLINK HAS BEEN THE CHANCE TO CREATE AUDIOVISUAL LEARNING MATERIALS”**

### The Problem

It's widely recognised that children benefit from immersive learning experiences. With the pandemic preventing the Trust from attending off-site trips, our teachers had to consider how to provide these opportunities to children who may not otherwise have experienced them.

### The Solution

ThingLink has become an essential tool across LEO Academy schools, supporting children to develop their writing skills. At Cheam Common Junior specifically, it's transformed how teachers and students interact with

traditional writing-based lessons – it's ensured all pupils have equal access to learning and empowered them to take responsibility for their own writing.

As part of its repertoire, ThingLink allows teachers to access audiovisual clips and 'text-to-speech' elements, enabling pupils to experience environments and situations that would otherwise be out of their reach. Virtual tours and images with additional links and resources can be employed to develop contextual understanding and academic vocabulary, while encouraging independent learning. A key benefit has been the chance to create audiovisual learning

materials that are accessible as an integrated reading tool. Text descriptions in images or video hotspots can be read with 'Immersive Reader' in over 60 languages. Pupils are able to focus on one aspect of a sentence/paragraph at a time, for example, highlighting adjectives for those who wish to improve their descriptive language.

### The Outcome

The ability to choose and select such tools has promoted a metacognitive approach to learning, where children have made greater progress by focusing on the areas of self-improvement that are relevant to their needs.

## 3 | NEARPOD



Cheryl Shirley, director of computing and digital skills & Matthew Clements, cloud champion and Y4 teacher

**“CHILDREN HAVE BECOME FAR MORE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN ALL OF THEIR LESSONS”**

### The Problem

Prior to us using technology in the classroom, there was a lot of teacher talk in lessons, and although children were encouraged to share their ideas through discussions, some of the quieter children were often reluctant to take part; it would be the same few pupils speaking out.

### The Solution

At Cheam Fields Primary Academy, which is part of the LEO Academy Trust, technology is embedded into all areas of the curriculum with the goal of enabling children to collaborate and work more independently and creatively.

The Trust decided to use the Nearpod platform as part of its educational offering due to the fact that it integrates directly into Google Slides, meaning there was no need for teachers to completely replan their existing lessons; instead, they could simply add interactive content of their choosing as required, whether that be a quiz, an online whiteboard, a poll, a quick-fire sorting activity or even an immersive 3D experience.

### The Outcome

By using interactive tools such as Nearpod, children have become far more active participants in lessons; they

can now all share their ideas, take part in short polls and answer questions. Not only does this keep them engaged, but it also gives teachers significantly more information about their learning in real time. They are, at the click of a button, able to identify misconceptions and immediately give feedback to support pupil progress. The use of technology enables learning to happen quicker. Assessment does not have to wait for the teacher to mark the books at the end of the day; it happens instantly for all children, not just the same few who always put their hand up.

# TECH TASTERS



## 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. For more information, visit [turniton.co.uk](http://turniton.co.uk)



## RELIABLE PROGRESS DATA

Working in partnership with school leadership, Whizz Education creates mutually agreed implementation plans for maths provision. It provides headteachers with reliable data that can be submitted to OFSTED and the board of governors to demonstrate progress and attainment. Find out more at [whizz.com](http://whizz.com)

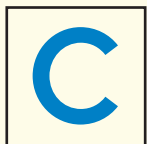


## SAFEGUARDING IN STYLE

Visitor management is an area of great interest to schools, not just because of GDPR but also for safeguarding purposes. Many schools highly recommended idXtra's visitor management system VisiTapp, which is user-friendly, flexible and affordable. See how it works at [idxtra.com](http://idxtra.com)

# SCHOOLS HAVE A KEY ROLE TO PLAY IN SAFEGUARDING

With resources tight, there has never been a greater need for teachers and social workers to work in partnership



Contrary to some of the more hysterical reports about the state of services for children, safeguarding partners continue to strive to improve multi-agency responses to the needs of vulnerable families. However, from a headteacher's perspective, some things never seem to change: the thresholds for social care are too high and you have to keep referring – they never get back to you and there are too many changes of social worker.

I currently work as the independent scrutineer for the Medway and Kent multi-agency safeguarding partnerships. *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018* established the requirement to have independent scrutiny of partnerships but was silent on what this should look like, or how the effectiveness of local partnerships could be assessed. It was proving challenging to describe what the world would look like when partnerships were working well.

Following the Wood Review, the government's new *Working Together* guidance removed the need for Safeguarding Children Boards, which were largely seen as process-driven talking shops. The new arrangements for the first time identified that the three statutory partners of local authority, health and police were equally accountable for the safeguarding of children.

## Working in partnership

Since the establishment of the new arrangements in 2020, multi-agency partners have reported improvements in safeguarding, but there's still much to do. One of the ironies of the coronavirus pandemic was how it improved cooperation between partners, including the development of closer working relationships between children's

social care and schools. As society returns to a new normal, children's social care services have reported an increase in contacts and referrals, putting a strain on an already overstretched system.

The Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) has embraced the freedoms and opportunities provided by the new arrangements and, amongst other developments, has sought to improve some of the traditional areas of friction between schools and children's social care. As did many partnerships, the MSCP reviewed their thresholds and consulted widely on the proposals. There was widespread acceptance and support for the new thresholds, which brought simplicity and clarity. However, getting the words right is one thing; the interpretation of those words varies between professions and still leads to frustration amongst teachers believing a child meets the necessary threshold for a social work intervention.

Headteachers in Medway tell me that communication with children's social care has improved significantly, although concerns remain about having to make multiple referrals for some children before social care finally accept the case. Conversely, social workers feel that schools could do more to provide early help to vulnerable children

and be more enthusiastic about taking on the lead professional role. Heads feel they are being left with the case and only refer because they no longer feel they can meet the needs of children.

Although schools are not statutory partners, the MSCP has reached out to headteachers to ensure their voice is embedded at both the strategic level in executive meetings and in the various sub-groups which are delivering against the partnership's priorities. While one head cannot represent all schools, the partnership recognises the value of having a strong voice influencing strategy and policy. This doesn't remove all the differences, but it ensures there can be frank discussions about the realities of multi-agency working. All headteachers will say there isn't



enough 'Early Help' and most directors of children's services will agree. However, the fundamentals of good multi-agency working remain the same, with good communication between agencies and a commitment to constructively challenge each other where there's disagreement.

### Support strategies

Through my work I've had the pleasure of meeting a number of heads dedicated to not only improving outcomes for learners, but also identifying and providing support for the most vulnerable families in their communities. Schools have built up a range of services, including providing parenting courses and mental health support,

and implemented new systems for monitoring issues of concern arising within the school. The best settings ensure their designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are trained in the local social care practice model and the relevant assessment tools. This improves understanding and communication between the professions and ensures the needs of vulnerable children are identified and the right services provided at the right time.

Schools are also providing student social work placements, enabling those entering the profession to get a better understanding of the school experience and how they can collaborate better to identify and support those in need. This good work should be applied universally to strengthen further the understanding of the different perspectives within the professions. The provision of so called 'no name' consultations by children's social care gives safeguarding leads the confidence to contact colleagues to talk through their concerns before making a referral. This can provide reassurance that they're adopting the right approach or confirmation that a referral would be appropriate.

### Community hubs

The best social care services are open to challenge and will always be willing to hear the concerns of schools about a child. So, at a time when resources are scarce and reducing; demand is rising and is likely to rise further, as more children and their families are plunged into

## OPERATION ENCOMPASS

*"Schools get notification at the start of the next school day where the police may have attended a domestic abuse incident"*

My local authority has organised itself into Early Help hubs, providing a focal point for local service delivery and signposting for families who need help and support. In collaboration with this service design, schools have organised themselves into areas that correspond to a local hub. Among many other forms of support, Early Help services can help families where there are concerns about domestic abuse.

Operation Encompass is a police-led initiative that was rolled out in Medway in 2021. It ensures that a school's DSL gets a notification prior to the start of the next school day where the police may have attended a domestic abuse incident. While not all notifications lead to a referral to Early Help, schools now have strong links with the local hub, ensuring that additional support

can be provided at the earliest possible time.

Addressing domestic abuse is one of five key priorities for the Medway Partnership, and schools are universally supportive of the initiative, which ensures they can support children whose learning and emotional wellbeing may have been affected by an incident the previous evening. Schools have developed stronger links with hubs, and DSLs are now able to put names to faces in their local service, enabling more informal contacts and conversations about vulnerable children who need support. This has ensured that children can be provided with emotional support if needed, while families can also receive help with debt or housing issues. Addressing the latter can reduce stress on families and help reduce the risk of violence in the home.

## By becoming more engaged, schools can have a hugely positive influence on the priorities and strategic direction of their local SCP

poverty; and increasingly more is expected from schools, there's an even greater need to ensure that services work together. Engaging with the safeguarding partnership provides an opportunity to shape priorities, influence strategy and contribute to the development of creative new approaches to supporting vulnerable children in the community.

Bringing schools and early help services together in community hubs and pooling resources can deliver a more coordinated and effective response to increasing need in the community. This also includes influencing the new integrated care services which are replacing clinical commissioning groups so that the delivery of community health services are more fully integrated with other front-

line services. While all public services are under growing pressure, there are grounds for optimism in the way that partnerships are evolving to drive new ways of working and supporting the most vulnerable. Communication and information sharing remain a key strand of effective safeguarding practice, and headteacher engagement in safeguarding partnerships is helping to build a more effective response to children at risk and breaking down some of those traditional barriers between schools and children's social care. [HT](#)



Rory Patterson is the independent scrutineer for the Medway and Kent multi-agency safeguarding partnerships.

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## THE NEXT BIG THING...

# PEER-ON-PEER ABUSE

With allegations of peer-on-peer abuse on the rise, it's more important than ever that schools implement secure, reliable and intuitive reporting systems

### [ THE TREND ]

It is vital that every school creates a safe environment and culture for the children and young people in its care. This includes zero tolerance for peer-on-peer abuse, educating students on what peer-on-peer abuse is, and having a secure system for recording any concerns.

### WHAT'S HAPPENING?

In 2021, the 'Everyone's Invited' website ([everyonesinvited.uk](http://everyonesinvited.uk)) began highlighting the extent of sexual abuse, sexual assault and sexual harassment suffered by children and young people at the hands of their peers. The mission statement of Everyone's Invited is to expose and eradicate rape culture with empathy, compassion, and understanding.

To date, the site has received over 50,046 testimonies of sexual assault, sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Many of these testimonies relate to incidents occurring inside education settings, with the victims' peers being the instigators of said harassment.

We know that peer-on-peer abuse continues to be a growing concern. In an Estyn report, 'We Don't Tell Our Teachers' (see [bit.ly/ts114-sc1](https://bit.ly/ts114-sc1)), 61% of female pupils reported having experienced peer-on-peer harassment, while 82% reported seeing others experience it.

### WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

2021 saw Ofsted make several inspection framework changes (see [bit.ly/ts114-sc2](https://bit.ly/ts114-sc2)) after recognising the extent of peer-on-peer abuse within schools. Consequently, schools will now be judged 'ineffective' where they do not have adequate processes to deal with harmful sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment and violence. Ofsted has also stated that all education settings should have organisation-wide policies in place making it clear that sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence – including sexualised language – are unacceptable.

Schools should offer a sanctuary to their students, creating safe spaces and a culture that enables them to



thrive, rather than survive. To achieve the best outcomes for their students, staff need support and guidance to handle, intervene and prevent incidents of this nature effectively, swiftly and professionally.



#### Contact:

[info@thesafeguardingcompany.com](mailto:info@thesafeguardingcompany.com)  
[thesafeguardingcompany.com](http://thesafeguardingcompany.com)

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Education staff need support to not only handle allegations of peer-on-peer abuse, but also effectively intervene and prevent similar incidents from occurring in future. There is also a belief that schools must do more to educate students on topics such as consent, online bullying and peer-on-peer abuse.

St Benedict's independent school has been using MyConcern safeguarding software for five years to record safeguarding concerns and support student wellbeing (see [bit.ly/ts114-sc3](https://bit.ly/ts114-sc3)). The school's senior deputy headteacher, Luke Ramsden, recommends MyConcern to any organisation, because of how vital it is that schools are able to record instances of peer-on-peer abuse – whether it be cat-calling and inappropriate language, or allegations of sexual assault and abuse. Schools can then track how concerns of this nature have been dealt with, and put measures in place to better educate their students.

## GET INVOLVED

MyConcern is our Queen's Award-winning system for recording all levels of pastoral and wellbeing concerns. MyConcern allows you to better protect those at risk of harm by facilitating early intervention using a trusted, secure and intuitive platform.

With MyConcern, you can securely record a concern on any device, refer to automated chronologies that display a complete history of any concern or person, and create customised reports based on types of concern, time frame or profile. MyConcern is also bespoke to schools' specific needs, putting you in control and ensuring that your particular safeguarding requirements are reliably met.

# “We had 70 items on our ‘essentials’ list”



Sustainability and a flexible design were at the heart of the development of Cornerstone CE Primary School, says Tim Clarke, the headteacher

**T**he new three form entry Cornerstone CE Primary school was completed in 2021 and will eventually house 630 pupils. The school aims to meet the demand for places in this area of Whiteley, Hampshire, which will arise because of a new 3,000 home development currently taking place around us.

Our new school, which has been built on green field land, replaces an existing one-form-entry temporary school two miles away, where we taught and learned for eight years.

The focus of the school is the Learning Hub – which lies at the very centre of the building and is where children come together for different aspects of learning. It is our library, but it also has a touch-screen board that enables lessons to be taught, and a trolley of iPads for blended learning and research.

Since we moved into our new buildings last year, I have taken more than 90 tours and the overwhelming response we get from visitors, parents and other schools is how fabulous and well-planned out the buildings are and how well they work.

**SOLAR SAVINGS**  
Solar panels on the hall roof, which is the tallest roof of all the buildings. Two-thirds of the electricity we use has been generated through the solar panels, leading to lower costs.

**PLAY SPACE**  
Single storey buildings, with separate blocks for early years and KS1, and KS2, pupils. Classrooms have direct access to dedicated play spaces for different age groups.

**ACCESS**  
Toilets are accessible through internal and external doors to classrooms, so at breaktimes pupils don't need to come into the buildings, where they might end up in groups, unsupervised.

**RISING UP**  
The school was built on two levels. Architects worked with the natural topography to eliminate the need for soil removal and created a 750 mm ramp to combine the two wings. Ramps double up as a great resource for children's play.



## INCLUDING NATURE

Existing mature trees to the north and south of the site form a natural haven from building work going on around the school and provide fresh air. This natural landscape supports outdoor learning.

## SMART ROOFS

South-facing classrooms with extended roof canopies make the most of natural light. Roof canopies around the buildings allow for outdoor play and activities in all weathers.

## SECLUDED

Hard play and sports pitches are located behind the trees, away from the road and passers-by, giving staff and pupils privacy.

## WATER STORAGE TANKS

Storage tanks underground allow for sustainable rainwater attenuation, which slows down the flow of water entering the sewerage system to prevent flooding.

## WARM WALLS

The highly insulated thermal envelope of the buildings works with the energy-saving aspects, such as high-performance windows, doors and rooflights to keep heat in. The building is steel-framed.

## “THE ONLY THING I’D CHANGE IS THE PAPER TOWELS”



Tim Clarke reflects on the design and building process

### Q What’s the best thing about the design of the school?

The whole design both internally and externally was driven by the need to support children’s learning, development and wellbeing, and to enable staff to enhance these things. We wanted to focus on pupils’ learning experiences. During our time in the school, we have seen just how this has happened through the flexible use of the different spaces, and how the design connects the whole school. The pupils love it!

### Q What was your main input?

The governors and I listed 70 items that we said were our ‘essential’ list, but it was actually a wish list. School design is often dated, and pedagogy changes. What we do now won’t be the same in five years’ time so we had to ensure we could maximise space and flexibility. We changed the original plans to make the Learning Hub bigger, so it could accommodate more children and combine classes. Other learning spaces can be divided or opened up with sliding doors. The building needed to function and be operational.

### Q Would you change anything?

Every classroom has a sink with a large cupboard underneath to maximise storage, with the paper towel dispenser located above it. When we moved into the school, the youngest children couldn’t reach the papers towels because of the depth of the cupboard; we have them in a basket next to the sink. This is the only thing I’d change.

# WHY I LOVE...

Find out how the NBA is not just developing young people's interest in basketball at school, but also helping to equip them with some important life skills...

## ABOUT US:

**NAME:** Mr Leighton

**JOB ROLE:** PE teacher

**SCHOOL:** Kettlethorpe High School

**FAVOURITE FEATURE:** "The students' eagerness to learn and play has been fantastic to see"

**TALKING ABOUT:** NBA IN THE CLASSROOM

### “ A brilliant new experience

At Kettlethorpe High School, one of our key priorities is to introduce our students to new experiences that can engage them in a range of creative ways – and the 'NBA in the Classroom' programme fits the bill perfectly.

Our students' passion for staying active and playing sports like basketball has helped them to buy into the many different aspects of the resources. They were intrigued to discover that there's so much beyond just the game of basketball itself – from the positive mental attitudes it can help encourage, to the wide range of careers it can potentially lead to, such as sports journalism, social media consultancy and physiotherapy.

### “ There's something for everyone

Our students were particularly excited to discover that they could be a part of, and play an important role in the NBA, even if they weren't especially strong at sports. For example, some of the resources encourage them to engage their imaginations and apply their creative skills to the task of designing and marketing a range of clothes and shoes. The exercises contained within the resources are all similarly inclusive, in that everyone can take part and enjoy them – whatever their particular skills and interests happen to be.

### “ It's given students a welcome boost

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen a significant portion of our young people struggle with their mental health. The various tasks they've undertaken as part of our 'NBA in the Classroom' activities have really helped them in a number of ways, such as learning about strategies that can help them cope more effectively with adversity.



**CONTACT**  
[classroom.nba.com](http://classroom.nba.com)  
 @NBAUK  
[youtube.com/NBA](http://youtube.com/NBA)



### “ It's given our students many more paths to explore

The resources have really helped to bring their attention to other, different career options they might not have considered before. For many of our students, if they're not a footballer or a basketballer themselves, then they've often not seen what they can gain from engaging with sport. The resources make it clear just how many opportunities there are within the sport sector.

Even among those students who enjoy the sport, but can't realistically picture themselves as professional players, they might have previously seen themselves as one day able to coach others or referee games. Now, however, they're seeing all these different sides to it – the sport journalism side, the physiotherapy side, what goes into marketing it, all the social media considerations around teams and players. The resources have helped bring all of that to the forefront of their minds.

## WILL IT WORK FOR YOUR SCHOOL?

- The resources teach students about the variety of careers that exist both within the NBA and throughout the wider sport industry
- The resources cover a diverse range of interests, and can engage even those students who aren't particularly 'sporty'
- Detailed notes are included to help teachers, coaches and other users of the materials plan their lessons more effectively
- Teachers can access the resources by signing up for the NBA in the Classroom programme, entirely free of charge



# The Head's Guide To... **LEADERSHIP**

## 62

### Screaming in the staffroom

How to reconcile fighting teachers

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Gaining and retaining the trust of parents



# CONSIDER YOURSELF

Why headteacher Vicki Manning cancelled a staff meeting to give teachers some time off and put themselves first...

W

hen I posted a quick tweet after our recent staff meeting, I did not expect the passionate responses I received. Usually, my tweets gain a vast audience of between one and three people, so the barrage of comments was a

bit of a surprise. But it highlighted the strength of feeling many practitioners have around the buzz word of the moment: wellbeing.

The tweet in question: “We put today’s staff meeting aside and challenged teachers to use the time to boost their wellbeing. Some people headed off to the theatre, some went home early to see the children and some of us took a few moments to read and have a coffee. What would you do?”

Lots of people jumped on immediately to praise what we had done, but there were (as always on Twitter) those who offered some points of reflection. One of the main reasons I am on Twitter is to learn and to enhance my practice. These questions and challenges are always welcome, and I enjoyed those who challenged with a curious and kind approach.

## Staff wellbeing

At my school, we produce a half-termly schedule for staff, detailing what is coming up, such as planned CPD, school events, deadlines and monitoring for the half term. In spring I we had included a staff meeting dedicated to

wellbeing. The purpose of including this on the schedule was to allow teachers to plan in advance how best to use the session. In my tweet, I deliberately used the word ‘challenge’, because I know that busy teachers will often see any extra time in the school day as the perfect time to ‘catch up’ on work. And, yes, having more time for the things on our to-do list can be just the thing for improving wellbeing, but for this specific session I wanted it to be something more powerful.

Over lockdown I joined a remote event where the speaker talked about filling your cup, and about how, for him, the opportunity to go running before he got home for the day meant that he could return to his family with energy and calm. As professionals, we are always busy and I know the teachers and leaders in my school will often work in the evenings and weekends. This can very quickly lead to overwhelm, stress, burnout and exhaustion.

## Not just a tick-box

We all know that to provide the best education we can for our pupils, we need oodles of patience, calm and energy. But everyone’s heard of the horrors of the mandatory staff yoga session, and I’ve worked in many schools where ‘wellbeing’ is ticked off through these kinds of novelties; a junk food Friday, forced fun in the pub, or a Zoom quiz. But the reality of true wellbeing is that it’s different for all of us. We all get our energy from different things, and events like this won’t hit the spot for everyone. I wanted the scheduled session to have the flexibility for teachers to choose what would work for them.

Prior to the session I asked staff what they were planning to use the time for. Some were already clear; they had seen the meeting listed on the schedule in advance and had made plans, such as booking theatre tickets. Others were not so sure, and were surprised when asked directly. It wasn’t so much that I wanted to hold people to account for their use of this time, but more that I was hoping to prompt their thinking about what would work for them, and to support them in prioritising themselves amongst their busy to-do lists.

I started having these conversations a few days before the session, but on the day of the event there were still some teachers who had decided to use the time to catch up on work. I made sure to visit them at the end of the school day, asking them to compromise a little and perhaps finish earlier than they would have.

These discussions were useful in understanding the staff a bit better. It is becoming clear that some are able to see the benefits of time out, and others find the thought of it uncomfortable.

## Making time

Deciding to dedicate directed time like this of course means that we lost an opportunity for direct staff training or specific work. Time in school is valuable, and this did mean we had to carefully consider what would be missing from the development schedule this term. However, we have also been considering how to make staff development more effective, useful and engaging for teachers. We’ve introduced more active approaches, such as a peer development cycle, loosely based on the lesson study approach. This allows teachers to visit each other’s classrooms and choose their own development foci, and it takes place within the school day and weekly phase meetings. We’ve also taken a more responsive approach to our school improvement work this year, ensuring we review regularly and focus on the most essential areas each half term. This creative use of the time we have available has allowed us to be more flexible with scheduled staff meeting time.

Truly developing wellbeing is going to take a lot more than a one-off event in the school diary. Ultimately, staff CPD sessions are part of our directed time. Staff need to attend them, and there are always so many things we could use that time for, but openly dedicating sessions to wellbeing

I wanted the scheduled session to have the flexibility for teachers to choose what would work for them



## 3 WAYS TO PUT YOUR WELLBEING FIRST



• **Six tips for teacher wellbeing**  
Prevention is better than cure so why not commit to some good health habits this term...  
[tinyurl.com/tp-TeacherWellbeing](https://tinyurl.com/tp-TeacherWellbeing)



• **Stop striving to be perfect**  
We need to bin the idea of relentlessly trying to achieve the unachievable...  
[tinyurl.com/tp-NotPerfect](https://tinyurl.com/tp-NotPerfect)



• **How to avoid burnout**  
We must make sure we have a teaching stress-management plan...  
[tinyurl.com/tp-AvoidBurnout](https://tinyurl.com/tp-AvoidBurnout)

demonstrates a commitment to the individuals in our teams. It is all too easy for teachers and leaders to put their own wellbeing at the bottom of that to-do list, and it can help if leaders model the importance of focusing on this, even when there are so many competing priorities. Giving up a staff meeting for this purpose is not the answer to improving wellbeing, and of course there is only so much that can be achieved in an hour or two, but it is certainly a start.

We aim to hold sessions like this every term, and we are currently writing our own strategy to be shared with everyone in school. Of course, key to this is consulting with staff and finding out what really helps them. If you have ideas to contribute, I'm always keen to hear them! Find me at @HeadOnTheHill on Twitter. **HT**

Vicki Manning is headteacher at Ash Hill Primary School in High Wycombe.

## PEER REVIEWS CAN

# transform headteachers' ideas

Bringing together senior leaders from different schools to share and assess teaching practice offers an effective route to self-improvement for all involved, says

**Dr Kate Chhatwal**

**F**or Ruth Coupe, headteacher of Marton Primary Academy and Nursery in Blackpool, visiting another school on a peer review led her to radically overhauling her own school's approach to reading. What she saw, heard about and further explored in an ongoing relationship with the host school, Pickhurst Infants in Bromley, led to major changes, benefiting children for whom language acquisition had been a struggle.

Ruth's transformational experience is one of many from the 2,500 Quality Assurance Reviews carried out by Challenge Partners school leaders across the country. Our peer reviews continued through lockdowns and Covid restrictions, online and in new formats, so leaders could continue to learn from each other and improve their schools.

Professional development is at the heart of peer review, which harnesses the wisdom of senior leaders to support each other.

Visiting reviewers benefit as much as the host school, and Ruth Coupe had particular challenges the programme helped her to address. "Marton is in a deprived area and many of the children have impoverished language," she explains. "We were a good school but we needed inspiration to know what to do next, and new ideas to help us to improve further."

"Visiting Pickhurst certainly inspired us and completely transformed our approach. Everything about the school emphasised reading and language acquisition, as soon as you walked through the front door. The outdoor learning areas gave us lots of ideas for language development through play. Each area had books, vocabulary and literacy activities as well as the other things to do; so, for instance, in the garden area there were books and words about gardening. They also had a reading dog, who reluctant readers would read to, helping develop their confidence and enjoyment."

"Back at Marton, we thought the way we were teaching vocabulary acquisition and reading, weaving them into our curriculum and environment. Classrooms were filled with links to characters, and the library was developed into somewhere the children can't wait to go. We arranged experiential learning around texts, such as taking children and their families out for a bear hunt. Everybody is seen as a teacher of speech and language now, whereas before it was almost like a bolt-on. Our children still have significant barriers, but progress



**“Upwards convergence is about raising the performance of the highest achieving schools while reducing the gap between them and lower achievers”**

Dr Kate Chhatwal OBE, chief exec at Challenge Partners

has significantly improved, and staff understanding was integral to that.”

## Wide-ranging benefits

Peer reviews were already common in the higher education sector, but schools' interest in them intensified from 2010, influenced by the vision of a self-improving system. By 2020, the School Improvement Commission recommended that "All schools should consider the role that school-to-school peer review could take, to help provide a regular external view of their strengths



and areas for development.”

Challenge Partners’ QA Review has been validated by the Institute of Education and found to offer schools multiple gains, deriving from the “collective educational ambition and mutual trust” that the authors credit for its success.

The CPD is carefully structured, with leaders undergoing a day’s training, which enables them to practise key elements of the QA Review process and receive peer feedback to augment their own professional reflections on what they learnt from that practice.

### A springboard for learning

The training and professional audit of an institution brings significant developmental benefits for peer reviewers and host institution leaders alike. It also provides a springboard for further learning as leaders and teachers collaborate within and beyond their school or trust, including learning together, from role models and through coaching.

The principal activity on the first day and in pre-reading is orientation to the host school, understanding its context, approach to school improvement, and evidence of impact. Further evidence is gathered and triangulated through activities including learning walks and interviews with key personnel, many conducted in partnership with host school leaders. This hones skills around evidence-gathering through skilful open questioning, observation and structured professional dialogue about what is seen.

Peer reviewers then work together to further explore the

evidence for structured feedback, highlighting what is working well and potential next steps. Giving the feedback demands skill so that it balances tact and rigour and is delivered in a supportive and developmental way, supported by the Lead Reviewer.

The final element is an opportunity for the host school to present an area of challenge and invite the insights and ideas that peer reviewers bring from their own experience and research.

### Upwards convergence

Challenge Partners was founded by practitioners and uses peer review to further the goal of ‘upwards convergence’ in school performance, in order to improve life chances for children and young people – particularly those facing disadvantage. The upwards convergence model was established by my predecessor and Challenge Partners’ founding CEO, Professor Sir George Berwick, as he developed the original teaching schools concept.

Upwards convergence is about raising the performance of the highest achieving schools while reducing the gap between them and lower achievers. It applies equally to student achievement and teacher quality.

Peer review is a necessary component in upwards convergence, but it’s the action taken afterwards that brings the real benefits, for pupils at the host school, the schools which reviewers return to with fresh thinking and examples of excellent practice, and ultimately for successive cohorts of children who benefit year after year. **HT**

**STAFF FEEDBACK**



**GEORGE CROXFORD**  
CEO, ROYAL WOOTTON BASSETT ACADEMY TRUST

“One review we had made an unbelievable difference. We had been trying to work on pupil premium performance for many years and were getting nowhere. We asked reviewers to look at it and they highlighted how most pupils receiving pupil premium were all in the bottom sets, except for the select few in the top sets who were absolutely flying. It gave us all sorts of new challenges to solve. We moved these pupils into higher sets to stretch them, and ultimately we had positive Progress 8 scores because of this.”



**JAMES GREENWOOD**  
HEADTEACHER, MANOR LEAS JUNIOR ACADEMY

“It’s a robust and rigorous experience that really means you can look at all areas concerned with leadership and the quality of education that young people receive. All stakeholders understand how it helps us as a school. After the quality assurance review takes place, we can report to governors and it makes sure they aren’t just told what’s going on by senior leaders but have an external report to really triangulate that evidence.”



**RITA HINDOCVHA**  
EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL OF BROOK MEAD ACADEMY

“You get a real injection of quality CPD through the training provided. The experience of undertaking reviews in your own school and going out to see the approaches of colleagues around the country is also invaluable. I was trained as a Challenge Partners reviewer and I had the privilege of going into schools for three days in London, Durham and Luton. That completely accelerated my development and exposed me to new ways of working.”

**THE PROBLEM**

**ONE TEACHER CAME INTO THE STAFFROOM AND SCREAMED AT ANOTHER. HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD?**



If you suspect that work is a factor in the initial outburst, you should ask if that is the case and what the work issues relate to. It may be that they need to discuss workload with their line manager – are they feeling overloaded? They can also be provided with any Employee Assistance Programme details and, if they suggest they are ‘stressed’ or ‘depressed’ regarding work, should be informed that if they are feeling unwell, they should visit their GP. As this could be a sign of a mental health issue, you could potentially look at a referral to occupational health.

Make sure you take notes during informal meetings and email the employees afterwards outlining what was discussed. Once you get more information, you will be in a better position to move forward.

**Is this a disciplinary issue?**

Potentially. If the employee has previous informal or formal warnings for shouting or not treating colleagues with dignity and respect, or if they’re not apologetic for their actions, it may be time to investigate under the disciplinary

procedure. However, if there haven’t been previous issues and if the employee is particularly apologetic, it may be that dealing with the matter informally through a management action letter reminding them of the expected conduct is sufficient.

**Is this a grievance issue?**

It could be. If the employee that was shouted at wants to follow the grievance procedure, they should be reminded that the first instance is the informal stage and options such as mediation could be considered to avoid a formal investigation.

**Is mediation an option?**

If both employees agree to it, you could hold a meeting with them and ask them to talk through the issue. You might choose to use an external mediation service to conduct the meeting, especially if you’re concerned that issues may be more complex.

The mental health and wellbeing of staff in education settings has always been important, but it’s now more important than ever in the context of the pandemic and moving towards recovery. Improved wellbeing among staff is a key outcome for education policy. **HT**



The staffroom break should be a time to relax a little away from the pressures of work. Unfortunately, disagreements aren’t uncommon in the

workplace, particularly when stress levels are heightened.

As unpleasant as the incident described was, it needs to be tackled so all staff feel safe and supported under your leadership. It would be prudent to ask the staff member who reported the incident to email you an account of what happened and the names of other witnesses. The next step is to meet with each person involved informally.

Sensitivity is key when you meet the employee who was shouted at; they must be supported and this should include making them aware of any Employee Assistance Programme your school operates. At this point you may also want to ask if they would be prepared to meet with the other employee to try and resolve the issue. Of course, they may not want to and should not be pressured to do so as that would be counterproductive.

Once you have met with them, you should meet with the employee that allegedly shouted and find out what happened from their perspective. You should also ask whether they would be prepared to discuss the incident with their colleague, because resolution is important, particularly in the workplace where there will inevitably be friction.



Oliver Daly is the principal HR consultant in Stone King’s employment team ([stoneking.co.uk](http://stoneking.co.uk)).

# HOW TO HIRE THE PERFECT...

## ECT

When **Colin Dowland** had to employ new staff at the last minute, speed dating proved a welcome saviour

### 1 LAST-MINUTE RESIGNATIONS

In 2021, I found myself with just six weeks to find a replacement teacher at that time of year when the strongest ECTs had already been snapped up. I advertised, contacted supply agencies and invited over 20 candidates to teach a trial lesson. Less than half turned up and most that did weren't good enough. We only managed to appoint someone in the final week of the summer term. It was very stressful!

### 2 A FRESH APPROACH

Fast forward to this March and I received another resignation.

Helpfully, a local supply agency was organising an event for schools to meet ECTs – effectively speed dating for teachers. Putting aside our distrust of agency recruitment, my deputy and I decided to give it a go. We had nothing to lose, except an hour of our time.

### 3 HEAD TO THE HALL

After we'd set up our stall in another school's hall, the agency introduced us to the first three of 12 ECTs and gave us 15 minutes to find a good match. The first two minutes were a chance for us to tell the prospective teachers about our school and what we could offer them. Then we had 10 minutes to ask them some questions.

### 4 SEARCHING QUESTIONS

We began with *'Tell us about your journey over the last few years,'* so we could hear how they expressed themselves and understand their motivations. The second was the classic *'What are your strengths and what do you need to develop?'*

This told us how reflective and open to development they were, and, crucially, whether they might be a good fit for our school.

### 5 LOTS TO LEARN

After three more minutes, which allowed them a chance to ask us some questions, we gave them our documents (and a free school pencil!) and then moved on to the next set of three. It was amazing how much we were able to learn in those few minutes, and how quickly we formed opinions about who were the strongest candidates, who we could potentially develop and who we would be happy to work with.

### 6 THE BENEFITS

Within a few days we'd invited six candidates for interview. We then observed and interviewed two and appointed one onto our permanent staff.

Yes, there was an exorbitant finder's fee from the agency, but to be able to meet so many candidates and filter them out in just over an hour was incredibly efficient. So, if you're looking for a long-term school relationship, try the speed-dating approach... even if you're already married!



Within a few days we'd invited six candidates for interview



Colin Dowland is a primary headteacher in North London. He tweets as

@colindowland

# TAKE A WIDER VIEW

All staff will have different thoughts on the problems your school faces. As head, you should not shy away from this complexity when setting strategy



It's tempting to envisage a clear-cut chain of cause and effect between what we do as leaders, what teachers do in their classrooms and outcomes for children. If that were the case, it would be complicated to successfully manage. But it doesn't work like this and schools aren't complicated; they're better described as complex. So, what influence do leaders have over a complex environment?

School leaders don't directly influence children's learning, but they do have strong influence over features of school life that positively influence the quality of teaching. As Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins document, successful leaders:

- Set directions – building and communicating a shared vision, identifying short-term goals, and creating high-performance expectations.
- Build relationships and develop people – stimulating and supporting staff growth; modelling the school's values; and forging links between staff, students and parents.
- Develop their school to support desired practices – building a collaborative culture, connecting the school to its wider environment, and allocating resources to meet its goals.
- Improve instructional programmes – staffing the

programmes, providing instructional support, and monitoring student learning and school improvement.

The link between these behaviours and excellent teaching is distributed leadership. When leadership is distributed, leaders at all levels make decisions and implement plans with the goal of improving children's learning. The challenge of getting this right lies in school complexity. Classes full of children, each armed with differing prior knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, come together to learn the school's curriculum. Classes are led by different teachers, equally varied in their own understanding and values. Parts of the school are led by different middle leaders, again with differing assumptions. If that weren't complex enough, each accumulated interaction

between children and staff results in changes to what they know, understand and believe...

## Know your context

School improvement requires leaders to understand their school context thoroughly in order to make good decisions on how to affect the quality of teaching. Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins identified the following contextual categories:

- Situated contexts – e.g. locale, school histories, intakes and settings.
- Professional contexts – e.g. values, teacher commitment and experiences, and policy management.
- Material contexts – e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure.
- External contexts – e.g. degree and quality of local authority/MAT support, pressures and

expectations from broader policy context such as Ofsted ratings.

- Legal requirements and responsibilities.

The complexity of a school's context is the main reason why improvement is a wicked problem that's never fully resolved and appears different to each person looking on (White). It's vital that leaders first select the right problem to focus on. Even doing this can be difficult because our perceptions of what is playing out in front of us (and what we should do about it) is influenced by our beliefs and knowledge about school improvement. A leader's mental model might include:

- what education is for
- what it means for a school to improve
- the characteristics of great schools that might be aspired to
- what their school is already good at
- what their school needs to do better
- the resources available to bring about improvements, and
- the standards schools are held to by Ofsted and other regulating bodies.





The success of school leaders' chosen initiatives to bring about improvement is dependent on action on a mass scale, influenced by leaders distributed around the school and implemented by all colleagues. School improvement is therefore reliant on:

- the headteacher's beliefs and values
- the beliefs and values of those that leadership is distributed to, and
- the leadership team's success in understanding/engaging with the beliefs and values of colleagues.

### A shared approach

Although there's no single most effective model for distributed leadership, one thing that necessarily aligns leaders' work is their recognition of the problem at hand and their perception of what is necessary to tackle it. Consider the problem of poor school performance in reading at KS2 SATs:

The Y6 leader thinks the children underperformed on the day and usually do much better in reading on a day-by-day basis. She believes children should be better prepared in managing test situations. She feels more comprehension-style activities

will be useful because they mimic the format of the test.

The reading leader strongly disagrees with the Y6 teacher. She knows the cohort have had less time learning with their recently developed reading strategy and believes the next cohort will do much better because of the additional year of reading instruction they'll have experienced. She's aware of the relative lack of reading fluency in the cohort which could have affected their understanding of what they read, and that reading fluency is much stronger in the younger year groups because of recent sustained efforts to improve it.

The headteacher thinks the quality of books that children read is insufficient to cope with the expectations of a KS2 SATs reading paper and that the reading curriculum needs to be overhauled to make the most of the emerging reading strategy being implemented. She thinks the wider curriculum is insufficient to build children's general knowledge and that more non-fiction reading needs to be part of the non-core curriculum to build robust schematics of key concepts from, and wide vocabulary in, each subject.

All three leaders in this

example have noticeably different assumptions about the reasons for poor reading performance. Consequently, if tasked with making decisions to improve teaching, each would choose different actions. As such the headteacher needs to strive to develop not only shared beliefs and values but also a collective mental model of the complexity of their school and the strategies they've chosen to improve it.

It's entirely sensible that this collective mental model of school improvement includes individuals' experiences of previous schools or knowledge of what others do, whether it's a particular scheme of work, pedagogical approach or policy to do with various aspects of school life. Leaders must however proceed with caution as what might have worked in other schools may not result in similar success in this school, now. The risk of transplanting solutions from one school to another is in failing to adapt them appropriately to suit the school's needs and context. Every school differs contextually and successful implementation of improvement strategies is dependent on leaders' understanding of their context.

When leaders explore a problem from multiple viewpoints, it sets the tone for other leaders to take the time to understand the complexity of school improvement. It makes it more likely that leaders diagnose the problem accurately and in turn makes it more likely that they choose appropriate strategies to bring about improvement. **HT**

## SIX STEPS TO SUCCESS

What can you do to appreciate the complexity of school improvement?

- Deliberately build up knowledge of the core business of teaching and learning.
- Support all leaders to do the same so that the leadership team develops a collective mental model of teaching and learning.
- School improvement requires leaders to accurately diagnose the needs of their school so take the time to study the intricacies of how it works.
- Support all leaders to do the same so that the leadership team develops a collective mental model of how their school runs.
- Seek the opinions of a variety of colleagues when diagnosing the cause of noticeable symptoms (such as poor reading achievement at KS2).
- Look to other successful schools for possible improvement strategies but remember that those strategies are the solutions to their problems, not yours.

It's vital that everyone buys into this approach; staff must understand its rationale, how it works and the benefits it can bring



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# BLAZING KEYBOARD SYNDROME

Debby Elley explains how to avoid combative exchanges with parents of children with SEND and build mutually beneficial partnerships

**A**

s co-founder of an autism parenting magazine, I've seen many parent-teacher relationships disintegrate after a flurry of confrontational emails sent during moments of heightened tension.

These type of exchanges are more common than you might think. However, the question from a teacher's viewpoint shouldn't be, 'How do I respond to them?' but rather, 'How do I stop these from landing in my inbox in the first place?'

First, let's consider why they happen. To illustrate this, I'll share with you the

This is the root cause of what I call 'blazing keyboard syndrome'. I've urged parents who have contacted me to not succumb to BKS, but instead arrange a face-to-face meeting to better understand the full context and plan a way forward. And I believe it's vital that teachers do the same.

To avoid the slings and arrows, make sure the stage is set for a proactive and personal approach to parent-teacher partnerships

event that came to inspire my current project. I'd offered to meet a local parent who'd told me she was desperate for help concerning her son's mainstream schooling.

Our conversation began with her recalling how, "I asked Will what he learnt at school, and he told me he'd learnt that if he gritted his back teeth hard enough, it would stop him from crying."

As a carer, what can you do when your protective instincts are mobilised so suddenly? When the school gates are closed, your only route in is via the computer keyboard.

## Reactive responses

Upon receiving an upset and perhaps accusatory email from a parent, the immediate temptation may be to respond with a (hopefully reassuring) sound and logical defence. However, to do so would be to miss the subtext – namely 'I'm upset and anxious. My child doesn't feel safe or cared for at school.'

When parents say they don't feel heard, it's often because teachers are responding to them reactively on a case-by-case basis, rather than expressing an understanding of their underlying concerns.

Responding to such emails with yet more emails also establishes a precedent, whereby carers soon learn that if they want to discuss something urgently, typing works.

If you'd rather not form partnerships centred around these kinds of mismatched exchanges, avoid letting them become that way in the first place. Allowing emails to define your relationship with a family means that when things go wrong, you're likely to receive an inbox of fireworks.

The keyboard can sometimes be a time-saver, but building a positive working relationship will save far more time, and do more to prevent further crises in the long-run.

## Friendly 'catch-ups'

It's always a good idea to meet carers face-to-face from the outset, especially at the first sign of any problems.

This will help to familiarise you with their emotional landscape, including their past experiences with schools, and inform your understanding of what drives their approach to you.

Gareth D. Morewood was my son's former SENCo, and is now educational advisor at the staff training and psychological services provider, Studio 3 – as well as my collaborator on the book *Championing Your Autistic Teen at Secondary School*. As

a SENCo, Gareth got to know me in my capacity as a parent straight away, which later reaped rewards through the pooling of our experience to create a calm environment for my son.

We both managed to forge a productive partnership over the course of 15-minute chats at the end of the school day every month or so over a cup of tea. These weren't 'meetings' – implying arduous, perhaps



intimidating talks – but friendly ‘catch-ups’. Gareth ensured that together, we could predict potential difficulties and put strategies in place to avoid them, while noting what was going well and why.

This honest exchange of information helped forge a fruitful and trusting partnership, which inspired us to help others replicate it. By adopting a straightforward exchange involving face-to-face contact, you’ll soon find yourself operating more within the realm of collaboration than confrontation.

### Anger at the system

If your parental counterparts don’t immediately embrace your ideas, don’t dismiss them

as unhelpful collaborators. Remember that SEND parents may well be emotionally exhausted. By the time our children have reached secondary school age, we’ll have explained their difficulties in detail to countless educators and professionals, sat in numerous meetings, filled in lengthy, indecipherable forms and attended umpteen appointments.

Our energy and commitment can sometimes become depleted, and our trust eroded. Often, we’ll have gone to immense efforts that don’t amount to much. There may be fatigue, disillusionment or anger at the system as a whole.

Take time to really absorb that last paragraph. Be aware that you may not be starting with a blank canvas; you may need to paint

over a dark background.

If a parent seems resistant to a particular proposal, try to unpack their reasoning. What’s happened in their past? Attempt to pick apart their fears. By addressing underlying concerns now, you’ll be more likely to avoid conflict in future

### ‘There was an incident...’

Anger and anxiety can be flip-sides of the same coin. If a parent feels powerless to influence decision-making on behalf of their vulnerable youngster, either or both can become evident. Including parent input within your strategies will reduce that sense of powerlessness.

It also pays to be honest when mistakes are made. I’ve yet to hear from a single parent who’s been angry at a teacher for admitting a mistake. I’ve heard from many who were furious at mistakes being swept under the carpet, or blame being assigned to the wrong parties. Being mindful of the language you use is also essential for avoiding conflict. Using the word ‘incident’ to denote a negative situation might seem well-meaning, but from a parent-carer’s perspective, it’s a term often associated with police cordons and flashing sirens.

If I heard a teacher use the word in relation to my child, the hairs on the back of my neck would rise. Careful phrasing can show that you’ve comprehended a young person’s distress and be far less inflammatory.

Instead of ‘There was an incident in which he lashed out at another student...’ try ‘Paul felt really upset and angry

## 10 WAYS TO FORM BETTER PARTNERSHIPS

1. When deciding on strategies to address social or learning obstacles, share ideas with parents at the planning stage
2. Create personalised ‘Stress Support Plans’ to predict and avoid anxiety-provoking situations
3. Don’t wait for a crisis; consult parents/ carers for their ideas on how to deploy early troubleshooting
4. Respond to parent/ carer anxieties via phone rather than email, and try to meet up ASAP
5. Summarise a parent’s concerns in your own words before arranging a solution-focused chat
6. Introduce new plans through stepped processes rather than overnight; review approaches together after a set time
7. Share good news about a child’s social, emotional and educational progress as often as possible
8. Establish rapid communication channels so that parents can warn you of difficult mornings before school, or difficult evenings afterwards
9. Be honest when mistakes are made; trust is built when you’re able to reflect on and refine your methods
10. If you encounter disagreement over particular interventions, bring in an outside expert

this morning because [insert situation], so we could do with chatting about how we avoid that.’

If you’d rather avoid the slings and arrows, make sure your stage is set for a proactive and personal – rather than reactive and impersonal – approach to your parent-teacher partnerships. **HT**



Debby Elley is the co-founder of AuKids magazine and a parent to twin sons, both with autism

# DON'T LET BAD MANAGEMENT DRIVE YOUR STAFF AWAY

By developing stronger leadership skills, you and your senior team can empower classroom teachers and boost performance school-wide

**A** recent survey by Teacher Tapp found that teachers are most likely to leave teaching due to management issues, with 34% of respondents considering quitting due to poor management. The survey also found schools are failing to build 'collegiate' environments. This is worrying news for senior leaders in education, but the good news is there is lots headteachers can do to develop stronger leadership skills in their senior management teams.

Leadership is a simple but powerful concept which anyone with an open mind can apply; it is about knowing where you are going and recruiting others to help you get there. Brilliant leadership can be learned, and anyone who chooses to work to improve theirs will be able to do so. Better leadership means happier, stronger, more empowered teams, and better performance. In turn, that all means a better school environment.

## Define 'leadership'

It's important to start with a clear and simple definition of what strong leadership is. The following is a good place to start: "Leaders achieve things far beyond what they could do alone, by engaging others intellectually and emotionally in pursuit of a clear and compelling purpose."

Leadership has reach because it creates and harnesses energy in others. An effective leader multiplies their own effect by the number of people they lead. They also connect with people on two levels. An emotional connection is essential to create energy and commitment. People are more likely to give time and effort to something or someone they feel an emotional connection to. Intellectual engagement is also important,



and elements of this would include a good plan, structure and order.

Where the purpose is not clear, activity is unfocused. Where the purpose is not compelling there is a lack of energy and engagement. When the purpose is both clear and compelling this supplies a powerful motivator, which gives direction and inspires creativity and useful initiative.

### The asymmetric approach

In high-performing teams this is exactly what happens: leadership flows around and throughout. Everybody is motivated and guided by that clear and compelling purpose, and the result is a creative and exciting school culture where leadership is encouraged and team members feel free to harness the energy of others to generate useful activity. I call this 'asymmetric leadership'.

However, high-performing teams are rare. Very often process becomes more important than purpose, and schools tie themselves up with bureaucracy that actually discourages initiative and leadership. Senior members of the school control everything, and energy is stifled. This means that there is a very traditional view of leadership, where it is linked to position, grade and status. Decisions flow downhill, and nothing happens without the right level or authority signing up to it. There is an implicit (and nonsensical) assumption that with position comes immense wisdom and infallibility. Normally the result of this style of one-directional leadership is that decision making is slow, and thinking is limited to only a very few authorised senior staff within the school.

If the purpose is clear and well understood, any member of the team can bring others together to work towards it. This could mean leading people of the same grade by harnessing their energy

and getting them emotionally and intellectually engaged, or it could mean leading people of a higher grade. Leadership should flow up, down and around in a vibrant, thriving school culture.

### Be purposeful

To avoid internal friction and to drive activity, senior leaders need to work hard to define the

purpose of their team and the school. That purpose should be 'clear and compelling', simple enough that everyone in the team will understand it (not too long and written in plain language), and emotionally engaging enough that people will want to work for it. A structure that works well is for the statement to have two elements to it: 'What?' and 'Why?'. The 'What?' guides activity, the 'Why?' fuels emotional engagement.

A well-defined purpose can be incredibly powerful. It can inspire and energise, but only if it is well understood within the teaching body. Too often the purpose gets lost in corporate-sounding documents; even though people know it exists, the purpose is not a lived experience. This is where you as a leader need to ensure that everyone not only understands the purpose, but are also excited by it and focused on it.

The purpose will need to be discussed regularly to keep it in the forefront of people's minds. It should be brought into meetings, linked to people's objectives, and referenced in plans. All work should be guided by the same clear and compelling purpose. If you get the purpose right, it will energise the whole school, pull people together, focus resources and give meaning to people's work.

### Make connections

Effective leaders need to be good at connecting with people. Even if your nature is introverted and you lean more towards engaging in a task than connecting with others, as a leader, connecting with your team is essential. One way to help senior management connect with their staff is by role-modelling this behaviour with them.

However busy you and they are as leaders, it is important to prioritise connecting with people. This will be an alien concept in many schools, where harvesting emails and filling space at staff meetings takes precedence over engaging with colleagues. Becoming an effective leader involves challenging unhelpful organisational culture,

## 5 WAYS TO CONNECT WITH COLLEAGUES

A simple but effective way to build connections is to visit your teams in their classrooms or offices and spend some time with them. This way you are meeting on their territory, where they feel most comfortable, which allows for a more relaxed and honest level of connection. Walking around school is always good too, as you meet people and see things that are not obvious from your desk.

I also have a few 'rules' that apply to connecting which might help you:

- 1 Always accept a cup of tea or coffee when offered. This lets people know that you have time for them.
- 2 Be yourself. Do not be tempted to hide behind your position or status. Instead, be relaxed, smile and look people in the eye.
- 3 Be present, and occasionally take notes. Take the time to ask questions about them, and how they are feeling – and switch off or silence digital devices for the duration of the meeting.
- 4 Listen much more than you talk. Try not to take any criticism personally and become defensive of school policy or your own decisions. Just listen to what people are saying and try to understand what is important to them.
- 5 If there is time, talk simply and consistently about what you are trying to achieve in the school.

so this could be a good place to start.

The aim is to get to know people: to break down the hierarchy, bureaucracy and status consciousness around you in order to form really meaningful connections. Connect with the people in your team and the people who interact with your team. **HT**



Neil Jurd OBE is the author of *The Leadership Book* (£15.99, available from Amazon.co.uk)

and founder of skills platform LeaderConnect. Visit [leader-connect.co.uk](http://leader-connect.co.uk)

Brilliant leadership can be learned,  
and anyone who chooses to  
work to improve theirs will  
be able to do so

# UNLOCKING THE POWER OF BOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

Strategy, drama and investigation – Talk for Reading can add a new dimension to your children’s literacy learning

**A** part from developing kindness, reading is the most important part of the curriculum, as it opens up the world for children, giving access to information, ideas and stories about the human condition. Reading is an extraordinary form of abstract thinking in words, images and feelings. Potentially, it provides a lifetime of enrichment that binds us all together as one human race. Everyone loves a good story.

With this in mind, we spent six years developing Talk for Reading. We worked with schools that have high attainment, despite serving challenging areas, to figure out what they were doing that was so effective. It focuses on three core aspects:

- A very positive reading culture
- Highly effective teaching of phonics and fluency
- Successful teaching of vocabulary and comprehension.

Here’s how they work...

## Books as core knowledge

Effective schools loiter with great books and texts. Once a child has spent time with Anthony Browne’s *Voices in the Park*, for example, working for a week or so considering the four characters’ viewpoints, the book becomes a frame of reference for exploration of other narratives. This enables pupils to discuss how texts can be seen from the author’s viewpoint, the narrator’s, and different characters’, as well as how different readers might view a text.

Familiarity with great books

provides core book knowledge. This is the school’s ‘Reading Spine’: a mapped-out book curriculum that provides the basic entitlement to experience great literature (narrative, non fiction and poetry).

## Picture books

Picture books can be an ideal place to begin to develop deep thinking about texts – pictures make it seem simpler and so children gain confidence. I would suggest starting with:

- *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne
- *I’ll take you to Mrs Cole* by Nigel Gray
- *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan.

## Reading strategically

This is not the same as ‘doing strategies’ whether the text needs them or not! Pupils should learn how to tackle different texts efficiently alongside what to do if they start to lose the meaning. So, reading

a non-fiction book to discover information involves a different strategic approach to reading a short story or poem. Generally, losing the thread of a text is addressed by slowing down, rereading, trying to extract the key idea or action, and perhaps making notes to clarify what is happening before summarising. Non-fiction, however, involves skimming, scanning and using an index or glossary.

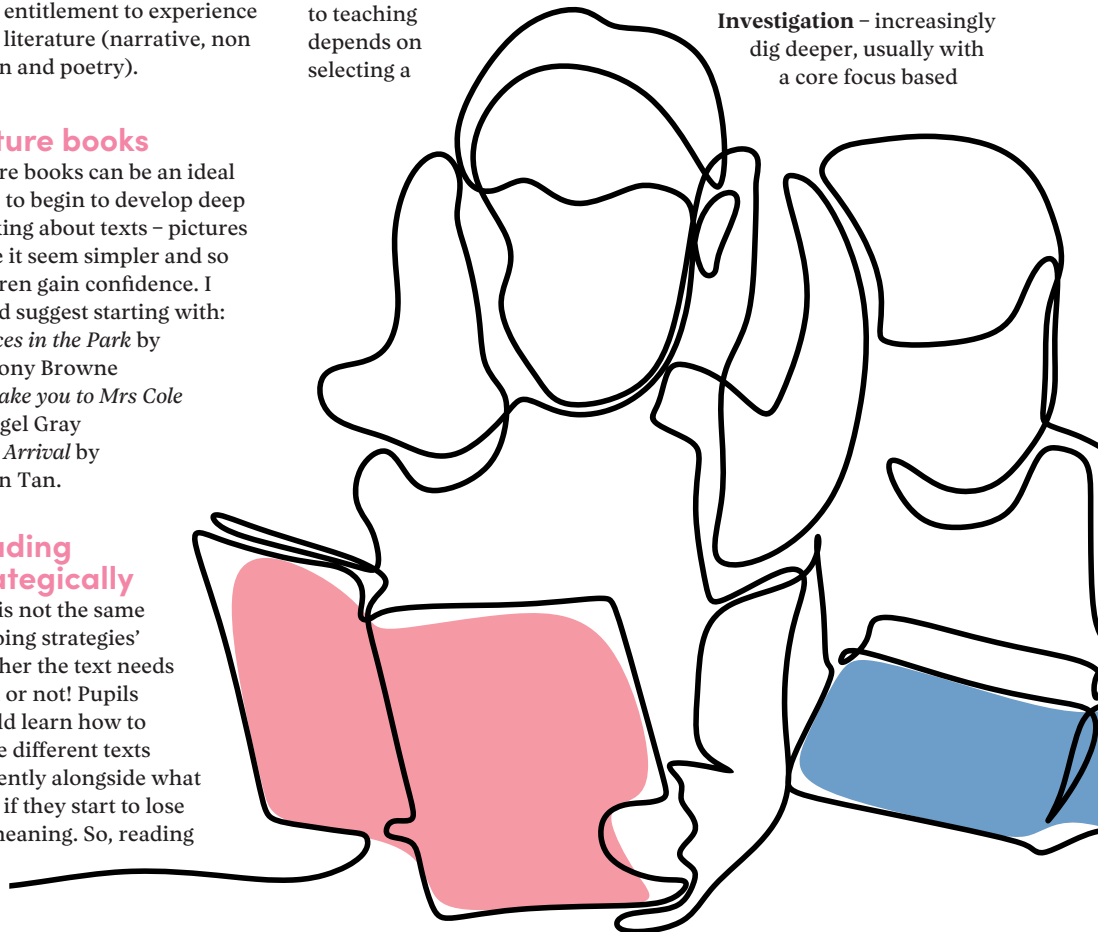
## Text choice

The approach to teaching depends on selecting a

worthwhile, challenging text. If the children can already read and understand a book, then nothing new will be learned. The movement from dependence to independence stretches across three phases:

**Introduction** – read the text aloud fluently several times and ask the children to share first responses and ideas. Carry out initial work on vocabulary so that soon everyone can reread the text with basic understanding.

**Investigation** – increasingly dig deeper, usually with a core focus based



on a relevant literary concept. Use teaching approaches such as reading aloud, sentence-by-sentence, close reading, drama, writing in the style and summarising. By the end of this phase everyone should be able to read the text fluently with understanding.

**Independent application** – finally, this involves children demonstrating what they have learned. This may be writing something similar, writing about their reading discursively, answering questions, or applying what they have learned to another text.

### Provide reading vocabulary

The main focus is on oral comprehension, sometimes leading into writing. Depending on the focus, you can provide the core vocabulary and sentence stems that might be useful.

For instance, when discussing character, provide words such as *character, heroine, protagonist, supporting*

*characters, inner thoughts, speech, action, reaction, motivation, description*; give pupils key words to describe personality such as *brave, bold, calm, shy, angry, humble*, etc., alongside the core vocabulary; and provide relevant sentence stems such as *'The way the character behaves suggests that...'* and *'This provides an insight into...'*.

### Core teaching approaches

**Dialogic comprehension** is an opportunity for the children to share and discuss their ideas as a group or class. Prompt their discussion, listening to responses and challenging as necessary. This is *not* about questioning children to test comprehension.

Apart from developing kindness, reading is the most important part of the curriculum

When such discussions are effective, everyone deepens their comprehension and the possibilities that the text offers. Training the children how to have a good discussion involves developing the following approaches. They should be ready to:  
Suggest a new idea – *I think... because...*  
Challenge – *I'd like to challenge Jenny...*

Build on an idea – *I'd like to build on Raj's idea...*

Explain – *Can Kabir explain why... I think I can explain why...*

Question – *We were wondering whether...*

Justify – *The author states that... I think that... because the author...*

**Talk aloud** – model being a reader out loud, to reveal the thought processes that happen as we read. This most effective when you focus on the key concept being explored, e.g. talking about the characters and picking up on what the text suggests or reveals.

**Sentence-by-sentence** reading slows the text right down and allows you to demonstrate how to tie ideas together rather than skimming. Model the way in which the text works before the children work in pairs using the same strategy.

**Questioning** – the most powerful questions are usually open-ended and lead into a meaty discussion based on careful rereading of the text. They could be built around literary concepts, e.g. *What is your impression of the author's viewpoint of the subject? Is the author biased and how do we know?*

**Drama** – use this to deepen and strengthen emotional engagement with the text. It might involve hot seating, freeze frame, and re-enacting a scene or interviews by journalists about key events.

**Reading as a writer** – once the children have a good understanding of the text, the class can consider how the author created certain effects. For instance, we might be thinking about how a persuasive argument is structured and how the key points have been made so persuasive.

**Writing in the style** – use the text as a model so that the children have the chance to try out the techniques used by the writer. **HT**



Pie Corbett is an education consultant, poet and author known for Talk for Writing.

Talk for Reading is available at [tinyurl.com/tp-TalkForReading](http://tinyurl.com/tp-TalkForReading)

## CONDUCT A READING AUDIT

An audit finds out what a school is doing and the impact, rather than what people think is happening. It's not just a piece of paper with boxes to tick. Here are some pointers we learned from successful schools.

**Reading for Pleasure** – survey children to find out if they love reading? If not, fix it!

**Phonics** – works best as 'sound-to-print' so writing and reading develop together; if a child can read a word, they should be able to spell it. Is phonics teaching balanced by reading and chatting about quality picture books? Often, this is imbalanced.

**Fluency** – is fluency modelled and practised? Herts for Learning provides great training.

**Vocabulary** – is this taught daily across the curriculum so children are learning more?

**Comprehension** – is this based on a dialogic approach or the answering of closed questions which test understanding rather than developing comprehension?

**Text choice and quality** – are books for the daily classroom story of sufficient quality? Are the texts used to teach comprehension challenging and carefully chosen for different aspects of reading? Is there a balance of narrative, non-fiction and poetry? Is there a good stock of books that children want to read: comics, graphic novels, comedy, popular series, etc.

**Teaching approaches** – do teachers use whole-class, group and one-to-one teaching? Is guided reading worth turning up for?

**Strugglers** – are they identified, and do they receive focused, repetitive, daily teaching?

Finally, let no one near reading who doesn't know what they are doing. A link to surveys for children and teachers plus a whole-school audit is available in our book 'Talk for Reading': [tinyurl.com/HDTftr](http://tinyurl.com/HDTftr)

# HOW TO BUILD A COACHING CULTURE

Tying on your cape and launching to everyone's rescue may seem helpful, but allowing staff to solve their own problems is better, says Damian Mitchelmore

**E**ducators are hard-wired to want to help people achieve their best – it comes naturally as part of the job. But school leaders or senior staff who try to give their colleagues all the answers or who dive in and solve problems for them are not providing their team with the tools to succeed.

To illustrate the point, imagine a Y2 pupil coming to you at breaktime with their shoelaces undone. The simple act of stepping in to tie those laces gets the child back out into the playground, but it doesn't really solve the problem at hand. In the long term, pupils need to develop the confidence and ability to tie their own shoelaces.

Likewise, we need to empower people to develop their own brilliant ways to address issues in our schools, and that's where coaching comes in. School staff can sometimes feel they have the weight of the world on their shoulders, particularly during unsettled times. However, there is no need to carry that burden alone. Rather than trying to fix everything all at once, it is better to build a team of capable problem solvers who are always ready for the next set of challenges.

Anyone in a school can be a coach. A less experienced

teacher could have a coaching conversation with a more experienced colleague; for example, to help them find ways to address day-to-day challenges such as how to help pupils collaborate on a project using technology, or how to teach a maths lesson outdoors. However, getting to this point involves embedding coaching throughout a school, and that calls for a culture shift...

## A different approach

Take the example of a teacher who is experiencing low-level disruption in their Y5 class. If the teacher comes to you for help, your natural instinct might be to tell them what you would do in that situation and recommend they do the same. Alternatively, you might be tempted to go to the classroom and talk to the children yourself.

However, this won't help the teacher find their own way to approach the issue next time.

In a coaching culture, the first thing to do is listen – and

empathise. Find out what the issue really is: are the children tired, distracted or disengaged? Then you become a facilitator by asking your colleague what techniques they could use and how they could make the most of their own professional qualities to address the situation.

Here are some coaching steps for this scenario:

- Encourage the teacher to explore what the issues could be. Are the pupils really misbehaving or are there other factors making them play up?
- Focus on encouraging them to accept what is happening in the classroom when pupils behave in this way.
- Inspire the teacher to identify what they want to achieve by making a change. What is their aim?
- Ask, but don't suggest, what steps they could consider taking to address the issue.
- Empower the teacher to think about their own set of skills and qualities, and how these can be used to help them to solve the problem.
- Challenge them to take ownership of the issue and encourage them to think of one or two new actions they could try, to see if it changes the pupils' behaviour.

## Coaching conversations

Coaching gives teachers the time and space to express their individual voices as professionals. That's because it is not passive – coaching is not done to someone, it is

done with them. In a school with a coaching culture, these conversations become a part of everyday learning.

A good coaching conversation will follow the 80:20 rule. The coach should keep a teacher in the 'what' part of the conversation for 80 per cent of the time. This is when you encourage the teacher to fully explore what the issue is, accept what is happening as a result, and identify what they want to achieve.

For the remaining 20 per cent of the time, you focus on the 'how' part of the conversation, when the teacher talks about how they want to move forward. At this point, the teacher should create one or two tangible, positive actions to address the issue.

It can be useful to have a set of coaching questions to give structure to the conversation, such as:

- Where are you now? This explores the teacher's strengths and areas of development without overly focusing on or brushing over the negative.
- Where would you like to be? This question examines what the teacher wants their practice to look, feel or sound like next.
- What do you already do? This keeps the conversation positive by establishing what is working well and what they should keep doing.

Teachers who are trusted to develop their own strategies will be better prepared to tackle even the most complex challenges





• How could you be more effective? This is the point where the teacher considers their next steps and sets some well-defined goals.

### Positive challenge

Coaching can take a bit of getting used to at first. While training and mentoring focuses on imparting knowledge and demonstrating skills, coaching is more about encouraging people to change their behaviour and mindsets. As a result, some teachers initially feel challenged by coaching. And yes, they are being challenged, but in a positive way.

Ultimately what happens is people

learn to self-coach. They ask themselves difficult questions and are always seeking out opportunities to improve, flourish and progress.

Paul Day, assistant headteacher at Royal Wootton Bassett Academy, says this about the impact of coaching in his school: “The problem with many approaches to professional development is that they focus on what people are not so good at, and what they need to improve. Coaching, on the other hand, gives staff greater autonomy over their own development, and it encourages them to seek out opportunities to learn and grow.”

“One of our teachers was having difficulties in the classroom and the leadership team were trying to find ways to offer support. But the real difference came when this teacher started her coaching journey. She became inspired to take ownership of her future, found her spark as a teacher and flourished. This teacher is now a head of department.”

### Keeping good teachers

Schools urgently need to recruit and retain great talent, and the best teachers want to work in an environment where they can grow as professionals and make a genuine difference to their pupils’ lives. Teachers will want to work in your school because it is a place where everyone thrives, and is empowered to succeed.

In fact, coaching comes naturally to people who work in schools. Good teachers are already supporting their pupils to tackle problems and figure out solutions for themselves. Empowering teachers to use their own teaching style to overcome hurdles will help your school whatever the future brings. **HT**



Damian Mitchelmore is a former deputy head and managing director of OLEVI, a leading coaching organisation for schools.

# BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT: IS A RESTORATIVE APPROACH A SOFT OPTION?

Far from it, says Sue Byron, and its emphasis on talking can lead to calmer learning environments and more productive pupils

“**S**o, we’re going soft on them now, are we?” This was the pointed remark made by a colleague during a whole-school training session on using a restorative approach. Judging from the murmurs around him, a few others felt the same. A common misconception about a restorative approach is that it’s a ‘soft option’ because of its focus on talking about the harm caused and its support for everyone, even those who have broken the rules.

The trainers weren’t perturbed, they’d heard this scepticism before: the concerns that pupils who transgress would ‘get away with it’, teachers’ ability to discipline would be hamstrung, and behaviour would deteriorate. They were confident that by the end of their session they could bring about a clearer understanding of this powerful way of working, which is based on restorative justice.

## What is it and how does it work?

Restorative justice is based upon the basic principles and values of psychology and the belief that people can learn and change for the better. This approach is tried and tested having been pioneered over 35 years ago in Australia before spreading to North America and then the UK. It offers a completely different way of addressing discipline and behaviour and is based on five key features: respect, responsibility, relationships, reparation and reintegration. The framework offers a range of restorative processes, from an informal chat through to large group conferences. Using restorative questioning (see box) and active listening skills, those who have been harmed are encouraged to convey the impact of that harm to those responsible, and those responsible are helped to acknowledge the impact of their actions and take steps to put it right. This can range from

an apology and a handshake to a written agreement. Most children automatically offer an apology when participating in a restorative conversation and it’s not the usual ‘sorry that they’ve been caught’ – more a genuine sorry for hurting someone, disappointing someone or letting someone down. This process creates a responsibility to learn from poor behaviour or conflict and more importantly a further responsibility to put things right and to behave better in the future.

## In practice

Samira and Lucy (Year 5) sit next to each other. Samira was using her new felt pens, bought for her by her dad, who she doesn’t see regularly. When Lucy asked if she could borrow one, Samira instantly said no and moved them out of Lucy’s reach. Lucy became cross, called Samira selfish, and knocked the pens onto the floor. The immediate situation was dealt with by the teacher

and a restorative chat instigated during the next break. Their teacher had ensured that they were both calm and willing to engage in a group chat by talking to them individually first using restorative questioning.

Once together they were invited to say, in turn, what had happened from their point of view, what they had been thinking at the time, and who had been affected by their actions. Where necessary the girls were supported to listen to each other and were reminded that they too would have their turn and be listened to.

Samira was open and honest about her relationship with her father and about how the pens felt so special to her; this was the reason that she didn’t want to share them. Her openness and honesty was disarming and Lucy came to appreciate how Samira felt (she had her own complicated family background). They were both able to acknowledge their negative behaviour and the effect



## RESTORATIVE QUESTIONING

- What happened?
- What were you thinking/feeling?
- What are you thinking/feeling now?
- Who has been affected by what happened?
- What needs to happen to put things right?
- What will you do differently next time?

that it had had on the other. When asked how they could put this right, they both offered to say sorry to each other and showed genuine remorse. When discussing what they could do differently next time, Samira agreed that she would talk to Lucy rather than just react and appear rude. Lucy suggested that she wouldn’t automatically



## A MEASURABLE IMPACT

- Once embedded, a restorative approach can reduce bullying, conflict, anti-social and disruptive behaviour, poor attendance and the need for exclusion. The London Borough of Barnet reported a reduction in exclusions of 51% in restorative justice-trained schools compared to an increase in exclusion rates in the schools that had received no training. This was mirrored in Wigan and Walsall, where schools also reported a reduction in the necessity of calls for police involvement.

- In 2014 a DfE report gave whole-school restorative approaches the highest rating of effectiveness at preventing bullying, with a survey of schools showing that 97% concurred with this. Bullying is notoriously difficult to deal with once it has happened; it's insidious, harmful and time-consuming to deal with. This evidence-based, proactive approach in school can not only help to prevent it but can also be employed to deal with most incidents should they occur.

- A more accurate description of this approach might be 'tough love', since pupils are not only prey to the usual consequences or sanctions but are also required to reflect on the incident and consider the impact of their behaviour on others. This is a big ask. It can be a difficult process for anyone, child or adult. Indeed, in the 2017 Restorative Justice Report offenders who engaged in this process reported that they found it more difficult than attending court and accepting their sentences. A soft option it is not!

expect Samira to share her things and that if she became cross, she would do her best not to react in the way she did.

### How could this benefit my school?

Research has shown that a restorative approach in school can promote emotional literacy, honesty, accountability and conflict resolution skills. Over time pupils feel more confident to own up and tell the truth, acknowledge their poor behaviour and accept the effect that it has had on others.

Staff who work restoratively report increased levels of confidence when dealing with difficult behaviour or incidents of conflict. They feel empowered in their ability to

support pupils through scaffolded conversations as they can bring about understanding and healing rather than just blame and the dispensation of punishment. Pupils feel more supported when things go wrong and those affected are helped to come to a mutually agreed solution to repair harm, rebuild relationships, prevent escalation and stop it happening again. This can result in a calmer, more respectful climate across school, better relationships amongst pupils and staff, and a more productive learning environment.

### In practice

Senior leaders were having to deal with the rough, bullying behaviour exhibited by RB almost

every play and lunchtime. He'd had numerous exclusions, attended almost daily time-outs with SLT when kept off the playground and was involved in frequent arguments and fights whenever he was allowed back outside (even when supported). During any subsequent conversation with staff, RB was surly, rude and never able to admit to his part in any incident. He felt picked on and that no one listened to him.

After yet another incident I was asked to unpick the situation with him. After ensuring that he was in a fit state to engage I used restorative questioning to gently tease out exactly what had happened from his point of view. He was given time to reflect and to speak without

being pressured. Even I was astonished at this lad's response. For the first time, as far as I was aware, he accepted responsibility for his part in the incident and acknowledged that he could have behaved differently. He suggested his own sanction and carried it out without the usual outburst. This was a major breakthrough, and it was only the beginning... **HT**

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6

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



# “We’ve gained and retained our community’s faith”

Abbey Mead Primary Academy struggled to connect with parents, but a whole-team effort has made the school a trusted source of support for all

**F**ollowing a period of turbulence in 2018, Abbey Mead Primary Academy’s local community had undoubtedly begun to lose confidence in the school despite the incredible commitment of the teaching and support staff. Around this time, a strong mix of emotions were prevalent amongst parents. We had regular visits from them, and on each occasion, it was hard to tell whether we’d be greeted with positivity, frustration or a somewhat sombre mood where mums, dads and carers were equally unsure of the reception they would receive.

We knew this situation had to change. I’d never before been a part of such a vibrant school community that, at the same time, suffered such fractious relationships with parents who held so little faith in being heard. It’s important to note that throughout all these challenges, the school staff remained unwaveringly dedicated to its pupils. They were the ones who were essential to repair relationships, knew their pupils best and could effect change and ensure the school would thrive once more.

### Know who you serve

Vital to effecting change was developing a shared understanding and celebration

of the rich culture of the school, whilst also addressing parental concerns and challenging practices which had long become accepted as ‘just the way things are’. We knew we had to ensure the community’s values were interwoven with the school’s ethos and curriculum and build purposeful parent partnerships. Whilst school staff across the country will know only too well the challenges of supporting families with the removal of common barriers – morning routines; school avoidance; relationships with technology – our local community showed

that they needed more. They needed a system built for them that not only understood but also challenged cultural expectations, advocating for them as individuals; a team of professionals who not only understood the cultural expectations, but also had experience of supporting others in navigating visa applications, housing issues, hidden domestic abuse, recourse to public funds and so much more.

### Breaking barriers

Whilst the vision was clear, next came the task of formulating

and empowering a team that held the necessary knowledge and skills to effect change. Removing Barriers to Learning (RB2L) brought together colleagues who had previously worked in isolation, providing opportunities to collaborate thereby ensuring the voices of pupils, and the community, would be heard and acted upon.

Originally, SEND colleagues, those with attendance responsibility, home-liaison practitioners and safeguarding leads worked together to ensure a holistic outlook. However, as with many new concepts, RB2L quickly evolved, adding further colleagues to

Spending time with parents, that occasional smile and hello, instils immeasurable faith, which has a much broader impact than can initially be seen



represent the school's inclusion and wellbeing advocacy. The work undertaken by RB2L acted as a breath of fresh air that heralded a new approach to parental, pupil and community relations and restored confidence. Parents felt valued, colleagues were once more discussing the essence of pupil wellbeing, and the internal and external barriers which had prevented pupils thriving were being challenged. Newly established tiered support systems allowed the right support to be put into place in a timely manner. The impact of these approaches was seen in tangible results through improvements in absenteeism, reductions in behavioural incidents and improved communication with parents and other local stakeholders. Over time, more refined systems and processes were introduced with a specific focus on unpicking the local risks to our pupils' welfare. There was a drive to understand and improve the mental health and wellbeing of our children and their families. The most notable contribution to this was the commissioning and deployment



of a mental health practitioner from the NHS.

### Advocating equality

Advocating for children soon became second nature for staff at all levels. Colleagues reported that improved communication with parents and the community was contributing to demonstrable improvements and changes in attitudes towards our more vulnerable pupils, most noticeably assisting in the removal of cultural stigmatisms regarding SEND.

Through our efforts to advocate and celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion, parents began to openly discuss commonalities and the challenges they faced.

A notable improvement was the lens through which SEND was viewed and the erosion of cultural stigmatisms which were held. This openness and acceptance allowed the school to put into place bilingual support groups and training to best support increasing numbers of families. Through outreach work and running ESOL courses, ASD-accredited courses and Solihull Parenting Programme sessions, parents were enabled to better support the needs of their children.

More broadly, the RB2L team provided an avenue for parents to seek support outside of their community views and expectations. Over time, individuals who had suffered domestic abuse felt comfortable opening up about their lived experiences, allowing them to

seek support. Parents began to recognise and understand the detrimental impact their home situations were having upon themselves and their children. The team became essential in signposting and advocating for those who had seemingly lost their voices amongst cultural expectations and practices.

### Remaining resolute

Despite all that had been achieved to this point, the arrival of Covid in March 2020 laid a new set of challenges in Abbey Mead's path. School staff mobilised and shifted their focus to ensure that families not only had access to a quality education, but also the necessary access to food, benefits and support in a community detrimentally impacted by the loss of the local cash economy. We were not a community broken by Covid, but one that continued to thrive together, our resolve only strengthened as we forged new connections with local radio stations, religious organisations and charities to best support our families.

### The impact

Recently, I was standing in the hall at parents' evening, doing my usual rounds, when I spotted him – the parent that, despite every effort, would find me on the gates each morning with what would seem like a trivial matter but was clearly important to him and his child. Standing at the feedback table, he took his slip and pen, apparently guarding what he would write as if to make his grand announcement. But any feelings of distrust or resentment he held were replaced by reassurance, as he watched me approach and read his entry – afterwards, his smile from across the hall said it all. **HT**



Gary Aldred is principal at Abbey Mead Primary Academy. Find the school on Twitter:

@AbbeyMead\_TMET



### WHO WE ARE

## WHAT'S THE CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL AND ITS COMMUNITY?



### Location:

Abbey Mead Primary Academy sits in the heart of the city of Leicester. With its Victorian façade, it's a colossus in an urban area, located just off Leicester's Golden Mile.



### Community:

The school serves a multicultural community, with the vast majority of pupils being of an Indian heritage and the overwhelming majority, 98% of its 724 pupils, speaking English as an additional language. Its locale is globally recognised for its Diwali celebrations and features a main street full of opulent jewellery and sari shops.



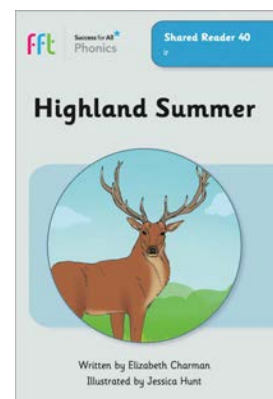
### Our needs:

Local employment opportunities are dominated by the local clothing and food production factories and there is a sense that the families who live in the Victorian housing stock are a somewhat isolated and overlooked community. Many of our parents find themselves in unstable employment, often on zero-hour contracts and predominantly in a cash-led economy. As a result of the cultural expectations and norms of the community, many of our families live in multiple occupancy and multigenerational households. Consequently, they are often prevented from accessing government-sponsored assistance programmes for individuals and families in need. As with parents' struggles to access financial support, the school faces its own challenges due to high levels of deprivation and the associated barriers but lower than reflective levels of pupil premium funding.

## PHONICS

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REVIEWED BY: ADAM RICHES

FFT's new Success for All Phonics is a proven systematic synthetic phonics teaching programme for Reception and Year 1. Comprised of eye-catching, well-designed resources, the content meets all of the requirements of the National Curriculum and the EYFS framework, plus it's been validated by the DfE.

The programme provides teachers with a complete print and digital package for whole-class phonics teaching, massively reducing planning time. Inclusive daily lesson plans support teaching and effective progression through a clear structure of the six phases of Letters and Sounds for reading, writing and spelling.

The lessons and resources are colourful, bright and engaging, meaning pupils respond positively and learn quickly.

FFT Success for All Phonics isn't just a resource, though. It's a part of a wider offer from FFT that includes in-depth training and support, a free parent portal, an online tutoring programme – Tutoring with the Lightning Squad – and a reading assessment programme. In short, FFT Success for All Phonics provides schools with a comprehensive offer to support every child to learn to read. Tutoring with The Lightning Squad offers pupils the opportunity to work in small intervention groups and further support their individual needs. The additional,

interactive, visual content allows classroom teachers to effectively develop those individuals who require extra guidance and time.

What stands out for me, though, is the regular assessment of children's reading skills. The feedback from all of the assessments is used to monitor progress, inform teaching and support any necessary catch-up support or intervention strategies. A new online assessment programme is included as part of the programme to do this, and is designed to be used, on average, every half-term to track every child's progress easily and quickly.

From a pedagogical point of view, FFT's Success for All Phonics adopts a unique co-operative learning approach, meaning that all pupils are fully engaged and interact for the whole lesson. Coming from tried and tested pedigree, the Success for All foundation, the teaching method is proven to have a dramatic effect on progress and attainment that is positive and long-lasting.

FFT has thought about everything with this programme and the interleaving of the assessment and additional support means that teachers are able to deliver effective lessons and react quickly and efficiently to the requirements of the learners in front of them. Not only is the programme great, kids love it too!

the  
headteacher

## VERDICT

- ✓ Hugely engaging for learners
- ✓ Highly intuitive to use for teachers, both specialist and non-specialists
- ✓ Adaptable and flexible
- ✓ Workload reducing functionality around assessment
- ✓ Training available for effective implementation

## UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for a fully validated phonics programme that has effective reading assessment and monitoring of learner progress. Also consider if you want to get the added value of an effective online tutoring programme and free parent portal included in the cost.

Prices start at £600. See website for full details: [fft.org.uk/phonics](http://fft.org.uk/phonics)



# SAFEGUARDING

# MyConcern



Stay on top of your safeguarding obligations and ensure concerns are promptly addressed with this user-friendly reporting system

## AT A GLANCE

- Bespoke safeguarding software for creating customised reports
- Automated chronologies for identifying trends
- Allows for easier inter-agency information sharing
- Up-to-date advice and guidance resources, including templates

REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL



Child protection is a key priority for all schools but one that's become increasingly complicated to manage, as the safeguarding risks to which children are potentially vulnerable have grown over time.

Children spend around 7,800 hours in the care of teachers and other staff. The scale of this responsibility is enormous, and its challenges are complex. Staff are regularly informed that if they see something, they should say something and report it – but how? Schools need to ensure they have robust data and reporting mechanisms in place, so that effective action can be initiated in accordance with existing policies and staff can ensure procedures are being followed, while enabling different agencies to work together.

That's why I unreservedly recommend MyConcern – a Queen's Award-winning secure digital platform created by former police officers, designed to enable staff to easily record, report and manage all safeguarding, wellbeing and pastoral concerns.

The software is brilliantly configured to provide all the expertise school staff will need in one place. As soon as a concern is raised, it's assigned its own unique reference number and a Designated Liaison Person is alerted, thus kick-starting the process of triaging.

Concerns can be grouped under different categories and case owners easily assigned. Users then have the option to view an automated chronology, complete with filtering, redaction and export functions. Separate files can be easily attached to concerns, with all

documents securely stored. A main 'Concerns' dashboard will clearly display any filed, open and new concerns, while a 'Pupil Profiles' function can be made to show aggregated information across all concerns, including body maps, flags and level of need.

MyConcern can provide safeguarding leads with the confidence that they're meeting all statutory, legal and moral obligations. Its reporting tools are second to none, giving you detailed data analysis of the highest order, and the option to present all this data via easy to digest summaries, to help identify trends and deploy resources more effectively.

Crucially, MyConcern will help schools build effective, well-informed safeguarding teams that can respond rapidly when a child appears to be at risk. Accountability processes are baked in, with the platform keeping a thorough audit trail of who, when and what has been involved in any given concern.

Information sharing with external partners is therefore made more accurate, reliable and better able to withstand later scrutiny, allowing you to minimise your own risks and ensure compliance. Even better, any concerns you have can be securely recorded and case managed on any internet-enabled device, either through a web browser or via the dedicated MyConcern mobile app.

The welfare and wellbeing of children is everyone's business. MyConcern can be a powerful ally to you in helping record and manage essential evidence as part of your whole-school safeguarding procedures.

the  
**headteacher**

## VERDICT

- ✓ An ultra-secure platform for recording and addressing safeguarding concerns
- ✓ Robust and sophisticated reporting tools
- ✓ Smartly designed, with an intuitive and easy-to-use interface accessible via multiple devices
- ✓ More accurate and reliable information sharing with external partners
- ✓ Keep an accurate audit trail
- ✓ Secure system, even when using a web browser to enter information
- ✓ Excellent value for money
- ✓ An innovative and outstanding piece

## UPGRADE IF...

You are looking to easily record and manage any safeguarding concerns, while saving time and facilitating early intervention. This is a powerful system that can materially improve your safeguarding provision.

For more information, visit [thesafeguardingcompany.com/myconcern](https://thesafeguardingcompany.com/myconcern)



Jo Brinkley is the CEO of a six-school multi-academy trust.

# A day in the life

A one-day diary from first alarm to lights out

## WAKING UP

At 6.15am I'm up and checking my phone for the day's schedule. I walk the dogs, before setting off for one of the Trust's schools to do gate duty with the SLT.



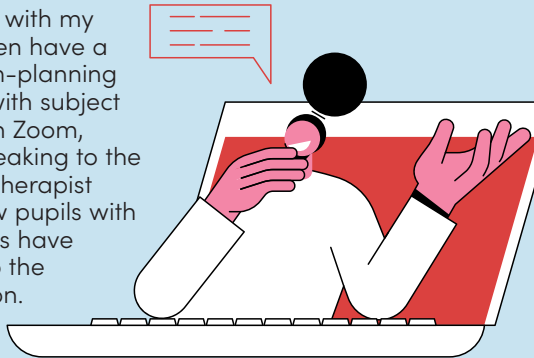
## MY MORNING

Whichever school I head to, whether it's for meetings or monitoring visits, I spend time sharing good practice from other schools in the Trust or from further afield.



## MY AFTERNOON

I catch up with my emails, then have a curriculum-planning meeting with subject leaders on Zoom, before speaking to the new dog therapist about how pupils with high needs have reacted to the intervention.



## LUNCHTIME

I test out a school lunch with children from Y4. Today I'm targeting some who I know need to catch up with reading. I want to hear what they can tell me about their geography topic this term.



## MY EVENING

I'm home at 6.30pm and quickly make dinner for my husband, who will be back late. After walking the dogs again, I get a smart suit on and go out for a trustee meeting.



## BEDTIME

I feed the turtles, snake, guinea pigs, cats and dogs before falling into bed at 10.15pm and browsing Facebook marketplace – I need a new sideboard!



## QUICKFIRE QUESTIONS

- **Career plan B?** I'd be a dairy farmer with a couple of sheep and a goat for company.
- **Must-listen?** The Diary of a CEO podcast with Steven Bartlett.
- **Must-watch?** At the moment, I'm totally addicted to Schitt's Creek on Netflix.
- **Must-read?** Radical Candor by Kim Scott.
- **Twitter hero?** One of our nursery leaders, who posts daily about children's learning in a way that brings the curriculum alive for us all!

# CARE SUPPORT SERVICE

Easing  
Isolation &  
Exhaustion



We provide support, respite and home care to families who have children aged 0-19 with congenital heart defects or feeding issues across the North West of England.



All staff are Enhanced Child DBS Checked



Minimum of 2 hours support each week



CQC Registered and fully insured



Fully trained support workers (Hoist, Meds, Suction, CPR, Vent etc)

This service is free to access for families who do not qualify for a funded care package from local authorities or CCG's. To refer a family or indeed yourself please get in touch or complete our simple Referral Form online.



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# Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Efficacy Trial:

**+3** additional months' progress with  
**FSM** struggling readers\*

## EEF Efficacy Trial Findings of Lexia Core5 Reading:

'The findings indicate that at the end of Year 2, [struggling] children who received the Lexia programme excelled in reading, making two months of additional progress in comparison with their peers in the control group. Also, children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) who participated in the programme made an additional three months of progress compared to children eligible for FSM who did not receive the intervention.'

*\*Subgroup analysis. For full results, search 'EEF/Lexia Trial'*

- ✓ High security evidence rating
- ✓ Low-cost intervention rating
- ✓ Fidelity of implementation: 'high'

**FOR YOUR FREE TRIAL**

0191 482 8499 | [www.lexiauk.co.uk](http://www.lexiauk.co.uk) **LexiaUK**