

PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

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IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

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boiling over

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buying windows



**Lesson observations** HOW WE CAN ALL DO BETTER

### Bossing it

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What does it take to get the most out of your staff? It's a question examined in different ways by several of this issue's contributors. Ask Kelly Hannaghan, wellbeing leader at Lessness Heath Primary School (p50) and she'll tell you it involves giving teachers a meaningful voice and encouraging them to pay closer attention to both their own and others' emotions.

Perhaps, as Simon Botten notes (p14), the answer might lie in using that widely feared tool in the headteacher's armoury – lesson observations – in a more sensitive and intelligent way. Or it might be worth listening to an outsider's perspective and doing your best to, as executive coach Andy Coombe (p6) puts it, absorb those accountability pressures from above so your staff don't have to.

Elsewhere this issue, you'll also find some practical advice on how to respond if parental concerns risk spilling over into concerted protest (p40) and a guide to tackling the difficult business of staff redundancies (p52). It's not all negative, though – hopefully you'll also gain some inspiration from Sue Birchall's suggestions on how to make your budgeting procedures less opaque (p60), and Anthony David's insights into why leading more than one school at a time is not only manageable, but one of the most exciting adventures you can embark on (p68).

Finally, a quick note on a new addition to some of the magazine's articles – panels directing you towards similarly-themed further reading at our online home, [primaryleaders.com](http://primaryleaders.com). If you haven't already, do stop by to catch up on some features you might have missed and look out for some web exclusives we'll have coming up soon.

Enjoy the issue,

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 Deputy headteacher



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 Headteacher at The Prince of Wales School, Dorchester



**Jean Watt**  
 Principal of Ormiston Meadows Academy, Peterborough



From the makers of  
*Teach Primary*

## HIGHLIGHTS

**14 LESSON OBSERVATIONS**  
 Make yours an improvement tool, not an instrument of fear

**40 PARENT PROTESTS**  
 How to calm the tensions and bring families on board

**60 EVERYONE'S BUDGET**  
 What the whole school can gain from a little financial knowledge

**68 MULTITASKING MAESTROS**  
 Why leading multiple schools can be exciting – but not for everyone

## 11 School Improvement

- Let teachers own your school's data
- Educational research
- Get ready to teach first aid

### 14 WATCH HOW YOU WATCH

Useful lesson observations shouldn't result in harried teachers, writes Simon Botten

### 16 WRITING FOR PLEASURE

Lucy Starbuck-Braidley finds out how the key to boosting your pupils' enthusiasm for writing might lie in overhauling your timetables

## 21 Buildings and Facilities

- Do your windows need replacing?
- Prolong the life of your flatpanel screens
- Keep your carpets pristine

### 25 A WELCOME RECEPTION

How The Beaulieu Park School went from groundworks to teaching two reception classes in just over a year

### 28 GIVE YOUR BOOKS A GOOD HOME

Alison Tarrant offers some suggestions for sprucing up your library and reading areas

## 31 Technology

- How to manage technical support staff
- Learning with Chromebooks
- Save on your hardware costs

### 34 NETWORKING KNOW-HOW

Why the job of system administrator isn't what it used to be

## 37 Community Engagement

- Parental advice sessions
- Houseplant deliveries
- Steve McQueen's primary art project

### 40 PARENT PROTESTS

If your parents are staging opposition to a decision they don't like, here's what your response should be

### 42 MARKETING MADE GOOD

How should you go about promoting what your school has to offer?

## 47 Legal and HR

- Why schools need to adopt flexible working
- Disqualification by association
- Are your back office staff over-stressed?

### 50 "OUR TEACHERS ARE HAPPIER"

Improved staff morale, their best SATs ever – here's how Lessness Heath Primary School did it

### 52 THE REDUNDANCY PROCESS

Redundancies are never a pleasant experience – but they can be well-managed

## 55 Budgeting

- Funding staff visits
- Could your school use an SRMA?
- Could your staff claim tax relief?

### 58 YOUR TAS, YOUR BUDGET AND YOU

Why smarter deployment could be the key to keeping your TAs

### 60 IN IT TOGETHER?

Demystify your budget and your teachers' financial savvy will soar, says Sue Birchall

### 63 HOW TO BUY ... PRINT SUPPLIES

YPO's Zoe Morgan-Kriek offers some advice for keeping those print facilities ticking over without spending more than you need

## 65 Leadership

- School development plans
- Headship in deprived areas
- Leadership and workload

### 68 LEADING MULTIPLE SCHOOLS

Anthony David details the strategies executive heads should use to oversee more than one school at a time

### 70 END STAFF DISPUTES

Inter-staff arguments are best avoided – but if matters have already started to escalate, what should you do?

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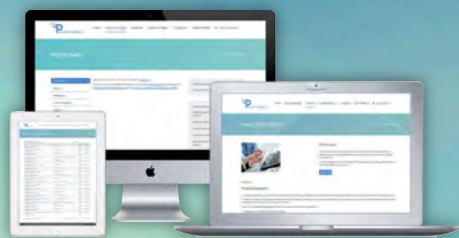
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# “The effective leader absorbs pressures from above”

As an executive coach, writer and founder of a change consultancy, what does Andy Coombe make of what’s happening in the education sector?

## In your view, how effective have the government’s education reforms been in terms of their implementation?

My background is within the health sector, so most of my work has been within the NHS, but I work in other sectors too and am currently coaching a primary school head. From my experience, the main challenge primary leaders face is how to bring about the changes they intend to make.

Most research into the effectiveness of change programmes shows that something like three quarters of change programmes fail to complete the objectives they set out to achieve. Applied to the government’s academy reforms, those aims might be to achieve

better and more consistent educational standards. To get there, you make a change that’s intended to lead to that outcome – but even if you’re successful in completing that change, it’s not the same thing as achieving the outcome you originally had in mind.

The challenge for school leaders is that they’re often under so much pressure to effectively implement changes they’ve been directed to make, that they take their eyes off what it was those changes were intended to accomplish. I think there’s a risk that academisation has become an intended goal in itself – achieving academisation therefore becomes the ‘success’ once it’s done, rather than result it was intended to bring about.

## If that’s the case, what options are there for changing course?

It’s partly a case of continuing the change process beyond short term wins. All change processes need those short term wins, or else you risk losing people – but once you’ve secured them, there can be a temptation to fixate on the effort it took to get there, the problems overcome on the way and think, ‘Great, we’ve done it.’ Very often, this is the point where change programmes will fail.

The wheel needs to continue turning, so that the changes you’re bringing about get integrated into organisation’s culture and become simply ‘the way we do things here’. I’m admittedly basing this on a small sample, but there is a risk of academisation falling into that trap. The short term win is gaining academy

status; the potential failure is not seeing through the changes that academisation is meant to bring about.

## In your book *LEAD*, you and your co-authors [John Greenway and Andy Blacknell] advise that leaders adopt a growth mindset – can a willingness to embrace risk and learning opportunities be squared with the current accountability system for schools?

One of the biggest challenges for headteachers is that they’re held to account in a system that’s more of fixed mindset than a growth mindset – the pressure is top down and there’s little scope for personal freedoms. But the effective leader doesn’t pass that on. The effective leader will absorb that, hold it in themselves but behave in a different way with those they’re leading.

The least effective leaders will be those who simply pass on that pressure and those demands without thinking about how they can enable, empower and develop people’s ability to achieve them, rather than simply demand that they do.

The skill in doing that is where the growth mindset comes in. Yes, you’ve got to measure outputs – but you also need to think about what inputs will lead to those outputs. You can then measure, encourage and reward those inputs and behaviours. If you only measure the outputs, and effectively turn a blind eye to how they’re achieved, that’s when you risk fostering a culture of bullying to the long-term detriment of the organisation.



## CAREER TIMELINE

**1976**  
Joins Downs Way School upon relocating to the UK from Peru, aged 8

**1991**  
Graduates from University of Southampton with honours degree in philosophy and theology

**1994**  
Joins local pay intelligence unit of a regional health authority and develops an interest in consultancy

**2000**  
Having served as HR director in a hospital trust, sets up an NHS consultancy



**Schools have been increasingly encouraged to adopt more ‘businesslike’ practices – are there any that should be part of the conversation but currently aren’t?**

I believe there’s a lot of good practice in the private sector that the public sector can learn from – having more of a ‘business ethic’, focusing more on outcomes and taking a longer term approach are things I think we’re starting to see more of in the public sector, though I’ve seen it work well and I’ve seen it work badly. Very often that’ll be down to the interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence of those overseeing how they’re implemented.

However, I think there’s a tendency for the public sector to get the message from government and elsewhere that ‘You need to be more like the private sector’, which belittles public sector leadership.

**How about the reverse – what can business stand to learn from the public sector?**

In many ways the public sector has been much more centred around values-based leadership, which is something that’s very much in the ascendancy in all the textbooks and the broader language of business. It’s not an entirely new thing – like much else, it goes in cycles – but what’s meant by values-based leadership is a kind of core belief that if we get behaviours and attitudes right, the rest will follow.

You wouldn’t necessarily think of someone like Richard Branson as being a values-based leader, but he’s long advocated that we should put staff first rather than customers, because by doing that the customer will get what they want.

It’s an approach that’s working in the health service. A number of health organisations are now stating that their primary aim is to get the staff experience right. Patient care is their bottom line, of course, but by focusing on the staff experience, the patient care experience will follow.

**How should leaders win over staff who are wary of big organisational changes?**

If you have a whole group of staff who are sceptical of the change process you’re

trying to bring about, you’ll need to think first about whether that change process is actually the correct course. Generally speaking, a whole group of staff going in one direction conveys a message you need to listen to.

But in other cases, the solution concerns motivation. That motivation will come through having a clear vision that you as a leader need to set, while involving staff in how to achieve that vision, rather than micromanaging or dictating how it should come about.

Again, this is where the effective leader will absorb the pressures from above, be it from government or other scrutinising organisations. Their task is to enable staff to own the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of the change process for themselves. That’s where I’d start.



**LEAD: 50 Models for Success in Work & Life by John D H Greenway, Andy Blacknell and Andy Coombe is available now, published by Capstone**

@AndyCoombe  
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**2006**  
**Founds Kairos Consultancy Ltd. - named after the ancient Greek word for ‘time of opportunity, time of change’**

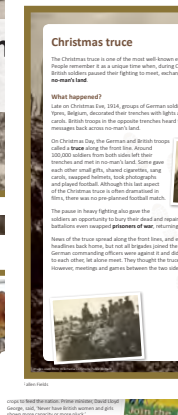
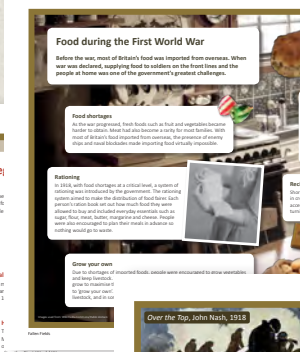
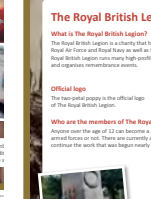
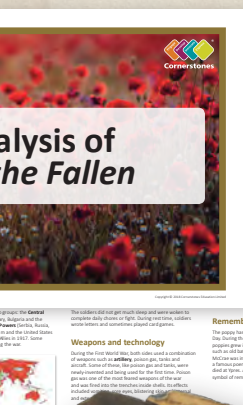
**2013**  
**Meets friends and future colleagues and co-authors John Greenway and Andy Blacknell**

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WHAT? Express Grant (open to applicants in Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire)

HOW MUCH? Up to £5,000 within a 12-month period

APPLY BY? Ongoing

WHERE? [tinyurl.com/psm-quartet](http://tinyurl.com/psm-quartet)

FUNDS? Small organisations with charitable aims engaged in activity to benefit people who are disadvantaged due to poverty, disability, age, location or culture. Said activity should reflect the concerns and priorities of its target beneficiaries, and complement any existing community services. Funding will only be awarded for school-based activities that fall outside the scope of statutory provision.



## WHO? UK-German Connection

WHAT? Instant Impact programme

HOW MUCH? Up to £1,500

APPLY BY? Ongoing

WHERE? [ukgermanconnection.org](http://ukgermanconnection.org)

FUNDS? Travelling costs for pupils and young people attending (primary, secondary or SEN) schools that partner with an education institution in Germany that they have yet to visit. At least five pupils must take part in the visit, which needs to last for a minimum of two full days (not including travelling time). Both British and German pupils have to spend at least 75% of the visit's duration engaged in joint activities.



## WHO? Community Foundation for Surrey

WHAT? Grants for groups

HOW MUCH? Varies

APPLY BY? Ongoing

WHERE? [cfsurrey.org.uk](http://cfsurrey.org.uk)

FUNDS? Grants to community and voluntary groups making a genuine difference to the lives of people in Surrey through one-off initiatives and new or existing ongoing projects that require assistance with capital costs. Schools are able to apply for funding, but only for initiatives that exceed their normal statutory responsibilities and involve partnering with local communities. Priority will be given for projects that are working to become self-sustaining, and where possible, are user-led.



## WHO? Salix

WHAT? Salix Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme (SEELS)

HOW MUCH? Varies (funding awarded on loan basis)

APPLY BY? Ongoing

WHERE? [tinyurl.com/salix-loans](http://tinyurl.com/salix-loans)

FUNDS? Maintained schools seeking to install energy efficiency technologies. As part of a two-year, £25 million funding initiative between Salix and the DfE, maintained schools are able to apply online for interest-free loan funding from Salix, the payback terms of which are calculated on the basis of the estimated cost savings that result from having the technologies installed.



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# School Improvement

## MAKE SURE YOUR MONITORING MAKES SENSE

Schools are now awash with monitoring, testing and performance data – but are your staff able to access the details they need to see in a way that’s intelligible?

**I** like ownership. It means that something is yours, and that gives you control. And yet what often see in schools is that the tracking and monitoring of progress, attainment and performance seems to be done for someone else. The SLT need it, the inspectorate want it, the LA require it – all reasons I’ve heard for inputting data into a system and pressing ‘send’.

Of course, there may well be some legitimacy in that reasoning – but I’d argue that tracking and monitoring in this way only gives ownership of the data to others, when what I’d like to see is ownership of the data resting firmly with teachers.

When the teachers own data, it becomes more meaningful and ultimately more useful to them. As schools become increasingly data rich, how that data’s being used is much more important than the fact it’s being collected in the first place. And who better than to make use of it than teachers and learners? Ownership, you see, is vital.

### SYSTEM DESIGN

Systems for tracking and monitoring must be simple to use, easy to make sense of and not overly cumbersome. There’s nothing more frustrating, or pointless, than tracking systems which encourage duplication or fail to give teachers the information they value most. We’ve worked hard at my schools to devise systems which highlight at a glance the global issues for a class and specific matters relating to individual children.

In my schools we also encourage our teachers to react to their data – to track and monitor the data for themselves, so that it’s able to inform



# THE SECRET OF SCHOOLS' SUCCESS



## Can the culture of high performing schools be quantified?

their planning and provision. Half-termly pupil progress reviews help to unpack the information collected and ensure that no child is missed. Our senior leaders expect the teachers to take the lead at these meetings – they're not grand inquisitions, so much as opportunities for reflection and forward thinking.

I was once introduced to an impressive chair of governors who bore all the traits of a leader who knew what mattered most about their school. Not the numbers or pie-charts churned out to demonstrate impact, nor the paperwork or inevitable meetings – what mattered was that the children were seen as people.

### LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

Influenced by this encounter, I introduced a running log of 'learning conversations' at my school. I'd previously noticed how often teachers would discuss pupils in their own time, over a coffee in the staffroom or in the corridor after the end of the school day. I now encourage senior leaders who have had such conversations to electronically log them after the event, briefly describing the nature of the discussion and any outcomes. The log aims to capture the essence of learning conversations in all their forms, be it a structured meeting or a quick catch-up over coffee.

It's akin to a real-time representation of the dialogue that's constantly happening across the school, which all staff can access via a secure log in and use as a basis for professional judgments on how far they've moved learning forward. In essence, I want to help them access the monitoring details they need to see most, in a way that makes sense.

*Maxim Kelly is the executive headteacher of two schools in the Isle of Man, Dhoon School and Laxey School, which form the Laxey / Dhoon Federation*

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[maximheadteacher.wordpress.com](http://maximheadteacher.wordpress.com)

Anyone who's visited a range of schools soon notices the subtle but distinctive feel of different school cultures. In a research report recently published by the DfE (see [tinyurl.com/lkmco-culture-practice](https://tinyurl.com/lkmco-culture-practice) for the full report) we've set out in detail how these subtle differences can be pinned down in more concrete terms, and identified key practices that lie behind the culture of high-performing schools (which we define as schools where disadvantaged pupils have consistently done well).

The report highlights the ambitious comparisons that leaders of high-performing schools make with other schools, such as comparing the attainment of their most disadvantaged pupils with the national average for all pupils.

We visited 12 high-performing schools and 11 lower-performing schools around the country. Our case studies, focused on primary schools, involved hundreds of interviews with senior leaders, teachers, governors and parents, focus groups and a diary task with pupils. Observations of dozens of classrooms, playgrounds and dinner halls allowed us to make detailed insights into schools' cultures and practices, and how these are perceived and embodied by staff, pupils and parents.

Compared to lower-performing schools, we found that high-performing schools believed more firmly that their practices would have an impact in relation to attendance, behaviour, and parental aspirations and expectations.

High-performing schools celebrated pupil success and achievements at every opportunity, building such celebrations into their weekly timetable and actively including parents. They also dedicated

more resources, including non-teaching members of staff, to work with parents and families.

These schools further saw the recruitment and development of NQTs as a positive opportunity, rather than a source of concern over whether they could be adequately supported, and prioritised teachers' career development.

High-performing schools also worked hard to ensure a positive culture reached every corner of their school – for instance, all teaching and non-teaching staff held high expectations of behaviour everywhere, not just in the classroom. Finally, these schools' heads taught regularly, so that they could support new teachers and share their expertise.

Overall, we were struck by how much schools have in common when it comes to their cultures and practices – from their systems for behaviour management to their encouragement of high expectations. However, even when schools appeared to do things the same way on the surface, closer inspection revealed that high-performing schools often stood apart by using a wider range of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils, deploying strategies more consistently across the school, and ensuring positive cultures reached every corner of school life – and often beyond the gates.

**Sam Baars is director of research at the policy research and campaigning organisation LKMco**

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# Are you ready to teach first aid?

Martyn Blackford explains why the DfE's proposal for all schools to teach basic first aid skills should be welcomed

**I**n July this year, the government announced plans for basic first aid to be formally taught at both primary and secondary level, as part of its intentions to overhaul the provision of relationships education, SRE and health education in schools.

In the UK, ambulance services attempt to resuscitate approximately 28,000 people each year, of whom only 10% survive. Around 270 children die each year due to a cardiac arrest when at school.

People who have received basic life support training are more likely to recognise the need to quickly commence cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and will further provide a better quality of treatment prior to the arrival of an ambulance. For every minute that passes without CPR, where an automated external defibrillator is used instead, there will be a 10% reduction in the casualty's chances of survival.

Denmark added compulsory first aid training for children aged 11 and up to its school programme in 2005. Over the next six years, the country's provision of bystander CPR doubled and survival rates tripled. From our own personal experience, we've previously delivered such training to a number of primary schools and found the response from parents and even very young children to have been extremely positive.

The government is proposing that by the end of primary school, pupils should know how to contact the emergency services and be familiar with the concepts of basic first aid, including how to deal with common head injuries. Children who learn these skills at a young age can be more confident in a real emergency and play a significant role in saving a life.

We saw a vivid example of this in the UK in 2015, when a 3-year-old girl named Emma Bazzard found her pregnant mother collapsed after falling down the stairs. She confidently called 999 and clearly explained the situation to the call handler over the course of an 11-minute

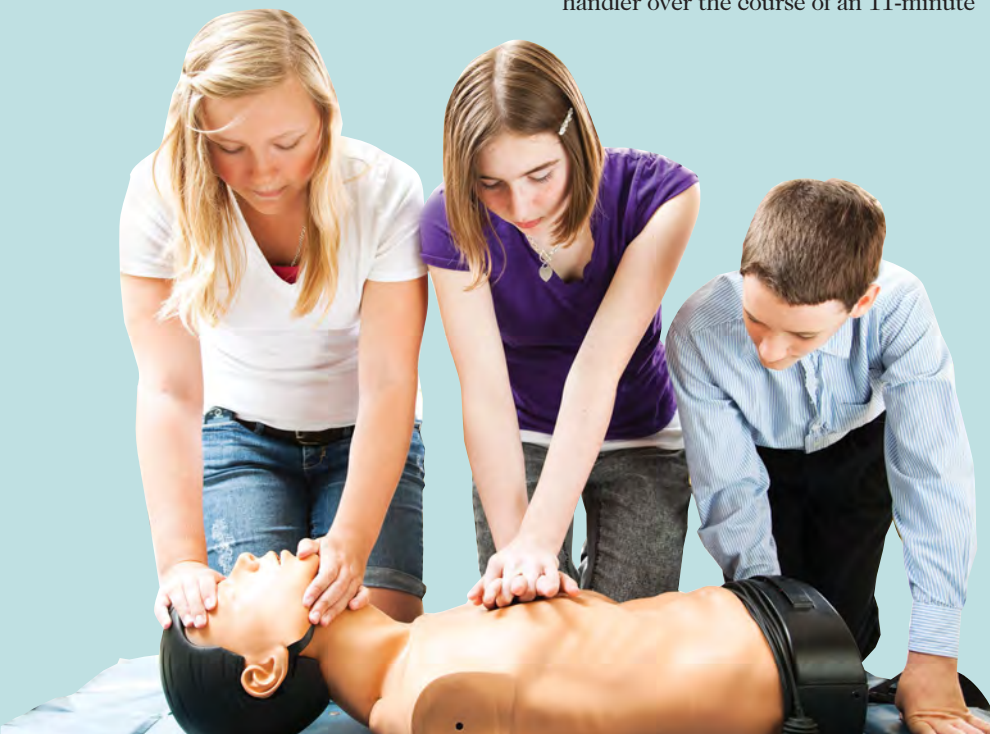
conversation. A recording of the call can be heard online (see [tinyurl.com/psm-999-call](http://tinyurl.com/psm-999-call)), and clearly shows why Emma won a bravery award for her actions.

Primary schools can make a start on developing their provision now by arranging a visit from an external first aid training provider. Our own sessions last 30 to 45 minutes and can be tailored to specific age groups. They are typically held in a school's main hall or other large space, and involve 20-30 children at a time. Alternatively, with a number of teachers already possessing first aid knowledge, having previously attended formal first training themselves, certain schools may be able to identify teachers who can devise lesson plans that cover how to act in an emergency, infection control, minor injuries, CPR and the recovery position.

We appreciate that some schools may be concerned at the prospect of having to find additional time for preparing and delivering first aid training in their already busy schedules – but as many schools have already recognised, first aid training is both hugely important and a fantastic life skill for children to learn.

**Martyn Blackford is the founder of the first aid training provider Latitude Training; further details concerning the government's consultation on SRE and health education in schools can be found at [tinyurl.com/psm-sre-consult](http://tinyurl.com/psm-sre-consult); the consultation runs until 7th November 2018**

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# “MAKE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT TEACHING – NOT GRADES”

Lesson observations needn't be your teachers' *bête noire*, says Simon Botten – at least not if done properly...

**W**hen colleagues asked me what I'd learnt from my Ofsted training, I told them I'd "Mastered the ability to write on a clipboard whilst simultaneously raising a single eyebrow, shaking my head and tutting."

I was joking, of course. But ask any teacher to list what they dislike the most about the job, and many will put lesson observations – especially Ofsted ones – pretty near the top. Why is this? Surely being observed actually doing your job, live, with a class of children is the best barometer as to a member of staff's performance? Well – partly.

There are many in the blogosphere who rail against all forms of lesson observation and disagree with them on principle. I'm not one of them. I believe lesson observations are needed, and if done properly, improve teaching. However, it is important to get them right.

## 1 DON'T MEASURE 'EVENT' LESSONS

In the bad old days, teacher appraisal was often based purely on two or three lesson observations (or even just one) which were then used to determine a teacher's ability in the classroom and whether they'd passed their performance management targets. This led to teachers creating two or three highly polished lessons for the benefit of the observing SLT member, and sometimes dressing up as Henry VIII or using some other wacky hook, often having previously taught the children the lesson in advance so as to ensure that they knew the answers when being watched. This told us nothing about 'typicality' (to use an Ofsted phrase) and everything about which teachers could perform in front of an audience.

Thankfully nowadays it's all about appraising 'teaching over time'. Leaders want to know what typically happens in a

classroom and how effective the teaching is. For this, you need to look at a range of sources – pupils' books, planning, pupil outcomes and lessons via observations. Only then can you get a rounded view of what's actually going on in a classroom.

No one source is more important than another, as a good leader of teaching and learning will be constantly trying to triangulate these sources to understand a member of staff's strengths and weaknesses. Observe lessons by all means, but don't make observations the only tool in your appraisal toolkit.

## 2 KNOW WHY YOU'RE OBSERVING LESSONS

Before getting to 'how' you'll observe lessons, you'll need a clear and universally understood rationale for observing lessons. All staff have the right to know why you're watching them teach and how any observations will be used. Fear of observations will often come about when an SLT member plonks themselves down in the corner of a classroom with little explanation as to why they're there. This can easily be avoided by explaining where the observation cycle fits in with appraisal, and just as importantly, as a vehicle for professional development.

## 3 DON'T MAKE THE STAKES HIGH

One of the most unpopular features of lesson observations has historically been the high stakes 'pass/fail' nature of adding an Ofsted judgement to, at best, 60 minutes of observation. Ofsted itself has long since stopped grading lessons, since it's very difficult to make such absolute judgements after such short observations. Too often, lesson observations were used as a stick to

beat underperforming staff with, which in turn made them something feared by all.

Removing such judgements means that the conversations that follow are now purely about what happened during the lesson, not which grade was written in the box at the bottom. Now, having previously seen some worryingly poor teaching during a lesson, I'm not saying that I'd simply offer a few bits of stock advice and withdraw – quite the opposite. If I see poor practice, I have a duty to make sure that the teacher knows how to improve that practice and see that improvements are made, usually through more observations. But make lesson observations about discussing teaching, not giving grades.

### 4 STAY FOCUSED

The tighter the focus of the lesson observation, the more likely it is to provide useful information for you, the teacher and the school. Our data last year showed that we had a problem with the achievement of quiet Pupil Premium girls, so we added a box to the observation proforma for listing all the Pupil Premium children in the class. By disproportionately focusing in on these children during observations, we discovered some nuanced differences in how this group interacted with learning during the lesson and were able to tweak our teaching accordingly. Attainment in this group subsequently rose sharply.

Adopt a clear focus at your school, phase and/or class level, and your observations will be much more purposeful.

### 5 MAKE YOUR OBSERVATIONS DEVELOPMENTAL

On the face of it, suggesting to staff that a series of lesson observations is the way forward sounds like a difficult sell, but it's what we've done and our staff prefer it. We stopped doing traditional hour-long lesson observations three times a year and instead started doing three 20-minute lesson observations three times a year. These 20-minute lesson observations take place over three

consecutive weeks, are all very tightly focused and are immediately followed by a conversation between observer and teacher regarding what worked well and where tweaks could be made.

We know that excellent teachers don't do things radically differently to everyone else – merely that they have a better 'strike rate'. They're teaching more children more effectively for more of the

lesson than their colleagues. By holding a series of observations over several weeks, the 'strike rate' of all teachers will go up, as they're making small, clearly defined improvements week on week. An added benefit is that teachers don't find these observations as scary, since they're only 20 minutes long with a clear focus and improvement outcome. Hour-long lesson observations held three to four months apart are unwieldy tools by comparison.

### 6 ALLOW TIME FOR PROPER FEEDBACK

There's nothing worse than receiving rushed, ill-considered and one-sided feedback. If someone's allowed you into their classroom, it's essential to allow time for a proper post-observation discussion – not just to maximise improvements in practice, but also as a matter of professional courtesy.

Our lesson observation proformas include a box labelled 'Questions about the lesson', where any queries, good or bad, can be recorded. By phrasing these as questions rather than 'areas for development' you're showing that this is a conversation about teaching, not just a judgement by a manager. We then record 'next steps' – manageable tweaks for the following week – and agree on what improvements could be made.

### 7 SHARE THE LEARNING ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Finally, after each observation round we distribute a memo to all staff that outlines good practice seen throughout the school. It aims to be as practical and straightforward as possible, listing all the successful tweaks and approaches we've observed. This allows the whole staff to learn from each other, further improving the 'strike rate' of the team as a whole.

So, there it is. Lesson observations are, in my view, an essential tool for improving teaching, and if managed well, can be something staff see as a genuine learning experience. Clipboards may still be necessary – but raised eyebrows and tutting rarely are.



**Simon Botten is a primary school headteacher**

 @Southgloshead

 southgloshead.wordpress.com

# DON'T MAKE WRITING A CHORE

Do happy writers make better writers? Lucy Starbuck Braidley talks to two primary educators who believe so, and sees what leaders can learn from their findings...

If you're looking to refresh, optimise or even radically change the approach to writing pedagogy within your school, the Writing for Pleasure movement can give you an interesting new perspective to consider. The overall approach aims for children to make progress in their writing, alongside developing a genuine love and sense of satisfaction from the activity of writing itself – thus setting them up to be lifelong writers, as well as learners.

It's an evidence-based pedagogy that places the child as an autonomous writer at the centre of decision-making about their writing. It enables children to write independently through explicit teaching of authorial skills, and its leading proponents say it's getting results.

## BORN FROM BOREDOM

The Writing for Pleasure approach is starting to gain traction amongst teachers and increasingly being implemented at schools across the country. As a school leader, what do you need to know about the approach and what it might be able to do for your school?

The Writing for Pleasure pedagogy was originally devised by Ross Young and Phil Ferguson, who at the time were both working primary school teachers. With many years of classroom experience between them, both were feeling frustrated by their attempts at helping children who struggled with writing, having observed that the traditional approaches they'd been using were having limited impact.

"We were both working in a school together, and were both bored with our teaching of writing," remembers Young. "We thought 'This isn't working,' and were starting to question the established pedagogy."

While reviewing relevant research, they came across a broader issue – the presence of a clear link between enjoyment and attainment in writing – as later described in the duo's Writing for Pleasure Manifesto (see [tinyurl.com/psm9-wfpm](https://tinyurl.com/psm9-wfpm)): "A recent survey conducted by the National Literacy Trust makes clear that for many years there has been a decline or stagnation in UK children's enjoyment, volition and motivation to write both in and out of school; with 49.3% of children showing largely indifference or dislike for writing. Importantly, The National Literacy Trust also states that 'eight times as many children and young people who do not enjoy writing write below the expected level compared with those who enjoy writing'".

As Young explains, "We realised that much of what we did in the classroom had no research to back it up at all ... We're teaching children to produce 'writing products' to fulfil assessment criteria. The children are never actually taught the craft of writing, they're never taught to *be writers*."

## HIGH EXPECTATIONS

So what does a 'Writing for Pleasure school' actually look like? The Writing for Pleasure Manifesto goes on to outline what such an approach to writing pedagogy should promote – namely self-efficacy, agency, volition, motivation, self-regulation, enjoyment, writer-identity and satisfaction in writing.

Schools are further called on to provide substantial daily time for writing. Class writing projects can be organised with the aim of bringing whole classes together in learning and discussing the characteristics of a particular genre, while allowing children to choose their own writing topics. At the same time, the

children are separately encouraged to pursue personal projects, writing in a genre and for a purpose of their own choosing.

The manifesto sets out 14 interconnecting principles that make up the Writing for Pleasure pedagogy, and is intended to act as a guide for school leaders interested in implementing the approach within their school. Those principles include ensuring high expectations for all writers across the school, and the creation of a community of writers within which writing is shared, talked about and celebrated, including writing produced by school staff.

## TIME SAVER

Reading this, school leaders and teachers might be concerned that the current curriculum allows little time for putting in place these and other Writing for Pleasure initiatives. Young and Ferguson claim, however, that the approach can actually save time in the classroom by unblocking children's creative flow and reducing the need for teachers to instruct them on what to write before starting an in-depth piece of work.

"It's a very efficient pedagogy once you set it up," says Young. "40 years worth of evidence is now pointing towards this approach, and it's grounded in academic research showing that it improves writing outcomes. If you get the children to generate their own ideas – individually, in groups or as a class – that's a lot quicker than building in additional lessons for transferring content to the children that they then reproduce in what we call a 'writing product'."

In Rob Young's view, a good starting point for school leaders would be to use the manifesto document to conduct an audit of current practice across their school. Reflections drawn from the audit should then provide useful insights that

can feed into school development plans and ongoing CPD.

## INDEPENDENT SKILLS

For the Writing for Pleasure team, implementing the approach across a school can play a key role in harnessing and building on the independent writing skills that children initially develop in EYFS. “Interestingly enough, children in early years are allowed to write about what they want. That then seems to be largely taken away from them once they come into formal schooling,” Young adds. “We basically make writing a lot harder for them.”

School leaders might also want to consider the extent to which ‘reading for pleasure’ is promoted alongside writing in their school, and the ways in which both are interconnected. Do your staff view themselves as writers? Do

they use their experience as writers to enrich their practice?

Moreover, are the children explicitly taught about the how writers use different sources of inspiration? Are they encouraged to record and save their ideas, and if so, are they given opportunities to use and further develop those ideas during personal writing time? It’s certainly food for thought. Careful consideration of these key questions could well mark the first steps of a journey that will radically change the culture of writing within your school for the better.



**Lucy Starbuck Braidley is a primary school teacher and subject leader for English and PE**

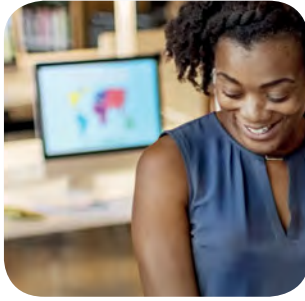
## CROSS-CURRICULAR WRITING – A POISONED CHALICE?

Cross-curricular writing might be very much in vogue in current educational practice, but some have expressed concerns over its potential pitfalls.

As Rob Young puts it, “The problem is that it’s difficult to give equal and simultaneous attention to (a) providing pupils with unfamiliar topic content and (b) helping them develop their writers’ craft.

“One could say that the trend towards cross-curricular writing is failing to serve the curriculum in both the foundation subjects and the practice of writing, because the learning intentions in these two contexts are diluted and weakened.”





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# Why I Love... Target Tracker



**Emma Breckenridge** has been the head of two outstanding primary schools and has worked in a school improvement capacity for schools in and out of a trust for over a decade. Here, she explains why Target Tracker has proved to be a 'lifesaver'...

**“As the saying goes, ‘knowledge is power’**

All too often in schools, this ‘power’ sits at the top. For me and my schools, it was the removal of levels and the implementation of Target Tracker that helped switch this power. Suddenly, the teachers and pupils were in control of the data; the power was now in their hands.

**“My school now has a proven way to assess without levels**

It’s one of the most intuitive school systems we’ve ever worked with. It only takes a few simple clicks to access exactly what we need – even my most technophobic staff were quickly on board. This, for me, is critical in schools today; staff are under immense pressure and need systems which save time and reduce workloads.

**“Target Tracker provides users with the whole national curriculum, broken down into logical statements**

There’s even a ‘pupil’ version of each statement – believe me, this is a lifesaver! Combined with the Observations function available in both the app and the software, these statements can be used to support formative assessment and provide evidence; gone is the

need for paper records that are easily lost when Ofsted come knocking! But what about summative data? For the first time, formative assessment now supports information gathered in tests and summative methods.

**“Thanks to Target Tracker, learning has become more meaningful**

Teaching staff have started to become more familiar with the full curriculum. Teachers were planning and tailoring every lesson to the gap analysis that their ongoing, formative assessment provided. Better yet, pupils were involved in this process, setting their own

targets and continually pushing for new challenges.

**“Target Tracker changed assessment and data for us**

It helped us to get it right. Once staff were using the data day-in-day-out, they started to explore. Before we knew it, teachers were coming to meetings armed with discussion points. Teachers were telling us what they were proud of, generating their own ideas for interventions and school changes. As a headteacher, there is nothing more gratifying than seeing your staff happy and motivated.



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# Buildings & Facilities

## HOW TO REPLACE YOUR WINDOWS

What should schools watch out for when ordering new windows? Steve Waller runs through a list of important considerations...

**E**very external glazing solution combines a glazing product and a window. With the latter, you're generally looking at a choice of wood, aluminium or plastic. It's fairly obvious when a window needs replacing – if there's water ingress or a draft, chances are it's failing.

With wooden windows, we usually recommend leaving no more than five to seven years between decorating programmes. If you decorate or touch up your windows every five years, you'll probably never have to change them. The problem is that people don't, with the risk that they'll start rotting. If your school is in a conservation area or housed in a listed building, you may need to look into repairing or replacing the timbers, rather than

going with a cheaper plastic replacement.

Aluminium lasts longer than wood, is more robust than plastic and can lend a building a more 'commercial look', but is more expensive. In most schools, the windows don't tend to be opened and shut all that regularly, and will often barely be touched, making the issue of durability less important. Something that more schools are starting to do is look beyond standard white finishes when it comes to installing plastic windows, opting instead to have them sprayed in custom colours.

The tell-tale sign of a double glazing unit needing to be replaced is visible condensation. That occurs when the seal on a unit has broken down, letting in moisture that causes condensation to form as the temperature changes. That means the unit is no longer providing the thermal properties it's been designed for, but it's simple to change a double glazed unit if the windows are sound – just make sure the right glass is used in the right places. Windows facing out onto playgrounds should have laminate or toughened glass.

## PROCUREMENT

If you want to compare prices between suppliers, you need like-for-like quotes. It's best to approach established contractors who are used to doing work for the commercial sector, as you'll get a more professional service and the order will be designed to the right specification.

Something to watch for when obtaining quotes are exclusions. Many contractors will exclude the removal of obstructing cabling, decorating works and attending to awkwardly-placed heating pipes. It might seem at first like you've agreed a great deal, but if it turns out there are issues that the window fitters haven't allowed for, you may need to hire a plumber, electrician and/or decorator and watch your quote jump from £10k to £15k.

Make sure that whichever contractor you go for, you check their terms and conditions. Sit down with the contractor before the work starts and plan how the job is going to be completed in terms of logistics. The contractor should carry out a full visual inspection both internally and externally. Forewarned is forearmed – the more information you have, less likely you are to encounter problems.

Someone who comes to you recommended is even better. Schools talk to each other, and if they've recently had windows replaced, may well be able to recommend a reliable contractor.

The primary objective for any school will be to provide the best possible environment for their students and staff. If the school is drafty or looks shabby, that's not ideal. We've found that schools that are warm and look good will have overall better attendance and outcomes because of their learning environment.

*Steve Waller is the managing director of Waller Associates*

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## LOOK AFTER YOUR IFPD

Familiarise your teachers with some simple maintenance tasks and you can ensure your flatpanel displays have staying power

**M**aintaining an interactive flatpanel display (IFPD) is just like maintaining a computer or smartphone – there are actions that need to be taken if the technology is to keep operating effectively.

Historically, interactive whiteboards (IWBs) in classrooms have been used as display devices, meaning that any required IT maintenance was generally fulfilled via PC updates. However, with leading IFPDs now shipping with integrated operating systems, they need to be looked after in much the same way as a computer.

In an ideal world, software updates will be applied as soon as the prompt to do so appears – but in school environments, that's not always practical. It can be difficult to time the rollout of updates around busy schedules, but it's important to schedule updates at least every half term or on a quarterly basis.

As well ensuring your IFPD's operating system and software is kept up to date, it's also important to manage the volume of applications, resources and files stored on it. As with any digital media device, keeping too much data on it at once will hinder its performance. IT managers and technicians are typically tasked with the responsibility of maintaining a school's IT systems, but they'll rarely be in a position to know what onboard data can or can't be deleted, nor which files or apps have fallen out of regular use.

It can be useful to provide teaching staff with guidance on looking after and maintaining the devices in their classroom, and remind them that

following some straightforward steps now will help to maintain performance of their IFPDs and reduce the likelihood of problems occurring in the long term.

Adopt a 'quarterly clean policy', whereby staff must uninstall any apps they no longer use and remove unwanted pictures or other redundant files from their image library. Once staff get into the habit of doing this regularly, it's likely to be adopted as common practice. Some schools may even take the step of appointing pupil 'digital leaders' who'll remind staff to carry out such tasks and assist with digital 'clean-up' procedures.

Simple actions, such as turning off an IFPD at the end of the school day, can make a significant difference to a unit's performance, running costs and lifespan. Older IWB systems could take a long time to shut down and start up, but newer IFPDs typically do both much faster and are therefore less likely to infringe on valuable lesson time.

With schools increasingly facing budgetary challenges, taking care of your EdTech will ensure that it can be used to its full potential and last as long as possible. A well-maintained IFPD will ultimately mean that your teachers are able to consistently access a range of fantastic learning apps and any other media resources they love to use in lessons without hindrance.

**Pete Millar is a technical consultant at Promethean**

 @PrometheanUKI  
 [prometheanworld.com/gb](http://prometheanworld.com/gb)

# Make your floors flawless

Carpets in primary schools are designed to be hard-wearing, but they're not indestructible – here's how to choose the right one for you...

**I**t's a given that carpets in primary schools put up with a fair amount of daily punishment and that carpet care can be relatively expensive. If you're looking for a carpet solution for your school, ESPO's Flooring Framework (16) can provide you with a simple UK/EU compliant route to procure flooring, saving you valuable time and money. With some supplier expertise, we've provided here some insight into the top three most frequently used carpet types and the best ways to tackle common forms of damage.

## Fibre bonded carpets

These are the most commonly used carpets in schools, consisting of synthetic fibres that are needled together to produce a robust and ribbed, felt or tiled product. It's ideal for busy schools due to its durability, and although it can have a rough texture, is widely used and typically priced at around £24/m<sup>2</sup> supplied and installed. However, as the carpet is permanently bonded to

the sub-floor, certain types of damage will require a call-out for repairs. Our ESPO Flooring framework provides access to highly experienced suppliers who can offer a full range of quality services that are ideal for school environments.

## Vinyl flooring

The second most frequently used carpet type in schools is favoured due to its durable wear layer, easy cleanability and water resistance. It has similar properties to fibre bonded carpets, in that it's hard-wearing and permanently bonded to the sub-floor. While it costs slightly more in capital outlay (£30/m<sup>2</sup> on average) its lifecycle compares very favourably. This type of flooring is generally deemed more comfortable and smooth in classroom areas, reduces noise and is easier to look after – all important factors for a busy school.

## Carpet tiles

These squares of carpeting are available in a multitude of designs and price points, incorporating fibre bonded, loop or cut pile. Tiles are becoming increasingly popular, though as yet not everyone is aware of how their ease of preparation, installation and maintenance makes them a good flooring solution for schools. The overall cost can be greater depending on the tiles used, but they're typically quick to install, heavy-duty and built to last. Another major benefit is that they're easy to maintain – if any damage occurs, individual tiles can be removed or replaced in-house, with no need for supplier call-outs.

## Damage

To prevent and minimise carpet damage, regular cleaning in line with the manufacturer's instructions is vital. With vinyl flooring, spillages can be easily wiped away, but note any damage to welds or physical breaks. Liquids that manage to penetrate the vinyl can sometimes react with the adhesives underneath and cause the vinyl to de-bond, which is why it's important to always get any vinyl welds or breaks repaired.

Vinyl can also be at risk from point loading, which occurs when the rubber feet on chairs become detached, leaving exposed tube edges. When those chairs are leant back on, the tube edges dig into the vinyl, causing dents – so make sure your chairs are protected with rubber feet.

Further information on flooring with regards to supply, fit or refurbishment can be found by viewing ESPO's framework at [espo.org/frameworks](http://espo.org/frameworks).

*Thanks to John from Contraflor for providing his expertise*

**Guy Swanson is procurement officer at the professional buying organisation ESPO**

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# How well can you communicate in an emergency?

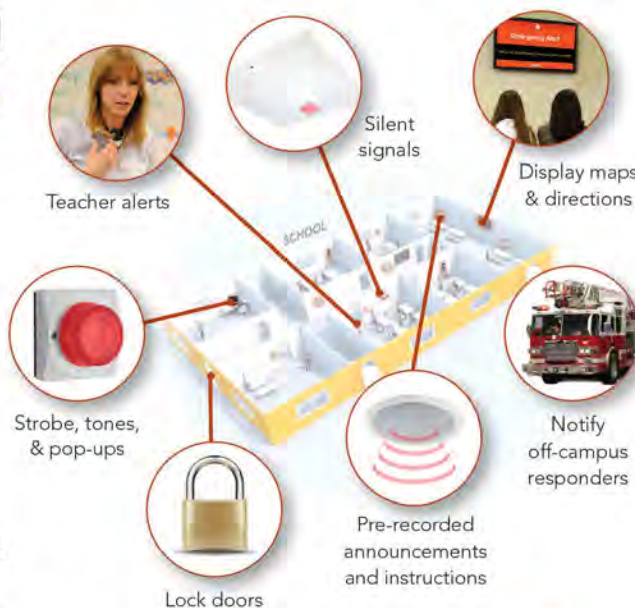
Communication technology that helps keep staff and students aware, focused, and out of harm's way is part of a strong Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP). What's more, it should cover:



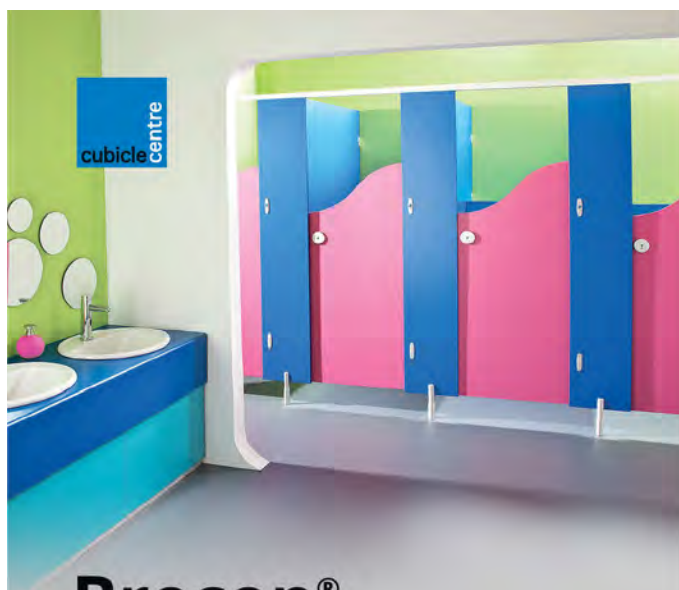
1. **...activation:** Multiple ways for staff to activate an alert
2. **...notification:** Redundant ways to inform responders
3. **...response:** A suite of effective, automated actions

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# A WARM RECEPTION

From groundworks to the primary site of a large through school in just over a year – we hear about the impressively rapid coming together of The Beaulieu Park School in Chelmsford...



**W**hen I speak to James Donaldson it's been barely a week since The Beaulieu Park School opened its doors. As the school's principal, he had just come out of what sounded like a whirlwind experience of headship – Donaldson's first – as the school was designed, constructed and prepared to welcome an initial intake of 60 reception pupils at the start of the 2018/19 school year.

The Beaulieu Park School forms part of the new Beaulieu district currently taking shape on the outskirts of Chelmsford. Created by the developers Countryside and L&Q, Beaulieu will eventually be the

site of 3,600 new homes alongside a series of shops, local amenities and community sites. The school is situated beside Beaulieu Square, a public space at the heart of the development, alongside the Bright Horizons day nursery and the Kip McGrath Education Centre, which will provide 11+ and secondary phase tuition services up to GCSE level.

What makes The Beaulieu Park School especially notable in this part of the country is that it's been conceived as Essex's first all through school. The school's first year 7 cohort are due to start in September 2019, and plans are underway to offer sixth form provision to those year 7s once they reach the end of

KS4 in 2024.

## PLANNING PRIORITIES

Prior to his appointment, Donaldson had previously served as deputy headteacher at The Boswells School – a nearby secondary belonging to the same trust, The Chelmsford Learning Partnership, that oversees The Beaulieu Park School and five others. Donaldson remembers being part of the team that was successfully named as the preferred bidder for the school over a number of other academy chains, in a process that concluded in May 2017. And thus was the starting gun fired.

As Donaldson recalls, "At that point,



only the groundworks on the building had been completed. The speed of the build since then has been quite incredible – 12 months from summer 2017 to now. Our secondary school is still under construction, but due to be finished in February. It's all been very quick."

Following the agreement of an initial plan for the school agreed between Essex County Council and developer Kier, Donaldson and others proceeded to attend weekly meetings with representatives from both to discuss and set out what was needed in the school and its specifications, right down to the type of plug sockets.

"We were able to specify what we wanted in the school to a large degree," says Donaldson. "The layout was somewhat fixed, but in terms of what we wanted, there was a lot of input from us."

Were there any aspects of the school plans that Donaldson can remember pushing particularly hard for? Being a former drama teacher, his answer is perhaps somewhat expected. "Learning beyond the classroom is incredibly important to the culture of the school – things like sport, performance and the creative arts," he says. "The specification of our performance spaces, what they'd feature in terms of sound and vision, and the requirement for them to facilitate high level school productions and shows – it was really important that we got that right."

"We therefore spent quite a lot of time

talking about what we needed. The school remains under construction, so we're still working on getting things right with the developers, but it's all going well. I've spent time looking up the correct mounts for the speakers we're using in one of the performance spaces – that's the type of thing that really matters to us."



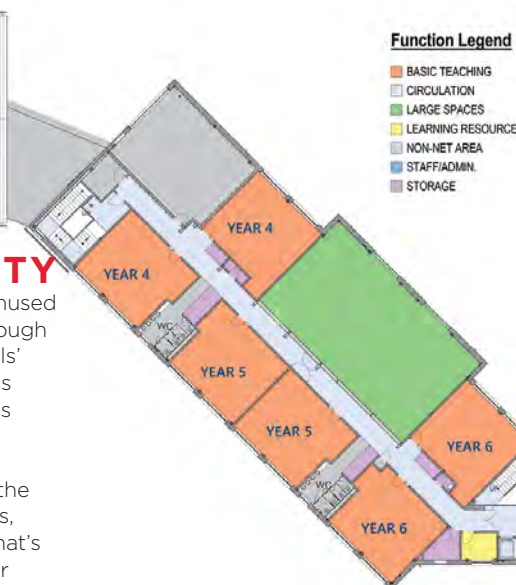
## CLEAR CONTINUITY

Donaldson becomes particularly enthused when asked what the school's all through nature will mean in terms of the pupils' daily learning experiences: "It gives us opportunities that other state schools don't have," he says. "Our primary children will have access to all the facilities on the secondary site, be it the sports facilities, performing arts areas, technology rooms or science labs. That's been a major appeal of the school for parents."

"Yes, it's a new and shiny building, but there's also a clear and tangible way in which their children will be able to access better facilities for their learning."

With the school currently attended by just a small fraction of the planned pupil

population, children who are at the very start of their schooling, how confident is he that the school will make good on its all through promise? "We'd hope to retain all 60 of our children," says Donaldson, though he concedes, "There is local competition in the form of two of the most successful grammar schools in



England, which is something for us to be mindful of. But with the approach we're planning in secondary, by the time our first pupils come through I'm sure they'll want to continue in what I'm certain will be an outstanding school."

## LEARNING PROCESS

Following the end of the 2017/18 academic year, Donaldson proceeded to go on holiday with his family for 12 nights. Upon his return, he joined the team finalising the primary build every day until its completion.

"It's not as glamorous as some might think," Donaldson notes. "We spent time sweeping up, preparing classrooms, taking deliveries, unboxing items, assembling flatpack furniture – everything necessary to ensure the primary school and classrooms for our two reception groups were 100% ready."

In Donaldson's telling, it was an intensive learning process. "When we finally got in, things needed to be done in order to pass buildings control. Fire extinguishers needed to be fitted, for example, but we couldn't do that until the builders handed the building over. Installations of hand driers – all these details which, had I joined another existing school as principal, I wouldn't have had to think about."

Happily, however, these early days for the school have proceeded smoothly – barring one minor incident during an event the school hosted for parents. "We held a picnic for our families as a way of saying hello and to give them a chance to get to know each other," Donaldson remembers. "With half an hour to go until start time, we realised that we had no water. What we hadn't realised was that the building is so smart, you have to actively tell it that you're using it on a Saturday – otherwise, it turns the services off. Fortunately, however, our premises manager is extremely well versed in the school's building management system and was able to come out and help us."

At this stage, what aspect of the school would Donaldson say he's proudest of? "The most impressive thing for me is the



way our two reception teachers and LSAs have put together their classrooms. It's the atmosphere they've helped create of the school being not just a fantastic learning environment, but also a welcoming space for children just starting school.

"The school provides us with an excellent blank canvas, but it's the people – the teachers, staff and families – that

really make it a school and make it a community. We're very lucky to have appointed the people we have."

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# Renew your READING SPACES

Appealing reading spaces can go a long way towards instilling a love of books. Alison Tarrant offers some tips on making yours the best they can be

1

## PURPOSE

Consider what your reading spaces are for. Is the way they're currently laid out appropriate to your needs? Do the furnishings you have increase or diminish their impact? Your reading aims are what should guide your design and furnishing choices.

2

## FLEXIBILITY

In a library space, flexibility is key. Having easily moveable furniture allows you to create spaces that can be adapted to your needs, whether it be clearing the space for a storyteller or setting up tables for group and one-to-one work – but don't forsake daily comfort for occasional one-offs.

3

## CLASSROOMS

A focused reading area in the classroom with soft furnishings and reading materials can provide a great reward for some students, as well as helping others who are more easily distracted. Providing an enclosed space of some kind will allow students to focus on their reading and reach the limbic state.

4

## LIGHTING

Some modern libraries can feel very commercial in the way they're lit, which may from time to time produce glare on open pages that causes reading difficulties for some. Try to minimise any harsh, overhead lighting and use covers to reduce glare. Using lamps instead can be very effective.

5

## SHELVING

A key consideration to bear in mind here is height. Some types of shelving may look very attractive, but be wholly impractical when put to use. More traditional shelving units can often offer greater flexibility in how they're positioned and still be made to look eye-catching without sacrificing their utility.

6

## SPACE

Make sure there are areas of your reading spaces that don't include shelves or displays – both for access reasons and so students can make themselves comfortable. Some will like to read sat between bookcases, others will prefer lying on the floor. Allow space for children to read as they wish (within health and safety limits).

7

## BOOKS!

One of the most effective things you can do to change a library's atmosphere is alter the layout of the books. When were they last 'weeded' (old/unborrowed/tatty books removed)? Keeping fewer copies of high quality books is better than holding on to a huge stock. How many are turned with their covers facing outwards? Aim for a couple on each shelf.

8

## ANCILLARIES

Libraries and book spaces need to be engaging, but not overwhelming. Breaking the book collection up with objects can prevent it from feeling like a 'wall of spines'. Add objects that can be played with, use QR codes to display book trailers, include some origami paper with instructions. Libraries are about discovery.

9

## SEATING

Think carefully about your reading areas' seating. Does it reflect how the spaces are used? If you do paired reading, are there chairs in twos? Are there separate chairs for children who don't like sitting in groups? Aim for a mix of relaxed and formal seating that supports your learning objectives.

10

## BOOK SWAPS

These can be a great way of firing children's curiosity and generating conversations about books. Use books you don't mind being lost, such as duplicate copies or older titles. Try holding a 'What are Year 5 reading?' session in a Year 4 classroom, or present some books that make for quick, funny reads in the playground at breaktime.



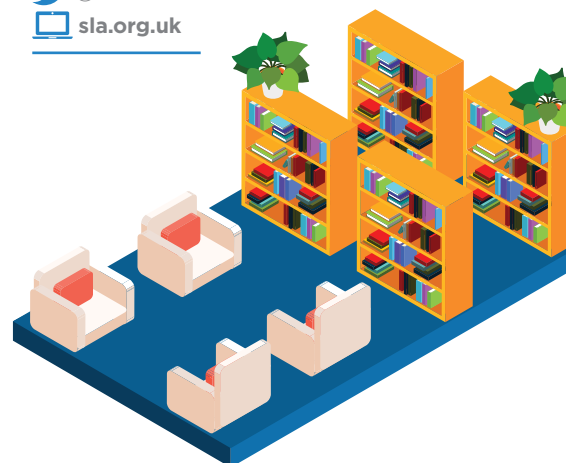
**Alison Tarrant is CEO of the School Library Association, prior to which she was a practising school librarian**



@uksla



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





## “A COSY AND INVITING SPACE”

*Alison Tarrant takes a closer look out at a standout library space that was previously the recipient of the SLA's Inspiration Award*

### FOCAL POINT

Charford First School ([charford.worcs.sch.uk](http://charford.worcs.sch.uk)) in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire is a delightfully busy, engaging and caring first school serving the needs of children aged 2 up to Year 4 pupils.

In November 2016 it opened a brand new library. Centrally located, it's now the focal point in the school for reading, accessing books, storytelling and general relaxation, as well as enjoyment of the written and spoken word.

As the school's headteacher, Mrs. A. McLaren, explains, “We cleared and adapted a classroom especially for this, including some building work, new entrance doors, newly painted walls in calming colours and a new carpet.”

### MAGICAL SPACE

Entering under a colourful tree canopy, visitors are drawn into the library's woodland theme – a magical, cosy and inviting space with a combination of standard ‘off-the-shelf’ shelving and some that's tailor made using curved wood.

A purpose-built arch links some of the shelving together, and there's an eye-catching storytelling chair, alongside some tables, chairs, beanbags, plenty of soft furnishing, mats and attractive curtains. Wood is also used for the bookends and label holders, while the issue desk is a product of the site manager's evidently capable DIY skills. The library is big enough for flexible whole class use, and yet comfortable enough for small group and one-to-one work too.

### AWARD-WINNING

The children are very proud of their library, and there's clear evidence of real book enjoyment taking place. The library is busy throughout the school day, being the scene of many book exchanges and quests for information. All of the school's classes have a lesson of at least 30 minutes duration in the library space each week.

Charford First School was Shortlisted for the SLA Inspiration Award 2017, which seeks to highlight innovative library refurbishment and design. The Award is sponsored by Gresswell and aims to reward creativity and resourcefulness in school library design and use. What matters isn't the size of the library space, but what a school has achieved with the resources it can call upon.

## BETTER BROWSING

Lend your reading spaces some added comfort and visual appeal with these furniture selections...



### Take your pick

The Small Fiction Bookcase from BookSpace can be supplied in an oak or white finish with a choice of six different shelf colours. Its upper two shelves can accommodate face-out displays (with a lip to guard against falling books), while the lower shelf is designed for spine-out display. A larger version for taller books is also available. [bookspaceforschools.co.uk](http://bookspaceforschools.co.uk)



### Sitting comfortably?

Ideal for reading areas where space is at a premium, this Carry Cushion Set from Gresswell includes 10 brightly coloured foam-filled cushions in aqua, lime, orange, red and yellow that can turn any patch of floor into a comfy seat. When finished, they can be stacked and stowed away in the supplied storage bag. [gresswell.co.uk](http://gresswell.co.uk)

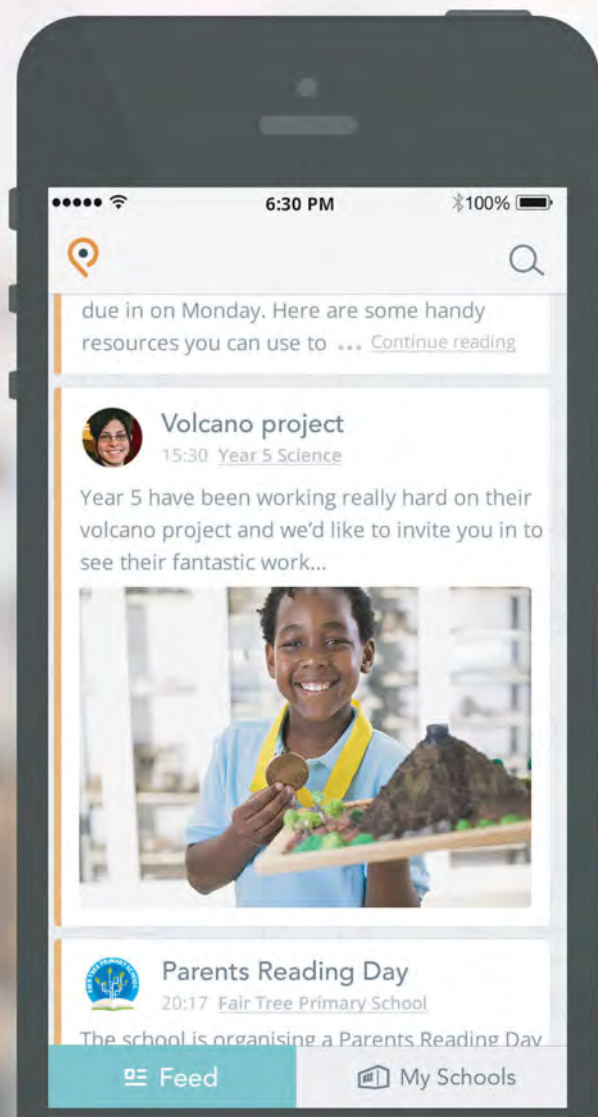


### Knowledge gateway

Lend the entrance to your reading space – or indeed any other dedicated learning area – a touch of quirky fun with the KubbyClass Library Archway. Available in seven colours, it's made from 18mm-thick MDF and finished in bump-resistant PVC. [willowbrookeducation.co.uk](http://willowbrookeducation.co.uk)

Further details about the Inspiration Award can be found at [sla.org.uk/inspiration-award.php](http://sla.org.uk/inspiration-award.php)

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## HOW TO LEAD YOUR TECHNICAL STAFF

You'd expect the staff looking after your ICT to know their WPA2 from their HDCP – but can they apply that knowledge in the unpredictable environment of a primary setting?

**A**s with any role in your organisation, to effectively lead or manage a technician you'll need to develop a 'working understanding' of what they do on a daily basis. For those that lead a technician in a primary school, that may mean entering into an unfamiliar world of technical vocabulary and endless cable runs of wires, switches and servers – but don't be daunted. Look past the jargon and fancy equipment, and try to focus on the following:

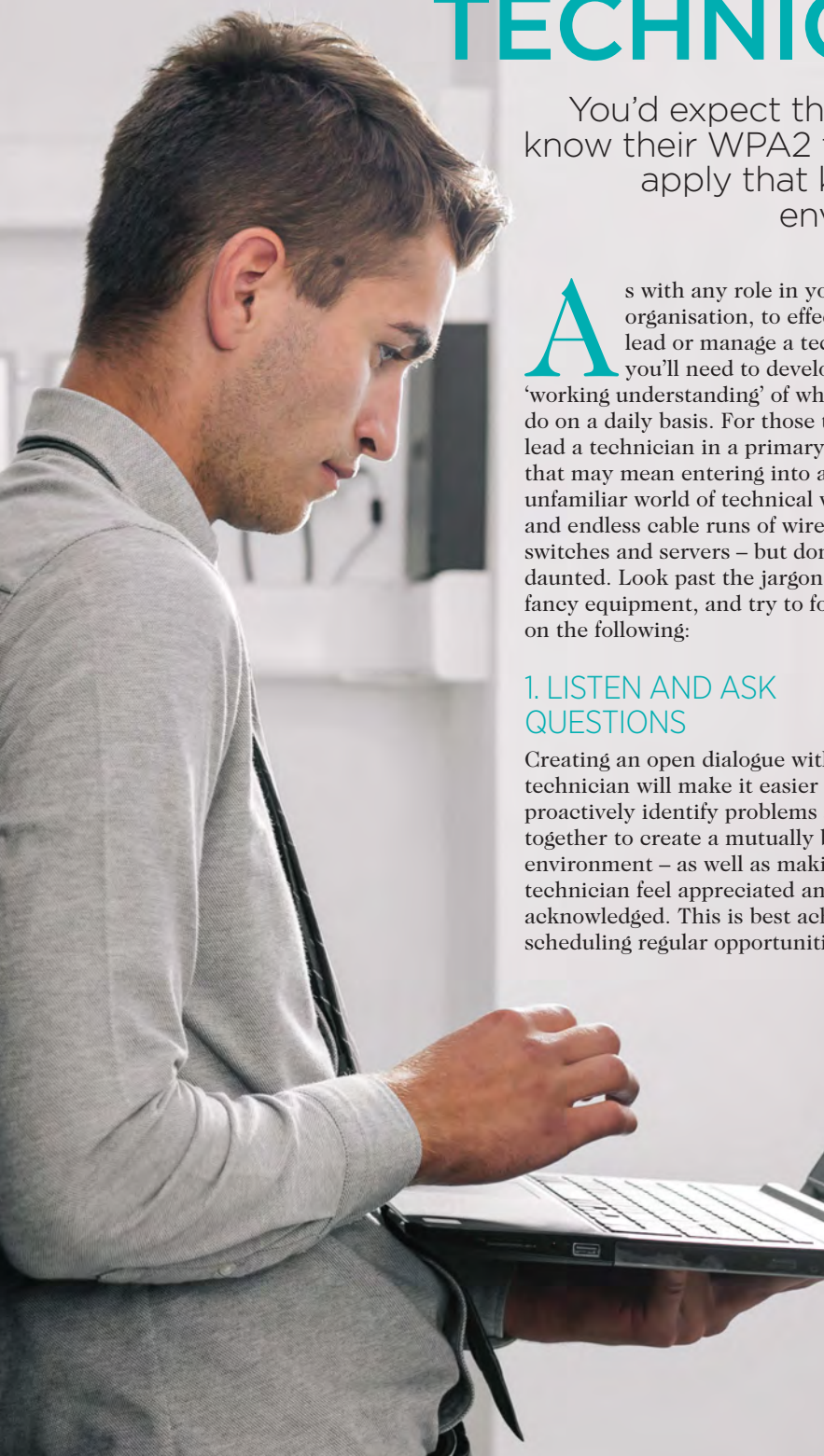
### 1. LISTEN AND ASK QUESTIONS

Creating an open dialogue with your technician will make it easier to proactively identify problems and work together to create a mutually beneficial environment – as well as making your technician feel appreciated and acknowledged. This is best achieved by scheduling regular opportunities to sit

down and talk, perhaps at a biweekly meeting. Don't limit your open dialogue to just meetings, though – as with other members of staff, take time to touch base and ask your technician how their day's going. Be mindful of how much time they spend on activities that address your organisational goals and make these the focus of your interactions.

### 2. LET YOUR TECHNICIAN DETERMINE THE METHODS

Give your technician an end result to obtain, rather than methods through which to complete the task. Explain in simple terms that there are many ways to skin this cat, and encourage your technician to do what they think is best to obtain the end goal.



### 3. GIVE YOUR TECHNICIAN INPUT

Ask your technician about timelines for projects and tasks and listen to what they say. Where necessary, seek additional input from other specialist voices – perhaps a governor with technical understanding, a technician from another school or a third-party technical advisor. When introducing a third party, avoid confrontation by affirming the shared goals of all participants and setting clear guidelines for any interactions.

### 4. PROVIDE THE RIGHT TOOLS

Give your technician tools that help them and a suitable space to work in. If they tell you that a specific tool will aid their work, let them use it. Consider pooling tools with other local schools to reduce costs, or leasing equipment that might be required for short term tasks such as PAT Testing or network debugging. Create protocols that will prevent your technician from being drawn away from big projects by staff with minor technical issues who may be better assisted by colleagues familiar with, for example, the photocopier or printer. A ticket-based help desk can help here – see [spiceworks.com](http://spiceworks.com) for an example of how you can set one up.

### 5. EMPOWER THEM

Give your technician the power to come up with new approaches and let them try things out. Assign them tasks that will see them interact with others both in and out of IT, and allow them to attend industry conferences such as the Bett Show. Don't underestimate the advantages to be had from letting your technical staff network and build relationships with other technicians and suppliers. Above all, treat your technician with respect – not just for who they are, but for what they can accomplish.

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



**“THEIR LEARNING ENGAGEMENT HAS IMPROVED”**

We hear how changing the technology used in its classrooms enabled one school to reignite its pupils' excitement for learning

A few years ago, we realised that boys weren't engaging in core subjects such as history, geography and the arts. Previously, our school's existing computers had been used as search engines for research or for making documents. We wanted tools that would better prepare students for their lives in the future.

While attending a computing conference, our school's executive principal, Johanne Clifton, was inspired to trial a technology solution aimed at improving classroom lessons by providing easier access to learning materials. As well as being helpful for pupils, it was important that the technology was affordable and easy for teachers to learn, and apply it in lessons.

After some careful consideration, we decided to trial the HP 11 G4 Chromebooks and Google's G Suite for Education software tools amongst our Year 5 cohort. Initially, a small group of teachers were tasked with managing the Chromebooks, but as more staff came to start using them, I began to lead on staff training with support from the head of IT.

The Chromebooks proceeded to be used in lessons to manage homework and improve communication between teachers and pupils. One thing that was found to be particularly helpful was the ability to share and access learning materials with children to work on individually in the classroom, rather than have the class crowd around a single laptop to be shown a task, as had been the case before.

Teachers across the school were subsequently able to create richer lessons that illustrated key concepts in ways not

previously possible via standard classroom instruction. They could vary their lessons more and now call on a rich array of interactive tools for engaging students. In a series of Year 6 history lessons on *Crime and Punishment*, for example, pupils were asked to present research on myths and history involving piracy in any form they chose with the aid of their Chromebooks.

By tailoring and customising the resources for pupils, it helped prompt a close (and usefully time-saving) classroom interaction that encouraged the pupils to take ownership of their work. This in turn boosted their confidence in lessons they wouldn't have been particularly interested in before. The more teachers used Chromebooks in their classrooms, the more we saw the potential benefit for other students.

After concluding a successful Chromebook trial with the Year 5 students, the school rolled out the technology across all cohorts. Every teacher now has a Chromebook of their own from a total complement of 60, which are made available to pupils on a rotating basis.

We found that when pupils are told that tomorrow's lesson will be on Chromebooks, they're more excited about it. Their learning engagement has improved – especially for our boys, who can be harder to reach. As a school, we've been able to adapt our teaching for the modern world and provide our pupils the core skills that they'll need for the 21st century.

**Angela Watson is the Year 6 leader at Billesley Primary School**

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# Reduce the cost of your upgrades

The EdTech upgrade cycle is ultimately unavoidable, but there are some things schools can do to reduce the accompanying expense, says Colin Green

**H**ardware costs can be an enormous burden for schools, particularly smaller ones. At a time of significant financial pressures, a single server can consume a significant proportion of a school's budget. As a governor for a small school, this was recently brought into sharp focus for me when an ageing server suddenly failed, necessitating an urgent replacement.

How, then, can schools reduce the cost of essential hardware replacements, while also avoiding disruptions to critical staff and pupil services?

First and foremost, your technology strategy shouldn't be device-led, but based on educational needs. The latest shiny devices can be very seductive, but it's essential that their impact is fully considered well in advance of any purchase.

Besides, there's much to be said for using yesterday's technology – though key to that is whether older devices are able to meet your particular needs. Undertake a thorough audit of what technology is currently being used for learning at your school, how it's being used and the impact it's having. You'll likely find this to be an extremely useful and eye-opening exercise – not just in terms of your procurement decisions, but also for informing your training needs.

It's further vital to know and understand how your future needs are likely to change. Any hardware purchase should always involve careful consideration of

its intended purpose versus a clearly set out impact evaluation. That way, you can gauge what equipment will be central to your continuity of service.

Having audited your present technology use, you'll be better placed to judge what further ICT purchases might be required if you're to deliver on your aims. Taking time to understand your most frequently used software – and what direction its future development might take – will further help you decide what equipment to keep, what to upgrade, what to replace and what to jettison.

A second strand to consider is the expected lifespan of the hardware you have at the moment, and what replacing it is likely cost. When rolling out replacement or upgraded hardware, it's essential that the items in question aren't bought piecemeal, but in volumes that will ensure your identified needs can be properly met.

The actual costs of the hardware in question can be significantly reduced in several ways:

- Factoring in the longer-term cost savings of newer hardware in areas such as energy consumption and running costs, which can be quickly realised within the first year of use.
- Taking account of how new technology may negate some existing processes, such as managing communications with parents, enabling them to instead be carried out via inexpensive mobile apps

– in this case, resulting in prompter parental bookings and online payments.

- Repurposing existing hardware. If you have a clear understanding of what your school genuinely requires, you'll find that being able to use a limited amount of software effectively is far better than having a wider choice of options, but limited knowledge and understanding of how to actually deploy them.

- Cloud services may be advisable for schools wanting to reduce the amount of hardware they need on-site. Another cost-effective strategy you might be able to adopt is server virtualization.

**Colin Green is director of education at New Era Education and a former primary headteacher**

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



# WHO SHOULD MANAGE YOUR NETWORK?

Your school's wireless network needs to be robust, reliable and secure – and the way to ensure that could be to have it managed remotely, says Pete Hannah

**W**e recently completed a network rollout at a primary school in Lincolnshire that had to support 120 iPads, nine interactive displays, 15 laptops and 13 desktops to support 200 pupils and staff. That's admittedly an extreme use case where primary schools are presently concerned, but it does illustrate how much dramatic growth there's been in assisted learning and EdTech designed to support learning skills.

At the other end of the scale, you might have a smaller school with fewer resources that requires networking for a couple of interactive screens, and a complement of Chromebooks that need wireless connections. There might also be a trolley with some iPads that visits different classrooms throughout the day.

## THREE ELEMENTS

Having been selling into the education sector now for around six years, I've seen the network infrastructure in primary schools managed in a number of different ways. If you go back around half a dozen years or so, it was often the case that a school's system administrator would be someone who simply 'knew a bit about computers' and got lumped with the task, because they wouldn't tend to have dedicated IT people.

The IT network in a school typically consists of three elements – a series of access points, some form of switch and a gateway. You'll likely find wireless access points (WAPs) in every classroom, or at least several of them in corridors. How many you have and where they are can depend on how the school's buildings are constructed, how old they are and the extent of any pre-existing cabling infrastructure. The WAPs will typically be attached to cabling that runs inside the building's walls and roof spaces back to a switch.

The switch controls the distribution and flow of data across the school network to and from the WAPs, and will come in one of two flavours – a standard or a PoE (Power over Ethernet) type. The latter does as it sounds, supplying power via data cabling to devices at the other end, and tends to be the sort normally used in education settings, as they remove the need to separately cable out electricity alongside the data infrastructure, or provide power points for each of the WAPs.

The switch in turn connects to the services in the school's ICT bank, be that a server or a gateway to the wider internet and the outside world. This should, of course, always be a security-enabled gateway that allows some form of control over the school's internet.

Some might blacklist certain websites, or

whitelist only certain websites they want people to see. It'll also provide the means of putting in place other firewall functions, such as providing protection against viruses and spam and detecting intrusions.

## MANAGED RESPONSIBILITY

Some primary schools may well prefer to appoint someone internally to carry out elements of their system administration – configuring the network in a specific way, managing the registration and access of users, overseeing the processing of pupil admin. It's usually the



case that the more technical aspects of managing a school network – applying firmware updates to hardware devices, installing patches for applications and operating systems – will be either passed on to a reseller that's supporting the school, or to an LA that's responsible for managing the networking of schools throughout the area.

What we've seen in the education sector over the last year, however, has been a rapid adoption of cloud network management products.

A growing number of schools are concluding that there's a low cost of ownership and manageable level of involvement in terms of the technological complexity – but also that if they want to step in and manage specific areas, doing so is relatively simple.

In this case, outsourcing the work or giving it to someone else to manage

doesn't necessarily mean relinquishing all control entirely; it just hands responsibility over the network to someone who actually knows what they're doing and can manage it reliably.

## MAINTENANCE FROM ANYWHERE

Our own offering in this area, which we call Nebula, allows for cloud control of a school's access points, switches and

gateways. That means you could be anywhere, while still be able to supervise your school's network infrastructure, while the likes of patches and updates are automatically carried out.

It used to be that a school would need someone familiar with how to use a command line interface to roll out software patches, or download the latest firmware to multiple WAP

devices and ensure everything's working. All that can now be done through cloud control.

Another advantage is that it makes it easier for schools to track their network's performance data over time. Staff can analyse previous issues, see how they were fixed and be reassured that they won't happen again. It's all made accessible, without them having to

shoulder the responsibility of managing and supervising the system itself.

## CONTROL AND LONGEVITY

What I've seen is that schools want to maintain a sense of control. That ties in to broader shifts in recent years of schools parting ways with LAs and converting to academies – but at the same time, we've seen some LAs relax their formerly tight control and requirements when it comes to network management in favour of going with a more flexible approach. We've also seen some examples of schools building direct partnerships with resellers who have strong track records in supporting schools in their local area.

What we've learned from working with our reseller partners is that the 'IT people' based in academies and trusts tend to be much more knowledgeable (and have larger budgets) compared to those in primary schools. On the whole, trusts will have a good grasp of the infrastructure they currently have, what it needs to grow and what they need in the way of support.

Interestingly, what we're starting to see now is more established academies – those that have been around for three to five years – that are in the process of reviewing networks and systems they've had in place since they were first set up. I can recall meeting with trust representatives at the Bett show who had rolled out costly networking systems at a time when they were relatively flush with funding. Some have since found that their costs are no longer manageable once their hardware comes up for renewal, or that the licences for their switches and WAPs are more expensive than the capital costs of replacing it all with different equipment.

The final area schools should therefore look at is the likely longevity of the equipment they decide to go with, and whether it might be worth procuring via a three- or five-year lease. The school might not own the kit at the end of that period, but it can be assured of always receiving new equipment each time their network is refreshed.

“Outsourcing the work doesn't necessarily mean relinquishing all control”



Pete Hannah is head of channel, UK and Ireland at Zyxel

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# Community Engagement

## WHY SCHOOLS SHOULD OFFER PARENTAL ADVICE

The obstacles preventing parents from engaging with your school aren't always obvious, says Michelle Doyle Wildman – but the right kind of support can help bring them to light



**T**he importance of parental participation in a child's education is well documented, with plenty of research available to show the many advantages it brings to them academically, emotionally and behaviourally. But what happens when parents and carers themselves feel they lack the skills or ability they need to get properly involved?

Challenges in supporting a child's learning and development can exist in any school or community, but may be more acute in deprived or culturally diverse areas. Whether it's due to their own level of education, the pressures of poor health, language barriers or other issues that stand in the way, reaching and engaging these families is critical to helping their children achieve their full potential.

However, some schools have been making great strides and leading the way in terms of parental engagement, bringing the community together to support families. Take, for example, Rowlands Gill Primary School in Tyne and Wear, where the PTA recognised that some children's behaviour in class reflected challenges at home. The school's PTA and SLT decided to address the problem by employing a family support worker and setting up an outreach programme, through which it was able to strengthen home-school ties with advice and support and improve children's behaviour in school.

Richmond Park School in Carmarthenshire, meanwhile, broke down barriers that existed between home and school by holding a series of events designed by the teachers and PTA to engage parents. These included teacher-led academic and reading workshops, as well as sessions on

hygiene and organised sporting activities that parents could get involved in. Since introducing these weekly parent-focused events the school has seen better attendance, the children's reading ages have improved and more mums and dads now attend parents' evenings.

So how should you get the process started? SBLs can play an important role in establishing mechanisms for parental engagement. Recognising what issues matter to parents is important, but you'll need a system in place for gathering information and feedback if your efforts are to be successful.

Working with senior leaders and governors or trustees to champion parental involvement in school can help build the expectation that parents can and should have a role to play in their child's education. Where schools are able to support mums and dads through out-of-school advice and learning sessions, that's when the most progress can be made.

Working with an existing PTA or parent group within your school to encourage and support those parents who rarely get involved is a good place to start. By inviting feedback and taking on board the challenges they may be facing, schools can tailor the support they provide to the specific needs of the community. Our own research has found that parents welcome this kind of support from schools, and are eager to work with them on tackling an array of issues, ranging from mental health difficulties to social media challenges, cyber bullying and beyond.

In association with Parent Councils UK, we are currently delivering a series of training courses for SBLs and leaders on how to develop a whole school approach to parental engagement, break down barriers and set up a Parents Council. Further details can be found at [parentkind.org.uk/forschools/training](http://parentkind.org.uk/forschools/training)

*Michelle Doyle Wildman is acting CEO of Parentkind*

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 [@Parentkind](https://www.facebook.com/Parentkind)



## We hear about why and how an independent garden centre in Essex went about donating a large volume of houseplants to a number of nearby primary schools

**L**ocated in Tiptree, Perrywood is a family-owned garden centre and nursery that has built an impressive local reputation and won awards since its owners, Alan and Karin Bourne, took over the business in the mid 1980s.

Accompanying that success has been a desire to contribute something in return to the local community. According to Debbie Wrigley, Perrywood's communications manager, "We do lots in the local community and for schools. We've had local schools come in for visits and organised activities, and we run a 'Garden Explorers' gardening club for children in the holidays."

Since last year, the business has also been giving away plants and equipment to nearby primary schools. "It was our retail director's idea," Wrigley recalls. "He has young children in primary school himself. All of us here are obviously very passionate about plants, and he was of the view that we need to get more houseplants in classrooms; that we should try to 'green up' their interiors by bringing the outdoors inside, as it were."

Wrigley thus went about making initial contact via email with schools in Tiptree and several surrounding villages, outlining Perrywood's plan to pay a visit, meet the children, share some knowledge about indoor gardening and let the schools choose two houseplants to keep for free.

Time slots were subsequently allocated to the various schools over a two-week period and a series of houseplants were

carefully selected. As Wrigley notes, "We source plants that are easy to care for, obviously not poisonous and have interesting or unusual names, like snake plants, money plants and spider plants."

The deliveries then hit the road in one of Perrywood's vans, its rear laden with enough plants to resemble an indoor jungle. Upon arrival, the team are typically met by pupil representatives, who are given a brief explanation about the plants they've chosen before being issued with care leaflets and pot covers. By Wrigley's estimates, 94 classes and their school offices received free plants last year; this year, the focus has shifted to nine schools on the outskirts of nearby Colchester.

Wrigley has since found herself fielding requests from other schools in the area wanting to get involved. "Where we can, we'll add them to a recommended list for us to consider next year – but we've got to be realistic in what we can do and the areas we can target."

For now, though, the feedback has certainly been positive. As one testimonial by Kate Moore, headteacher at Birch CoE primary school puts it, "The plants have been a wonderful gift and having fresh green plants in our school has been uplifting. The children have taken ownership of their class plants and we are very grateful for them."

 [@PerrywoodGarden](https://twitter.com/PerrywoodGarden)

 [perrywood.co.uk](https://perrywood.co.uk)

# A year in the life of year 3

If you're a primary school in the London area, here's your chance to get involved in an ambitious art project due to be exhibited at Tate Britain...

Steve McQueen is an artist and filmmaker, most well-known for his films *Hunger* and the Oscar-winning *12 Years a Slave*. This month sees the launch of his Tate Year 3 Project – a hugely ambitious work that will see him collaborate with Tate Britain, art collective Artangel and the not-for-profit outreach organisation A New Direction in an effort to create and exhibit a photographic portrait of London's year 3 schoolchildren – as many of them as possible.

McQueen's aim with the project is to capture a year in the life of London's approximately 115,000 seven- and eight-year-olds via a multitude of traditionally styled class photographs depicting them sitting or standing beside their teachers and TAs. "The idea came from thinking about my past and my present and how I got here," he explains.

"I wanted to have an idea of the map of London, the future. London is very much in my heart. It's very much a part of me and what shaped me as a person. Year 3 is an

important time in a child's life, because it's at that point that you're getting to understand your surroundings. It's one of those moments where there's a turning point and you're getting to understand, possibly, gender, race and class."

Between October this year and July 2019, Tate photographers will be visiting schools across London to take class photographs for the project. Every single one of the city's 2,410 primary schools is being invited to take part in the project by signing up and booking a photography session at [tateyear3project.org.uk](http://tateyear3project.org.uk), where they will also be able to access supporting learning resources, consent templates for pupils and staff and agreement forms for headteachers. A child protection policy covering all work relating to the Tate Year 3 Project will be made available on request.

The accompanying KS2 learning resources, devised by A New Direction and Tate Learning, will help schools further explore the project's main themes of belonging, identity and citizenship via a set of materials linked to PSHE, citizenship, literacy and art

and design. Also on the cards is a livestreamed lesson scheduled for spring 2019, which aims to let primary school classes across the country watch and engage with the project, and staff at participating schools will have the option of signing up for free teacher CPD and other online opportunities for supporting creativity and curriculum learning.

From November 2019 until May 2020, Tate Britain's Duveen Galleries will play host to a vast exhibition of the assembled photographs that will be free to public. Artangel, which has gained a reputation for 'producing extraordinary art in unexpected places' will be putting on a separate series of outdoor exhibitions in each of London's 33 boroughs, where passers-by will be able to get a glimpse of the project for themselves. The climax of the project will then overlap with a major survey exhibition at Tate Britain of McQueen's work that runs from February until May 2000.

 #year3project

 [contact@tateyear3project.org.uk](mailto:contact@tateyear3project.org.uk)



Year 3 class at Mayflower Primary School, Tower Hamlets 2018. Photo © Tate



# HOW TO RESPOND TO PARENT PROTESTS

One of your decisions has prompted some parents to set up a Facebook group and organise a protest outside the school gates. What should be your next move?

**F**or many heads we've worked with, a parent protest is their worst nightmare – something seemingly out of their control, with the potential to seriously damage their own and their school's reputation.

However, there are steps school leaders can take to reduce the likelihood of such events happening in the first instance, and things they can do to minimise the impact of any that do occur. Here, we'll go through the options available to you for protecting your school from the start, defusing situations as they arise and getting your story across when issues escalate.

## PROTECT YOUR SCHOOL

When setting up a communication channel with the wider community, the school must retain control and safeguard everyone involved, while making it easy to share facts.

With social media and online messaging dominating the way parents communicate, schools must own their social media platforms and have clear policies in place for those staff and parents who use them – the days of allowing a PTA group to manage your Facebook presence are long gone! Switching on the moderation function of a school Facebook page will enable negative messages to be intercepted, though they will, of course, still need to be acknowledged and addressed.

You also need to monitor wider social media, using applications such as Hootsuite ([hootsuite.com](https://hootsuite.com)) or Social Mention ([socialmention.com](https://socialmention.com)). This will also help you find positive mentions of your school and could have other

benefits. We know of one school PA who saw some comments one evening about a possible fire in her school building and immediately passed them on to the head, thus alerting others to the situation early and limiting the subsequent damage.

Every school has its own 'dark social network' – WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger groups used by parents of children in the same class or year group and set to private viewing by members only. Parents must be told to use these responsibly – they might use advanced privacy settings, but that won't reduce the risk of offence being caused or prevent pictures from being widely shared. Parents should be reminded regularly to contact the school for facts,

rather than spreading rumours and gossip – and to contact the school themselves if they feel a particular online exchange or message thread has gone too far and started to damage the school's reputation.

Yet while social media and messaging might have become parents' chief means of communicating, you also need to keep talking to them. Organising regular parent forums or a weekly 'open door' morning will provide opportunities for concerns to be shared face to face.



## DEFUSE THE SITUATION

Taking the steps above should help you become aware of potential crises at an earlier stage. Having been made aware, here's what to do next:

1. Arrange a meeting and open it up to all those who have concerns. You should always have another member of staff or a governor present, with one of you taking notes.
2. Once you've heard the problem, begin your response by clearly setting out the facts and the purpose of any change or decision you've made, as there can often be a lot of miscommunication. In one recent example, parents heard that a school's new food supplier would not be supplying truly halal meat, but were reassured once they had a chance to question the school further.
3. While you won't want to change or roll back a policy (and in 95% of cases you'd be in the right), you should always listen to any concerns regarding its implementation. Every year, schools introduce new uniforms or hairstyle policies at short notice that can carry harsh penalties; allowing parents and students more time to adjust will often solve the issue.
4. Communicate what happened at the meeting and what was agreed back to your community, and again let them respond. That might seem to take up a lot of time, but it's nothing compared to what a full-blown crisis will involve.
5. Try to involve parents in solving the problem. In one school, a parent who had been upset by a lack of awareness raising around LGBT parenting was delighted when they were asked to research and select suitable books on the subject for the school library.
6. Consider making exceptions for individuals. An example of this might be allowing a child to carry a mobile phone so they can contact a surviving parent after a bereavement.

## TELL YOUR STORY

Seek help from within, and potentially outside your organisation. Tell your chair of governors, LA or trust about your problem and what you propose to do. Consult your crisis or reputation management policy, and consider bringing in additional support to help you monitor your social media or manage your media relations.

Create a short, clear statement that sets out the issues and actions you've taken. The statement should be easy to share by email, on your website and via your social media channels, so make sure you have access to these at all times, all year round.

If you have a good relationship with the local press, talk to them first. This can work well, for example, with issues revealed in a poor Ofsted report. There will still be a negative story, but at least the context for the issue can be communicated. You can also arrange to give a statement on camera – this will



often be the best way of dealing with serious legal issues, such as convictions for abuse.

Negative stories on social media will inevitably reach the local papers. Share your statement widely with parents, staff and governors, and ask them to pass on any media enquiries to the school. This will reduce the pressure on them if they are 'doorstepped', and hopefully avoid them having to say 'no comment'!

Finally, it's rare for parents to progress to the stage of threatening members of staff, but it does happen. In such situations, you need to focus on safeguarding your team and your pupils – report any incidents to the police and LA and ask for their support.



“Every school has its own ‘dark social network’ – WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger groups used by parents and set to private viewing”



**Simon Hepburn**  
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[localvoicemedia.co.uk](http://localvoicemedia.co.uk)

# How should schools market themselves?

The process of actively putting yourself out there and promoting what your school does isn't necessarily an easy one. We hear from several experts about the best way to proceed...



**SALLY ALEXANDER**

**Client Services Director,  
Ambleglow**

Marketing is still a relatively new concept in education, but an increasing number of schools in both the state maintained and private sectors are now embracing the need to market themselves to prospective pupils and parents. Where funding is mainly governed by how many

pupils you have, schools need to be actively promoting themselves to the local community.

Like any business with competition, it's important that schools look at themselves critically. Why would someone choose this school? What makes you different, and are you telling your story? Any external communications should always be able to answer these questions.

Marketing doesn't have to cost the earth. Agree what your overarching message is and ensure that this is woven through all of your marketing efforts. Use social media to highlight achievements and promote key events. Parents can also be great school advocates and will have a multitude of skills, from design to photography and video production – so use them!

Finally, try and set realistic goals to start with and make sure you can measure the results of your efforts.

 [@ambleglow](https://twitter.com/ambleglow)  
 [ambleglow.co.uk](http://ambleglow.co.uk)



**JUSTIN SMITH**

**Founder, Chameleon  
Training and Consultancy**

With the significant challenges facing our schools, it's more critical than ever to ensure your own school is best placed to attract new talent and investment. Here are my top tips for ensuring your marketing hits the spot.

Firstly, try to define your values and key messages – what makes your school an attractive proposition? Marketing begins at home, so focus on defining your brand and bring to life those things that make your school what it is.

Once you've articulated those messages, you'll then need a plan. This needn't be complicated, but a coherent approach will help you focus on what you're looking to achieve and ensure that resources are allocated effectively.

Introduce digital media, and remember that short video clips are far more engaging than pages of text. Short clips of pupils introducing the school are particularly effective. Social media is a good way of saving costs on promotion, as most of your audience will be inclined to follow you on Facebook and/or Twitter. Finally, produce some case studies to help bring those pupil and staff success stories to life.

 [@jus\\_chameleon](https://twitter.com/jus_chameleon)  
 [chameleon-training.co.uk](http://chameleon-training.co.uk)

## GROW PUPIL NUMBERS WITH VIDEOS

**Videographer Rebekah Nangle offers some tips on how to engage would-be parents and pupils through the medium of video**

### 1. What's your goal?

The point of video marketing is to tell a story in order to achieve a goal. You will need to be clear about what it is you want to achieve. Tell a story, don't make it a sales pitch.

### 2. Creating messages through visuals is tricky

Using certain angles and lighting can help to portray the school's ethos through visuals. This will give the opportunity to convey the ethos and atmosphere that words can't communicate. Staff and pupils voiceovers are a bonus.

### 3. Keep it short

With videos up to two minutes long receiving the most engagement, it's important that the length of the promotional video is kept concise.

### 4. Don't be boring!

Keep it light and be creative. Don't worry about what your competitors are doing – being a little different can give you the edge.

### 5. Your messages get through

Uncertain about why you should use video marketing? Viewers retain 95% of a message when they watch it in a video compared to only 10% of written content.

### 6. Make it mobile-friendly

Not sure you will reach your market? Smartphones have become the hub of our daily lives and are now in the pockets of two thirds (66%) of UK adults.



### 7. Transparency is good

Take viewers behind the scenes and show them your school. Don't just sit in front of a camera and tell them about it – let them see it in action.

### 8. You get what you pay for

A school video will reflect on your school as a whole and the personality inside. A video will be a representation of your school's image and reputation.

### 9. Highlight what you do

Video allows you to give viewers a real insight into your school and the kind of

teaching environment parents should expect when visiting. Bring forward your strengths – your school is unique, so show it off.

### 10. Think ahead

Video has a longer lifespan than traditional literature, meaning you can use it to advertise upcoming open days or other events.

**If you would like to speak to Rebekah to see how video can benefit your school, contact 07852 299 294 or visit [fireseedfilms.com](http://fireseedfilms.com)**

£10,000

APPROXIMATE SIZE OF THE AVERAGE SCHOOL MARKETING BUDGET IN STATE SCHOOLS (COMPARED TO £40,000 IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS)

13%

OF SCHOOLS HAVE TRIED TO PROMOTE THEMSELVES VIA RADIO ADVERTISING

Source: 2016 school marketing survey carried out by Marketing Advice for Schools – see [tinyurl.com/school-market-16](http://tinyurl.com/school-market-16) for more details



The means by which organisations of all kinds can promote themselves

underwent a major shake up earlier this year with the UK's adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation. The DfE document 'Data protection: toolkit for schools', which aims to guide schools through the GDPR compliancy process, was recently updated to include further details on data safeguarding, consent and retention and can be found at [tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-gdpr](http://tinyurl.com/psm-dfe-gdpr)

[primaryleaders.com](http://primaryleaders.com)

### READ MORE ONLINE:

*Social media – a user's guide for headteachers*  
[primaryleaders.com/social-heads](http://primaryleaders.com/social-heads)

*Create an inspiring prospectus*  
[primaryleaders.com/prospectuses](http://primaryleaders.com/prospectuses)

*Engage teaching staff in your marketing*  
[primaryleaders.com/staff-marketing](http://primaryleaders.com/staff-marketing)

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# Resources UPDATE

Harness the power of activity and improve attainment by up to 12% with imoves

# imoves



**Evidence shows that just 30 minutes of daily structured activity improves academic performance by up to 12%\*. That's the same as having an extra year with your pupils before SATs!**

Not only that, regular activity has been shown to improve behaviour by up to 67%, while helping to shape happier, healthier children overall.

The benefits of structured activity for whole school improvement is clear to see; the question is how can a school implement structured active learning without adding to teachers' already heavy workloads?

The curriculum-based active lessons provider, imoves, tackles this challenge head-on with the first evidence-based approach to achieving a more active school. By slotting easily and seamlessly into teachers' existing schedules, getting your school moving needn't entail a big upheaval in your daily routine.

Designed by teachers, for teachers, imoves includes over 1,000 cross-curricular lessons and activities to support active learning in every lesson, inside the classroom. To minimise planning time while maximising learning outcomes and fun, imoves also includes national curriculum-based lesson plans, demonstration movies, music and flashcards.

## GETTING STARTED

imoves offers a complete package of digital support that has been tried and tested in hundreds of schools for over 5 years.

Get started with daily 'active blasts' and 'quick blasts' – short 2- or 10-minute activity sessions which can be used at any point during the day, whether it be to get energy levels up in the morning, or beat the post-lunchtime slump with some invigorating activity.

In a win-win for active schools – pupils get to enjoy the daily variety of activities, while teachers can trust that the resources are always easily accessible and ready to go with minimal (or indeed any) preparation. Often, the only equipment required will be the

classroom's interactive whiteboard.

Illustrating just how much imoves can become embedded in everyday school life, Laura Mossman, PE lead at Mosborough Primary School near Sheffield, comments: "My children wouldn't even go on a school trip without doing their daily challenge first!"

## GETTING CLASSROOMS ACTIVE

imoves 'Active Classrooms' resources are specifically designed for use in the classroom or school hall and offer activities relevant to a wide range of subjects, including maths, literacy, science, geography, MFL, history and PSHE.

Every activity is designed with key lesson outcomes in mind and can be combined to create whole lessons that ensure children are always able to learn actively – something that may be particularly useful for your kinaesthetic learners.

Whether it's teaching phonics to Early Years children, the history of the Tudors to year 6s, or the science of evolution, with hundreds of lessons to choose from teachers will always find something that fits their needs.

Away from academia and reflecting the importance of mental health in schools today, imoves also includes an innovative mindfulness module designed to support

children's abilities to manage stress and anxiety using a variety of relaxation techniques and activities.

## GETTING PE ACTIVE

The foundation for seeing the whole school benefits of activity lie in an activity-based PE curriculum. imoves challenges traditional approaches to PE by incorporating a more inclusive style of physical activity into daily school life.

imoves skills-based curriculum supports pupils' physical activity, while also developing their physical literacy, with the aid of a full PE curriculum that contains over 600 lessons covering dance, gymnastics, and Pilates, to name but a few. Teachers receive full support for the delivery and assessment of lessons, with opportunities for upskilling along the way.

Described as "the best use of my PE and Sport Premium funding ever" by one PE lead at a Surrey primary school, imoves provides children with the resources to build the key skills they will be required to master through primary school, starting with the fundamentals required at Early Years and KS1, before progressing to invasion games, net and wall, athletic activities, striking and fielding, and OAA at KS2.

As part of its mission to get every classroom active every day by 2022, imoves recently launched the Active Schools Challenge, a free 30-day cross-curricular challenge designed to show schools how easy it really is to get children moving, boost academic performance and improve behaviour and wellbeing.

**Join the Active Schools Challenge for free, visit [imoves.com](https://imoves.com)**

\*Alvarez-Bueno et al. (2017), The Effect of Physical Activity Interventions on Children's Cognition and Metacognition: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis



# Get ahead this year with the Primary School Improvement Toolkit

## FREE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Primary School Improvement Toolkit is a free resource designed to support primary school leaders. It features helpful checklists to support you with your own professional development as well as lesson plans & resources you can share with all your staff.

Plus, enter discount code **PSM18\*** upon checkout to **get 20% off all School Leadership, Management & Administration resources.** Find out more here [www.routledge.com/posts/14430](http://www.routledge.com/posts/14430)

\*This discount code cannot be combined with any other discount code or offer and can only be used against print copies purchased directly from [www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com). Valid until 31st December, 2018.



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## Pupils' emotional and mental health needs - new responsibilities, new solutions

**A window of opportunity is opening.** The government plans to spend an additional £1.4 billion on transforming children's mental health.

**Responsibilities.** Supporting pupils with emotional, behaviour and mental health issues by providing therapy, as well as including education on mental health in the curriculum.

The White Paper being drafted is likely to require that primary schools employ only counsellors or therapists registered with the HCPC or a register accredited by the Professional Standards Authority.



**Managing risks:** Using Play Therapy UK (PTUK) registrants removes the school's responsibility for any complaints arising through the registrant's work. The PTUK Evidence Base of over 49,000 outcome measures assures the effectiveness of the therapy.

### Solutions.

**School friendly:** ideally select a member of your staff to be trained as a registered Play Therapist to Play Therapy UK's standards.

**Effectiveness:** the Integrative Holistic model used by PTUK registrants, produces a 71% to 84% positive change for a wide variety of presenting conditions.

**Cost effective:** only an average of 15.6 sessions were required to produce these outcomes.

**Parent involvement;** parents are an important agent of change. Our registrants meet and discuss their needs whenever possible.



**Keeping costs low:** there are two ways of being cost effective: Training your own staff is an investment that will be quickly returned.

Using the APAC/Leeds Beckett University placement scheme enables schools to test how well play therapy works in their school for up to two years at a very low cost. Some placements still available for this year.



More information and applications:  
Dee Rose, APAC  
Tel: 01825 761143

email: [mokijep@majemail.com](mailto:mokijep@majemail.com)  
[www.playtherapy.org.uk](http://www.playtherapy.org.uk)  
[www.playtherapyregister.org.uk](http://www.playtherapyregister.org.uk)



## “IT’S TIME FOR **MINDSETS** TO CHANGE”

If leaders are serious about tackling teacher recruitment and retention numbers, they need to start thinking differently about flexible working, says Farihah Anwar-Simmons

“**S**he was told she can come back full time or not at all.”

“They came back part time, but had to give up their TLR.”

‘We can’t have a part time year leader.’

These are some of the comments I’ve recently heard about flexible working requests after maternity leave. Only 60% of teachers remain in state-funded schools five years after starting. A recent report by the Education Policy Institute (see [tinyurl.com/psm-epi818](http://tinyurl.com/psm-epi818)) found that exit rates have risen from 8% to 9% in primary schools, and applications to teacher training have continued to fall. With 6,000 women aged 30-39 leaving the profession each year – 27% of all leavers, as cited by Policy Exchange (see [tinyurl.com/psm-pe16](http://tinyurl.com/psm-pe16)) – it’s clear that issues around maternity leave and flexible working must be tackled if schools are to recruit and retain talented teachers.

As leaders, what can we therefore do to support teachers, while ensuring the successful and smooth running of our schools?

### LAY THE FOUNDATIONS

Provide support in the run-up to maternity leave commencing. Assigning a mentor or key point of contact will enable communication channels to remain open and allay any concerns.

### SIGNPOST SUPPORT

There’s a wealth of support available for teachers seeking professional development during their leave. Signposting groups such as the MTPT Project ([mtpt.org.uk](http://mtpt.org.uk)), #WomenEd ([womened.org](http://womened.org)) and Flexible Teacher Talent ([flexibleteachertalent.co.uk](http://flexibleteachertalent.co.uk)) will enable teachers to access accredited development opportunities, networking, coaching and even reading recommendations.

Connecting with the EduTwitter community has helped me keep up with the latest developments, so that as well as gaining intrinsic fulfilment from nurturing my baby, I’ve been able to return to school having developed new skills whilst on leave.

## PLAN FOR THE RETURN

By formalising what can often be ad-hoc 'staying in the loop' chats with friends from school, the prospect of leaping back into school life can be made less daunting. Hold a constructive return to work meeting, plan KIT days in advance with clear, agreed activities or outcomes, and arrange for experienced staff to meet with returning teachers and run through any key changes with them.

## BE FLEXIBLE

Finding and promoting family-friendly ways of working will boost loyalty and retention. Advertise posts with the potential for flexible working or part time hours where appropriate, and recognise job sharing, shadowing and 'acting' opportunities as a valuable part of CPD and succession planning. Exploring technological solutions, such as video/conference calling and sharing minutes electronically, and giving part time staff access to development opportunities will help them to feel like valued members of the team whose efforts are appreciated.

## KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Flexible working – be it a part time role, job share, compressed hours, home PPA or allowing parents time away to watch their children perform in an assembly – brings clear benefits. Granted, it isn't always easy to organise or manage, and there will be issues to iron out, but given the significant recruitment and retention challenges schools face, trying different approaches to retaining talented, loyal and motivated teachers warrants serious consideration.

I was recently inspired by a meeting with a headteacher who has two young children and works part time. If her school could make flexible working a successful reality, perhaps it's time for mindsets to change. Instead of asking why, let's ask *why not?*

*Fariyah Anwar-Simmons is a deputy headteacher*

 @FariyahAnwar



The rules set out under the Disqualification from Childcare Act 2006 have been changed. Here's how...

Introduced in 2006, 'disqualification by association' meant that any individual applying to work with young children, who lived with a person convicted of certain crimes, had to apply to Ofsted for a waiver. However, with many considering these rules to be confusing and unfair, the government launched a consultation on the issue that eventually resulted in an update to the guidance that came into force on 31st August this year.

The new guidance removes the requirement for nurseries and schools to ascertain conviction and other relevant information about people living with their staff. Until now, any such convictions would have led to staff being disqualified from childcare 'by association' – an outcome that never made any sense for those working in education settings.

It's a change that should ultimately make life easier for schools, though they will need to follow these five steps:

### 1. UPDATE STAFF BRIEFING SCRIPTS

Some schools still ask staff to complete forms to confirm that they aren't disqualified. With the guidance no longer requiring this, continuing the practice can cause an unnecessary administrative burden and lead to schools obtaining information about staff to which they're not entitled. Instead of a form, use a staff briefing script that sets out what staff need to tell you, and that it's their responsibility to keep you updated if their circumstances change.

### 2. REVISE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS

If you don't already, make sure you include a clause in your staff contracts

requiring staff to update you if their circumstances change. Update any existing clauses that reference 'disqualification by association'.

### 3. AMEND AGENCY STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

Up to now, you should have been asking agencies and third-party organisations that supply staff for confirmation that disqualification checks have been made. Review your wording and remove any 'disqualification by association' references.


### 4. UPDATE YOUR POLICIES

Child protection policies (and possibly others) will refer to disqualification from childcare, so it's important to redraft the relevant sections to bring them in line with the new guidance.

### 5. REVIEW YOUR CURRENT DISQUALIFICATIONS

If you have staff awaiting a waiver, their disqualification will have ceased on 31st August, meaning they can return to a childcare role without requiring one. It should also be noted that 'disqualification' doesn't have to lead to suspension – the guidance specifically allows for staff to be moved into other roles in the school, if suitable.

**Dai Durbridge is a partner at the national law firm Browne Jacobson, providing schools with legal advice and training on pastoral education issues**

 @brownejacobson  
 brownejacobson.com

# Are your back office staff over-stressed?

It's not just teachers who have to battle accountability pressures – back office staff need ways of coping too, writes Philip Burton

**I**t was my first day in the job as an SBM, and the other senior leaders were listing the areas of the school I'd be accountable for. Finance, human resources, recruitment, marketing, premises, extended services, lunchtime arrangements, service level agreements, health and safety – basically everything, aside from teaching the children. I took a deep breath and wondered how I was going to manage and cope with it all...

Whilst most will agree that there need to be some targets and monitoring in place if standards are to be raised, it's possible for teams to be put under massive amounts of pressure to demonstrate that they're delivering on key objectives. When a school is being affected by financial issues, it's often back office staff who'll be the first to see reductions in staffing and an increase in their workload. Many will quietly continue to work through it all, without talking about the growing pressures and tiredness they're having to contend with. It's only when small mistakes get made that the truth will start to emerge – flawed processing of finance journals by staff who've never had problems before, incorrect dates on letters, daily tasks getting forgotten.

So how should we deal with such pressures? As an SBM, you need to understand what your governors or MAT leaders expect from you. If you know what their expectations are, you can work on delivering them. There should be a negotiation aimed at striking a balance between what they want and what you can achieve within realistic timelines. My tip is to display an A3 wall planner in your office with your dates and tasks clearly marked for all to see.

Another way of managing pressure is to plan ahead and focus on dealing with one area at a time. It's easier said than done, but try to set aside different days for focusing on various key areas. You might give yourself a 'Facilities Friday', a 'Marketing Monday', a 'Where's all the money gone?' Wednesday... By focusing

on a series of distinct areas, you'll soon find yourself ticking off major items on your to-do list and becoming more productive as a result.

Share the responsibility you have. Develop and invest in the skills of your team so that they can shoulder some of the workload – delegating lower level tasks will allow you to focus on those tasks that make the biggest difference. Sit down and discuss with your team what type of duties they'd most like to do. After all, everyone will want to develop within their role and contribute towards making a change within the setting.

Be sure to talk regularly with your network of friends and fellow leaders, since a problem shared is often a problem solved. Sadly, doing this can often be seen in wider society these days as a sign of weakness, especially for men, but it's one of the best ways there is of de-stressing. Arrange a meeting, or go for an informal coffee and discuss with someone what you're feeling.

Finally, take some downtime. There might be a lot of pressure on you, but your own welfare is important. Take up a hobby – anything that will enable you to forget about the job for a while. In my own setting, our admin team collectively took up running and now regularly head out together for a stress-busting 5km. In six months we've covered 1000 miles – that's some stress-busting right there...


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

 @runningSBM



# “OUR TEACHERS ARE HAPPIER”

Kelly Hannaghan recalls how radically reinventing its wellness provision helped one school turn round a staff culture beset by low morale



**K**ate O'Connor, headteacher at Lessness Heath Primary School in Kent, invited me to join the team two years ago, at a time when the school was in special measures. There were concerns around the parents' level of trust in the school, and their loss of faith in its ability to provide learning. There was a culture of blame.

I'd previously worked at the school years before as a therapeutic play specialist, before leaving to become a school safeguarding officer in a different London borough and later setting up my own therapeutic support business. Some time after that, I returned to Lessness Heath as a service provider, not long after it had been taken on by the Primary First Trust. Working alongside a newly appointed headteacher – formerly the school's deputy head – we resolved to take the school forward into a better place.

## OPENING DOORS

My main role initially was to visit specific classrooms and give talks to certain members staff around wellbeing and mental health, in an effort to build their self-esteem and confidence. It soon became apparent, however, that there was a need for this throughout the whole school, with the result that I was eventually taken on as a permanent employee.

To address the broader wellbeing needs of our staff, the first thing we did was send out a confidential survey asking how they were managing their roles, what difficulties and challenges they faced and what would improve their experiences within the school. Those findings were then used to help develop an assessment tool for gauging when our staff might require a wellbeing intervention.

From there, we devised a staff wellbeing policy built around annual measuring and monitoring strategies for the staff themselves, and ensured that everyone had a means of voicing their particular needs. We also introduced a 'staff wellbeing menu'; each month, staff are assigned a particular wellbeing

activity that encourages everyone working within the school to come together as a group.

The staff are consulted on what these will be ahead of time, and have previously included Yoga and mindfulness, creative art sessions and social gatherings. Over the past year, we've found that setting aside time for these activities has led to phenomenal improvements in the staff's teamwork skills and the forging of valuable connections between colleagues.

Beyond that, staff are able to consult a wellbeing noticeboard that displays the details of an externally provided confidential counselling service they can use, and which is updated each month with additional support information and space for staff to voice any concerns. Wellbeing supervision is offered to any staff who request it, and the school's SLT operates an 'open door' policy. As the process has gone on, we've sought to thread concepts of wellbeing through all of the school's appraisal systems.

Teachers will now tell us when they're struggling and what they need to succeed. In late July this year, I put three questions to the school's teachers, asking them to rate their wellbeing right now, the quality of wellbeing provision within the school, and what they'd need for their wellbeing to improve. We saw overall scores of 9/10, marking a considerable year-on-year improvement at the end of what had been a very long and hot summer term. We can see that that the approaches and strategies we're pursuing are having positive outcomes.

## **SHEDDING THE MASKS**

Another big concern for us is recruitment and retention, which we've looked to address by establishing links with other schools that have implemented excellent practice of their own. One difficulty we've had is that we're located just outside of London, and have seen teachers receive far higher salaries by moving to a different school just two miles away. That said, we're generally keeping hold of our teachers at the moment, which I think is due in part to them being happier, and because their wellbeing and self-care have been well looked after here.

Back when we started the process, many staff at the school were functioning from a place of fear. They were just about coping – putting on a mask, coming in and tackling the demands of the job each day as best as they could. As our work progressed, people began examining their emotions more closely, dropping those masks and struggling less. In process, however, we encountered – and still do – people preferring to avoid discussions about their wellbeing. That's because for some people, not looking at themselves in that way is, in itself, a means of protecting what sense of wellbeing they have.

On the whole, however, it's had a really positive impact. We've had teachers who were at one time thinking of leaving the profession, but who decided to stay on after going through our wellbeing process. Our teachers have developed

their capacity to understand their own emotions and those of the children they work with. More are now approaching their jobs from a place of empathy and are

better able to respond to appropriately to their own needs, rather than simply remaining anxious and unable to tackle them. They're now able to have powerful conversations, because they've been taught what language should be used.

## **HONEST LANGUAGE**

The way we all now talk in school very different compared to what it was. If a child's struggling, we'll ask the parents – 'I can see you're upset – what do you need to feel better?' Previously, these types of conversations wouldn't take place. I made a conscious effort to model that type of language when I rejoined the school, and have since seen it catch on. We now have parents who'll refer their children, and even children who'll self-refer themselves. Across our school community, people have become much more open and honest when it comes to their mental health and wellbeing needs.

Our last Ofsted inspection took place in December 2017, during which the inspectors took a keen interest in the wellbeing work we were doing. They made a point of really digging deep – looking at our wellbeing menu activities in detail, and speaking extensively to pupils and staff. This year's SATs results have subsequently been the best we've ever

*"This year's SATs results have been the best we've ever had."*

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had. Our attendance has also improved among both pupils and staff, marking a significant turnaround from the long-term staff absences we used to see, some of which stemmed from emotional health issues. In the end, the school was rated overall as Good, while our personal welfare provision was rated as Outstanding. I was further delighted to lead on a project for the Wellbeing Award for Schools accreditation – we were successful in being the first school to achieve this, which generated considerable interest in our wellbeing story and resulted in a visit from the BBC.

There's been a huge interest from other schools in what we're doing. In response, we've started organising monthly wellbeing seminars for schools locally, and hosted visits for representatives from schools as far afield as Yorkshire. We've also set up a wellbeing consultancy that operates out of Lessness Heath itself with the aim of helping to sustain the wellbeing strategy we've two years working on, while at the same time raising some much-needed funds for the school.

With my own role responsible for a chunk of the school's budget, there's a requirement for me to earn money for the school and safeguard what we're doing. It helps that I'm quite business-minded – we've organised talks at various events in partnership with Optimus Education and the Attachment Research Centre. Both Kate and myself are passionate about sharing our successful whole school wellbeing approaches with others, and give talks at conferences in return for membership of professional organisations and resources that will benefit the school. The upshot of all this is that our wellbeing work is not just successful, but also self-sustaining.

**Kelly Hannaghan is wellbeing leader at Lessness Heath Primary School; for more details regarding the school's termly Wellbeing Seminars and bespoke consultancy packages, contact [admin@lessnessheath.bexley.sch.uk](mailto:admin@lessnessheath.bexley.sch.uk)**

# HOW TO LEAD A REDUNDANCY PROCESS

Shedding staff to safeguard a school's financial future is never easy – but if it's your only option, here's how to ensure the process is both orderly and fair



**W**hilst headteachers and the governing board make the final decisions when it comes to redundancies, the preparation of budgets, business cases and presentation of information to staff often falls to SBLs. For those with relatively little experience of overseeing redundancies, or who are going through the process for the first time, what follows here are some of my own experiences, along with some advice on how best to proceed.

Firstly, don't be afraid of the process itself, or of the consultation with unions – though it's best to go in well prepared, well informed and with a detailed business case to support the school's redundancies request. Engaging early, and endeavouring to maintain a good, clear dialogue and positive working relationship with union representatives could help to avoid a costly unfair dismissal claim later on.

## MAKE THE CASE

My own approach to managing staff redundancies begins with producing an effective and detailed business case. This will likely be the most time consuming stage of the process, but the end result has to be appropriately informative.

Include some background information about the school, and structure it by asking yourself a series of questions. These might include:

- Has the school grown, or do you have a history of a falling roll?
- What will happen to pupil numbers in the next few years?
- How does your spend compare against other similar schools, according to financial benchmarking data?
- What does your current staffing structure look like?
- Have pay increases been factored into your budget plan?

In my own school, a falling pupil roll combined with the new national funding formula made for a very challenging financial year. I've purposely not used the term 'fair' here, since our current funding arrangements are far from it. Information supplied by our local MP suggests that were the school situated in Hackney, our budget would have received an additional £430,000!

The business case should detail your proposals and why you're suggesting them. Post-redundancies, what will your new staffing structure look like? Which staff posts have you opted to protect and why? Include a comparison chart that shows your current structure, versus what it will look like after the process.

## THE REDUNDANCY PROCESS

Preparation of business case

Membership of staffing and appeals panels agreed by governors

Union consultation takes place

Staff consultation takes place

Deadline for written voluntary redundancy requests

Deadline for submission of evidence to selection panel

## KEEP STAFF INFORMED

Your business case should also clearly summarise the number of staff you employ currently, and how this will be shaped in future. Useful headings here might include ‘current staffing structure’, ‘proposed staffing structure’, ‘proposed redundancies’ and ‘staff not at risk’.

Outline what information you’ll be providing staff with to support them through the process. This should include the school’s redundancy policy and a redundancy pay calculator (note that for support staff aged 55 or older, this may include a ‘strain payment’ if they belong to a pension scheme).

Information relating to your redundancy selection criteria may already be laid out in your school’s redundancy policy. If not, then you’ll be required to consult with unions to confirm how staff will be selected. If you’ll be using a points-based scheme, how will tie-breaks be decided? If you’re inviting applications for voluntary redundancies, this is the point at which you should make that known, and explain the criteria for selection in the event that you’re oversubscribed.

You may be required to present different selection criteria for teachers and support staff, and will need to clearly explain which redundancy pay calculator will apply to them. It may work out at x2 for teachers and x1.5 for support staff, for example. State also whether staff will be required to engage in a redeployment scheme.

The final additions should include a timeline that clearly sets out each step of the process you intend to follow (see below for an example) and two versions of your 5-year budget plan – one as it currently stands if no redundancies are made, and another showing what effect the redundancies will have on your figures.

## ANSWER QUESTIONS

For many, the most daunting task of the process will be providing information to, and consulting with the school’s staff and unions. These are unlikely to be particularly comfortable or easy meetings – the unions’ role in this process will obviously be to scrutinise and challenge the school on behalf of their members – but if you’ve already provided the union representatives with a clearly written business case well in advance and briefed both the headteacher and chair of governors, you’ll survive.

During one such process, I was once required to personally present the relevant information to the school staff, which meant standing in front of 20 teachers, 40 support staff and gathered union representatives and informing them why the school needed to make redundancies and how we planned to do it. After a brief introduction by the headteacher, it was my cue to start.

Beforehand, I’d produced and rehearsed a 15-slide PowerPoint presentation which set out some background information concerning the most challenging aspects of our budget – notably the incoming National Funding Formula, teacher pay awards, increased minimum wage, recent pension changes and newly introduced apprenticeship levy. I also included a series of proposals and details outlining what the next steps for staff would involve. At the conclusion of this initial consultation meeting, all staff were then issued with an information pack containing plenty of details about the process.

In the days following the meeting, staff would approach me regularly and ask lots of questions. A useful tip here is to develop a Q&A sheet that’s regularly updated and distributed to all staff every couple of days, which can help to cut down the repetitive questioning and

ensure that everyone receives the same level of information. It’s also a good demonstration to the unions that the school has remained open and offered support to staff throughout the process.

This will inevitably be a tough process for staff, some of whom will blame you personally. However, staff will often feel better if they’re kept well informed and feel that they can have trust in the process. By inviting union reps to the aforementioned consultation meeting, we were able to offer reassurance to staff that we weren’t hiding anything. Two key attributes you should always try to observe throughout the redundancy process are openness and transparency.



**Sue Gawman is an advanced school business manager at Tavistock Primary & Nursery School**

Meeting of selection panel

Staff informed of redundancy decisions

Governors hold first panel representation hearing

Governors hold second panel representation hearing

Redundancy notices served

Appeal panel hearings held

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## CUTTING CPD IS A FALSE ECONOMY

Hayley Dunn explains why enabling staff to attend CPD events isn't a waste of resources, but a sensible move...

**T**here's nothing quite like being in a room full of like-minded people – particularly if those people consist of school staff with specialised roles, such as SBMs and SENCos. There's much to be said for being able to talk through the challenges and opportunities you face with someone else who speaks your language and understands where you're coming from because they've dealt with similar situations themselves.

Yet when money's tight, one of the first spending areas some schools will cut is CPD. The long-term impact and benefits, however, should always be carefully considered before cutting opportunities for staff to attend external conferences, networking events and meet-ups. These types of CPD events form an integral part of staff's career development.

It's vital that staff are able to take a break on occasion to sharpen their skills and knowledge. Gaining an understanding of how other organisations are approaching similar challenges and spotting new opportunities enables us to fill gaps in our knowledge and build on our existing strengths. Quality CPD can boost confidence, and should therefore be part of an individual's personal growth plan. You want your

school's support staff to be forming new relationships and building a quality professional learning network (PLN) that will provide them with different perspectives, fresh ideas and new ways of thinking.

I've previously met professionals at national conferences who went on to become part of my PLN, and with whom I still schedule regular catch ups as part of my commitment to continual development and improvement. We're able to support each other with staying relevant and up to date, learning about new trends and catching up on what the latest research is telling us.

Local events of this type are certainly good (and tend to be more convenient), but they're often attended by the same people. National events are more diverse, and can attract some powerful speakers whose words and ideas will stay with you for years afterwards. If you've ever heard Sir John Jones speaking about creating possibilities; Nigel Risner give a talk on 'being in the room' or Steph McGovern detailing her career journey, you'll know exactly what I mean.

National events offer valuable opportunities to meet people from a wider area and connect with influencers, such as industry journalists, associations and thought leaders. They can result in face-to-face encounters with experts and leaders where it's possible to ask questions, after which we'll return to school with new ideas and approaches that make us more efficient and effective.

The cost of attending conferences can be offset by ensuring that the value gained is shared as widely as possible, and through fostering a culture in which staff share highlights and feedback from everything they've learned.

At every event I go to, I'll reflect on what I'm taking away with me – be that a new connection, an idea I want to explore further or a new piece of knowledge that will help me in future. I'll do that even before I leave for the journey home, because if I'm going to ask my employer to allow me development time, I'll need to return with things that I'll use, and which I know will have a positive impact.

*Hayley Dunn is a MAT finance director; her book, **The School Business Manager's Handbook**, is available now, published by John Catt*



## HOW AN SRMA CAN HELP

The ISBL outlines its recent involvement with a new government programme, which aims to assist schools that are struggling financially

In 2017 the DfE commissioned the Institute of School Business Leadership to carry out a pilot programme aimed at recruiting, inducting and accrediting school resource management advisers (SRMAs). The pilot took place over spring and summer of 2018, and involved the ISBL working alongside the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

SRMAs are required to possess extensive practical experience and current knowledge of the education sector, since their role is to act as school business experts. SRMAs have already been deployed into both academy trusts and LA-maintained schools that have come to the DfE's attention for being in poor financial health, using their expertise to assist trusts and schools with restoring their financial position.

Every SRMA looks to maximise the use of a school's resources in order to deliver positive educational outcomes, which may include effectively integrating curriculum and financial planning. SRMAs are charged with viewing a setting's financial situation holistically and considering a number of different issues. Those can include schools' HR, curriculum delivery, workforce planning, use of staff and leadership time, governance, financial resources and estate management.

To date, the evaluation and impact of the role has been positive. The Secretary of State for Education and School Systems Minister, Lord Agnew, have both shown a keen interest in the programme, meeting with members of the team, including the two SRMAs quoted here:

*"I started my first deployment in a secondary academy of a large MAT and*

*undertook a desktop analysis – not to establish and decide the solution, but rather to identify elements that needed to be part of the conversation with them. The principal and Trust officers were appreciative of the support and suggestions to forge a way forward for the benefit of the students. After all, that's why we're doing this in the first place."*

**– Andy Hamilton, Ash House Consultancy Ltd**

*"SRMAs can look for the opportunity to 'do something different' with key performance indicators, providing a good starting point for understanding the organisation.*

*"The purpose of the role is to help maximise resources, reduce duplication of work and ensure that there's a stable and realistic plan in place to move forward. I'm a firm believer that by sharing knowledge and supporting others, we can continue to improve outcomes for children."*

**– Sheryl Cardwell, Director, business and finance at Waterloo Primary Academy**

In terms of what happens next, the DfE is planning a full roll-out this autumn, having opened an invitation to tender for the programme in August this year. Those wishing to obtain further information regarding the project should email [training@isbl.org.uk](mailto:training@isbl.org.uk).

**Sarah Ray is professional development specialist at the Institute for School Business Leadership**

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# Could your staff claim tax relief?

Tony Mills highlights the ways in which school staff may be entitled to tax relief on some school-related expenses...

**T**eachers and education professionals represent a group of employees who are eligible to claim extra tax relief for certain expenses they pay as part of their job. You might be surprised at what expenses you can claim tax back on and the money you can save in your pay packet each month. You can also make backdated claims for the last four years. Here's a simple guide to what tax relief you could be missing out on:

## 1. Union fees

Choosing which teachers' union to join is an important decision. The main unions are a powerful collective body when it comes to industrial action, influencing government policy and campaigning for better working conditions.

To be a member, teachers and education professionals must pay registration fees on a monthly or annual basis. In most instances, a percentage of membership fees is tax deductible – worth 20% to a basic rate taxpayer.

If you haven't claimed previously, you

may be able to make a claim for the last four years. HMRC usually make any adjustments needed through your tax code for the current tax year, and they'll also apply any tax relief to your pay going forward, so you typically only need to claim once. It's possible to backdate any claim to the previous four tax years and receive a lump sum payment.

## 2. Mileage allowance

For teachers and education professionals making off-site visits – to a sports ground or outdoor activity centre, for example – or travelling to temporary places of work, a tax rebate could be due.

If you use your own vehicle to travel to different school sites or other work-related activities and receive less than the approved amount for mileage

allowance payments (45p per mile) from your employer in expenses, you can claim tax relief on the difference.

There are three kinds of vehicle covered and the rate depends on the kind you use – car or van, motorcycle and cycle. Be sure to keep any travel or fuel receipts to make an expense claim via your employer first and foremost.

## 3. Supply teaching

If you're a supply teacher, your employment arrangements are likely to be more complex than those of permanent teachers, and could mean you've been over-paying – or indeed under-paying – income tax.

If you teach at several different schools, you may pay more tax under PAYE than you should. If the amount of tax being deducted on your payslip appears too high or too low, it's good to check if you're due a refund or owe any additional tax. This may result in your tax code being updated based on your anticipated earnings for the year.

In some circumstances, a teacher may want to consider asking HMRC to split their tax code between two or more employers.

## 4. Finally, stay safe...

Don't fall victim to fraudsters who send fake emails and text messages promising tax rebates on your behalf. Fraudulent communications are likely to increase around the end of the tax year in late March.

Never hand out any personal or payment details to companies you haven't approached personally before, or to HMRC – it will only ever contact you via post or your employer. If you suspect you've been the victim of a scam, report the issue to your bank/card issuer as soon as possible.

**Tony Mills is director of  
Online Tax Rebates**

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



# DON'T LOSE YOUR TAs

If you can be flexible and plan ahead, TA provision needn't be the first casualty of your school's latest round of cost savings, says Caroline Collins

It's becoming ever harder to miss the signs of a funding crisis within our schools. Leaders and managers talk of reduced incomes and ever-growing spending obligations, while the media carry reports of schools having to balance their budgets by axing posts. It could be argued that shedding staff will inevitably lead to poorer outcomes for children, but many schools struggling with budget issues simply see no other solution. Still, if there's one thing we can expect school staff to be able to demonstrate, it's creativity and flexibility. Could a willingness on the part of schools to experiment with their timetables and staffing procedures offer a way out of the precarious financial situation many now face?

## LUXURY OR NECESSITY?

The biggest single spend in schools is on staffing, which will typically account for around 75% of the school budget – and of that, approximately 20% will go towards employing Teaching Assistants. TAs have been around since the eighties, but their popularity in schools really took off in the late nineties. Once timetabled PPA time came into being in 2005, schools across the country immediately saw the attraction of taking on TAs who could provide partial class cover.

With the educational needs of children in mainstream schools having become increasingly complex in recent years, it can be hard to imagine now how schools managed before TAs became such a fixture in classrooms. TAs are professionals in their own right, working to rigorous standards – and yet in the current climate, TA posts are fast becoming something viewed as a luxury, rather than a necessity.

Another trend in recent years has been the rise in children with SEND entering mainstream schools, resulting in a greater need for one-to-one support within classrooms that's often provided by an LSA or TA. For schools with high numbers of SEN or EAL children, the support TAs provide can be crucially important for the



children's development. Such schools are therefore likely to employ more TAs than most, and in some instances it's not unusual to see two or more TAs working in the same class.

But if this 'luxury' of excess classroom support staff might be no longer sustainable, perhaps the time has come to reassess how they're deployed within a school. If a class has more than one TA, the SLT should examine why that's the case, whether it's a necessity, how much it's costing the school and whether any changes could be made.

## WORKING AS DIRECTED

With the current financial climate being what it is, the time has come for senior

leaders and governors to make honest and realistic decisions for how to proceed when a TA leaves or retires. Schools should look at whether adaptations can be made to the timetable, so that one-to-one TA support can be provided more flexibly across classes.

However, there can be a particular challenge where a TA has been employed to work with a specific child or class, raising the prospect of teachers becoming over-reliant on certain individuals. All too often, we'll hear references to 'my TA', when in fact TAs should be employed to work *as directed by the school*.

When TAs are employed to work at the school in general, rather than with a specific class, they can be placed wherever they're most needed according to pupils' needs (though it's important to

involve your SENCo in any decisions concerning TAs' support for children with SEND).

A TA could therefore find themselves in Reception during the mornings, providing one-to-one support for a child with SEND, and then lending general classroom support to different groups of children throughout the afternoon. That can be helpful for individuals' career progression, as they'll get to see for themselves how learning and development needs differ between year groups.

## CONTRACTED HOURS

Here's how the approach looks in practice. One school in London employed a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) who had been assigned more senior responsibilities than the rest of the team, and was therefore on a higher pay scale. When she retired, the SLT reviewed the role and made the decision not to replace her, taking into account that most of the school's other TAs were long-serving, with years of experience and thus in a position to carry out some of the outgoing HLTA's duties.

The school then took the opportunity to reassess how its classroom-based support staff members were deployed, and reviewed the hours that they were employed to work. Most were employed on 36-hour contracts, working until 4.15pm. These staff were using the time after school to help prepare for the next day, or to assist with after-school clubs. The SLT, however, felt that realistically, those TAs' hours could be reduced, since their attendance at preparation wasn't a necessity and because those after-school clubs were led by teachers or external agencies.

The school is now looking at offering reduced hours to its support staff. While there's no guarantee that the staff will accept those lowered hours, there may equally be a proportion willing to see them reduced to around 30 per week if it will help alleviate financial pressure on the school without losing too much in the way of valuable teaching time.

## SPREADING THE COST

Something else we've seen from government lately has been a push for collaborative working. Many SBLs now regularly work with neighbouring schools to try and secure better procurement deals, for example – and that type of joined-up working should be extended to staffing.

## 10 HOLISTIC QUESTIONS

If there's nothing for it but to proceed with some far-reaching changes to your school's use of TAs, be sure to first ask yourself the following:

- What cohorts of children do we have?
- What percentage of our children need one-to-one support?
- How many hours of one-to-one support does each pupil need?
- How many TAs do we have?
- How many of those TAs can provide one-to-one support?
- Are any of our TAs due to retire?
- Are any TAs planning to leave imminently?
- Which class requires the most support?
- Would any of our TAs be interested in reduced working hours?
- Would any of our TAs be interested in voluntary redundancy?

Sharing support staff between schools can help free up valuable funds, whilst still allowing schools to enjoy the benefits that skilled and experienced staff have to offer. A different school in London recently took the step of 'loaning' three of its TAs to a neighbouring school, so that said staff's expertise could be shared while the costs of employing them were spread out. This is an excellent model of good practice, which can ensure that good quality staff are retained without impacting on budgets too heavily. The staff in question will obviously gain experience and practice of other settings in their local area too – knowledge which can then be brought back to the school they're based at.

Staff morale is important. With stories rife throughout the education sector of support staff losing their jobs, it's more important than ever for senior leaders to recognise the fears many support staff understandably have, and the impact this can have on staff morale.

If changes have to be made – whether it be a reduction in your TAs' hours, or

adjustments to how they're deployed – communication is key. Senior leaders have a crucial role in helping the staff in question understand the school's position, whilst simultaneously reassuring them about their future.

When embarking on any major programme of change, an SLT should take a holistic approach and ask themselves a series of questions (see '10 holistic questions'). Having answered these, the school can then draw up a model that addresses whatever financial concerns the school might have, before presenting it to governors. If it's then approved, the SBL and headteacher can start communicating to TAs what the changes will involve, and who knows – some of those TAs might well be more accommodating than originally expected.



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

**Primary School**

[@caroline\\_261](#)





# ALL IN THIS TOGETHER?

Framing your budget considerations as a battle between SLT and teachers helps no one. Instead, try fostering a budgeting culture everyone can get on board with...

**I**t's a fact of life that money makes the world go round – something that applies to schools and education as much as it does anywhere else.

Whether or not you believe schools should be run as a business, the truth is that schools in essence currently operate as businesses with a restrictive business model. Our main 'product' is the education of children.

In my time as a school business leader, I've seen a shift in the attitude of senior leaders – and to be fair, most staff – towards the financial elements of education. When I started in the profession back in 2002, there was a feeling that education shouldn't have a monetary value; that what was needed for students should always be provided. In these times of austerity, this attitude has been strongly challenged with all schools now recognising the need to plan their budgets to outcomes and seeing the importance of delivering both educational and financial value.

We're often as seen as the 'bad guy' when trying to bring up the cost element

in conversations about education supply, whether they be operational costs (stationary and resources) or developmental costs relating to CPD and other services. Taking a holistic view that refuses to recognise cost as an element of measuring an intervention's outcome, new product or strategic decision can cause confrontation. Teachers often don't understand the restrictions their SLT may be under when supporting or denying a purchase – though of course, if your SLT don't understand those restrictions either, you have a bigger problem on your hands.

## KEEP STAFF INFORMED

Your own personal budgets need buy-in from all stakeholders to ensure that true value for money and best value can be achieved – so how do we attain this at a whole school level? Regardless of whether you allocate budgets that others are responsible for, or manage them all centrally, every member of staff has to recognise the need to generate value from their spending.

Strategy number one is to therefore share information. Historically, schools have tended to keep the budgeting side things at senior management and governor level only, creating a culture where staff have little awareness of what's happening with respect to their school's general funding and budgeting. Budgets are often distributed on the basis of historical spend, or as a percentage of the 'pot' left remaining after a school's day-to-day operational spend is fully accounted for. This eventually contributes to a culture of kneejerk spending at year end to 'use up the budget', resulting in purchases that may have no impact at all on student outcomes.

Begin by dispelling any myths about the way your school is funded and to what amount. If you fail to share this information among your staff, they'll fall back on assumptions shaped by what they've read in the press and social media. The first time I did some training with staff about how our school was funded I was shocked to discover that they held some very strange and inaccurate views about what the costs of running a school actually entailed.

However, I received a fantastic reaction when they realised that over 75% of the school's income was spent on staffing. Once we'd added in the costs of running the building and our statutory and operating expenses, they quickly came to understand the need for best value purchasing using the 5% of the budget remaining for curriculum spend. A true eye opener!

## EMBED THE IDEA OF BUDGETING

Once your budget holders and staff understand how your finances work, it'll add a level of responsibility to their purchasing and budget decisions. No longer will orders be placed without them giving some thought as to the resulting impact on the wider school budget.

Having exposed staff to the realities of your school's financial opportunities and restraints, the second step is to then embed the concept of cost to every aspect of the school's operations. If you're an SBL attached





to your SLT, you'll be party to various discussions around strategic planning and operational changes and therefore be well placed to put this into action. But even if that doesn't apply to you, there are still things you can do to improve the financial perspective of your senior colleagues when it comes to important decisions:

- Ask to cost the school improvement plan
- Provide cost reports for staffing and other such decisions, even if they've already been made
- Provide financial monitoring that can be shared at SLT meetings
- Seek out your Pupil Premium champion, and sports and music funding leads, and offer them help with monitoring their spending
- Create service level agreements for the school's various services and ask to have these discussed and approved by SLT

Even if imparting this knowledge isn't requested of you, the more your colleagues are able to understand about spend versus outcomes, the easier your

role will be. One of the most productive pieces of advice I can offer for SBLs is to not be afraid to speak up and share the cost impact of the decisions made at your school. Some of the above strategies may also work when working with teaching staff, particularly around budgeting for different subject area plans and monitoring spending through regular updates.

## MAINTAIN MOMENTUM

The next step to consider how you can maintain this newfound budget-sensitive attitude among your staff and keep it going. Use your initial information sharing sessions to discuss the positives of knowing and understanding how school funds are spent. At SLT level, make it clear that the ability to cost and accurately assess interventions for Pupil Premium, SEN or any other type of directed funding will add value to reports and statements and make for great

discussions with Ofsted.

Among teachers – particularly those who are budget holders – drive home the message that using their funding in a way that achieves the greatest impact will help them better gauge what's working and improve results. The process of doing this can also provide your colleagues with a useful form of CPD.

Finally, include others in your decision making when it comes to setting both your annual budget and three-year strategy. Indeed, I'd encourage staff to look at their proposed spending not just for the year ahead, but also looking further forward. Particularly if, for instance, you have any longer term projects on the horizon, such as the purchase of a new three-year ICT programme or are testing something now that might require a financial commitment later down the line.

Ultimately, the setting of your budget is a whole school issue that calls for a whole school approach.



**Sue Birchall is a consultant, speaker, writer, trainer and business manager at**

**The Malling School, Kent**

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1

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# How to buy... Print Supplies



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*YPO's category buyer for technology and communications, Zoe Morgan-Kriek, takes us through the different types of print consumables schools may encounter, and the benefits and limitations of each...*

## RIGHT PRICE

When it comes to print supplies, it's no surprise that the accompanying costs are a crucial factor for many schools when deciding which products to purchase. Those looking to get the best value for money may find remanufactured cartridges to be a great option. These cost on average 30 to 60% less than brand new cartridges, so initially they seem like an attractive alternative. Yet this cheaper option might not necessarily be the most cost effective – remanufactured cartridges can sometimes give rise to various printer maintenance issues, including problems with inks drying out. While it's good to save money where you can, with cartridges you won't want the quality of your print jobs to suffer. Our procurement experts can help recommend suppliers that specialise in the sale of such cartridges and can offer after care support in case of any issues.

## BETTER QUALITY

If your upfront costs are less of concern to you than securing overall savings and ensuring good print quality, manufactured cartridges might be the better option. Before deciding, however, consider how much it will cost you to print on a single page. A school that frequently prints in large quantities will benefit most from as large a cartridge size as possible, since higher capacity cartridges will offer more print-for-page and work out cheaper overall in the long run. 'Jumbo-sized' cartridges will typically entail higher upfront costs, but if you track the overall cost per page over time, you'll find that they work out much cheaper. There are framework options available which will give you the ins and outs regarding quality and the overall cost per page you can expect, given the volume of printing your school needs.

## ECO-FRIENDLY

With suppliers increasingly conscious of the impact their industry has on the environment, they've responded by changing the way in which cartridges are now disposed of. HP, for example, don't send their spent cartridges to landfill sites, but rather see to it that the plastic from which they're made is recycled into road surfaces, while at the same times using plastic bottles collected from across the globe to produce the cartridges in the first place. Print consumables can be purchased at YPO separately on a compliant framework or as part of a multi-functional device (MFD) framework, where consumables are part of the click charge. Most MFDs now offer the option of automatically ordering new print cartridges when required. There are also several free options out there for setting up the collection and recycling of old cartridges, thus ensuring we all do our bit for the environment.

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## “YOU NEED A CLEAR MORAL PURPOSE”

Jean Watt shares her experience of the demands placed on school leaders in challenging areas and offers some thoughts on how to address them...

**T**his is now my fourth year as principal of Ormiston Meadows Academy in Peterborough, though before that my background was in secondary, having previously worked at a number of challenging schools as a deputy head and later as a school improvement consultant.

We're a mainstream primary school with 200 on roll and a specialist hub for physical disability, offering specialist physical disability provision for up to 12 full time places and outreach support for other schools in the region with children who have similar needs.

Our pupils tend to be drawn from more from socially deprived areas nearby than from our immediate catchment area, and 35% of our children qualify for Pupil Premium.

When leading a school in a challenging area you have to be mindful of the need to work closely with parents. When I started here, the children were presenting with various issues, the main one being behaviour. Having worked hard to address that, our next immediate priority was to tackle low expectations. Our job became about how we, as a school, could raise the aspirations our children had for themselves and those among the community as a whole.

To do that, we carefully built up the relationships we had with our parents, many of whom had little trust in the school. We organised a range of events aimed at bringing parents in and making them like feel part of the school, while at the same time celebrating their children's achievements.

Throughout all of this, the question I'd always come back to was 'What is

our 'why'? What's our purpose?'

Ultimately, we want all of our children to have an outstanding education and we intend to achieve that by having really high expectations. Setting out that vision clearly has been a key task for us that's involved staff, parents and children, and included coming up with a motto summarising our school values. The final wording agreed on by the school's stakeholders was 'Be your Best, Expect the Best, Succeed Together'. Everything we do is contained within that motto.

The process of building trust with our parents remains ongoing; we don't think of there being a destination we're travelling to, but rather see it as something we need to constantly work at.

We try to educate parents and ensure they're kept as well-informed as possible. Schools can sometimes take parents' existing knowledge for granted, which is why we host phonics workshops, for example, that parents are invited to. There's also a Parent Voice group that meets monthly to discuss any issues the parents feel we as a school should be addressing.

School leaders in challenging areas need to have a clear moral purpose and rationale for doing what they do, which can then be linked to their school vision. When we created our vision, we examined what it meant to the school's children, parents and staff and shared it widely, and continue to return to it every so often to check that it's still aligning with everyone's needs and expectations.

Ensuring that your school vision contains a moral element can help you answer those 'What's our purpose?' questions in a way that'll give you confidence in your decisions and keep you going when things get difficult.

*Jean Watt is the principal of Ormiston Meadows Academy*



## DON'T BE A WORKLOAD TYRANT

When it comes to workload, school leaders need to pull off a tricky balancing act, says Jill Berry

There's an extensive discussion to be had about how those working in schools can manage their workload in a sustainable and effective way. 'More' isn't always better, and 'I will work harder' is rarely a useful response. (It certainly didn't work well for the character Boxer in Orwell's *Animal Farm*).

It's in no one's interest – least of all the children's – for school staff to work themselves to the point of exhaustion. The ongoing workload debate is challenging us to consider how much of what we do is truly supportive of pupils' progress, and how much of it is tangential, or even redundant. Changing our work habits can be hard, even when we know they're unhealthy, but leaders must support those they lead in making the most effective use of their finite time and energies. If we don't, we risk exacerbating the teacher recruitment and retention challenges we continue to face and ensuring that those who stay in the profession aren't working as productively as they could be.

Leaders face the double challenge of finding a balance in their own lives they can model to others, while simultaneously monitoring how successful others are at doing the same thing. If someone's struggling, leaders need to help them in a way that protects and strengthens the school's offering to its children. It's therefore worth bearing in mind the following considerations:

### 1 CLARITY IS IMPORTANT

There's a comfort to be had in 'doing what we've always done'. If your

colleagues need encouragement to do things differently, it'll require discussion, a clear rationale and the courage to find the best way forward together

### 2 COLLEAGUES HAVE LIMITS

If those you lead are completing tasks simply to prove that they're doing a good job – producing lengthy written lesson plans, for example – ask whether what you're demanding of them is reasonable, and whether pupils are being well-served by activities that evidently take up teachers' time and energy.

### 3 SYSTEMS MIGHT WARRANT REVIEW

Check whether your systems as efficient as they could be, so that time isn't wasted on tasks that might support learning, but aren't fundamental to it. Try looking at your data collection and recording policy.

### 4 DUTIES CAN BE JETTISONED

Leaders and colleagues may have great ideas for new school initiatives – but if they're worth doing, can something else be taken away? If not, your calendar will increasingly resemble a hamster wheel in which your staff are required to run faster each year. Consider your core business versus the 'cherries on the top' – the latter are nice to have, but don't let them collapse the cake...

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

# Success means 'impact,' not 'completion'

Kevin Harcombe offers some advice for putting together that vital companion for the years ahead – your school development plan...

**I**s yours long or short? Expansive or concise? A revered and handsomely bound tome, or a few scrappy sheets of A4 crookedly stapled together?

However you present your school development plan, the key elements of it are straightforward. Are your key improvements prioritised and evidence-based, using hard data – both internal and external, with comparators where available? Does it include evidence of monitoring derived from lesson observations, work scrutiny, pupil conferencing and parental feedback? Can you see the wood for the trees?

If you've pinpointed writing or safeguarding as key areas, backed up by evidence, you're on solid ground. If your top priority is reducing school dinner wastage based on anecdotal whingeing from your lunchtime assistants, you may have some explaining to do when Ofsted come calling.

Check that your planned actions are clear, subject to diarised evaluation and likely to lead to the impactful improvements you've identified. If it becomes apparent during implementation that those actions aren't having the desired – or indeed any – impact, then

stop! Review, modify (or abandon altogether) and recalibrate. Remember the military adage that 'no plan survives first contact with the enemy'. Who are the enemy, in this case? Sometimes it's staff, who might fail to understand or implement the plan, or do so half-cocked. In-school variation between teachers is a bear trap for school improvement, so secure staff buy-in and motivate them to go for it. Performance management targets for individual teachers should link to your development plan.

Are the actions realistic and achievable within the timeframe you've set out? Enthusiasm is admirable, but you're unlikely to transform every aspect of your school within half a term.

Have SLT and key governors peruse the plan in draft and input ideas for improving it. This should also help ensure their buy-in, and if they've written sections of it, so much the better.

Is your plan costed in terms of time, as well as cash? Releasing staff to work on, or evaluate the plan in action will cost you in terms of time resources, so make

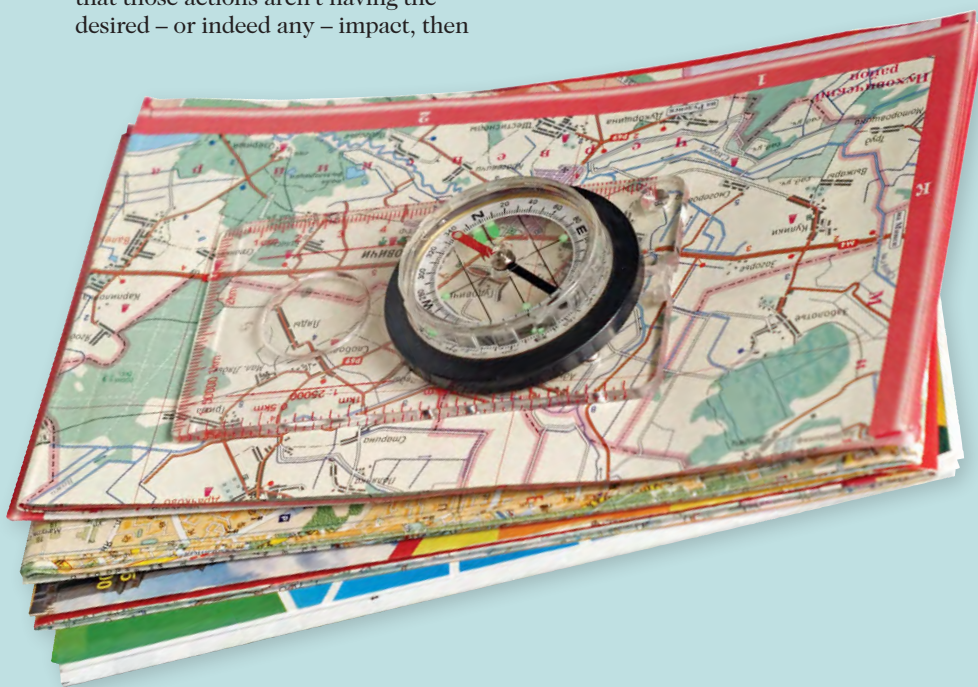
sure that cost leads to tangible benefits. Are the success criteria directly linked to impact, rather than just completion of actions? If an action to improve pupils' understanding of their times tables is to directly teach times tables for 15 minutes four days a week, the success criterion isn't simply that said teaching has taken place; it's that the teaching has taken place and the children's recall and use of times tables facts has got better. Measure any improvements – before the action, perhaps 60% of children could recall their 7x tables, with the figure rising to 80% following the action.

Make your SDP easy for governors to both support and challenge. Include a calendar as an appendix, presenting an at-a-glance guide to when planned actions are supposed to be taking place throughout the year. Have your governors ask whether the planned actions have taken place and if they were they effective. If you're intending to RAG the plan (Red / Amber / Green), check that it's the outcomes being coloured and not the actions themselves.

Finally, 'good practice' is for plans to cover three years, but that's increasingly difficult at a time of falling budgets and seemingly ad-hoc DfE initiatives. How about having it cover year one in detail, year two in outline and year three as fantasy? You can quote me on that...

**Kevin Harcombe is the headteacher at Redlands Primary School, Fareham**

 @kevharcombe



# LEADING MULTIPLE SCHOOLS

When running one school can easily fill your time, what does it take to effectively lead across multiple settings? Executive headteacher Anthony David shares his thoughts...

**W**orking across more than one setting is becoming increasingly more common. There's been a national qualification for several years in one form or another, LAs and Dioceses across the country run localised versions and it's become the favoured way of managing clusters of schools by several larger MATs.

So what's it like? Why bother with the stress, unless there's something in it for you?

To get pragmatic, none of us joined the education profession for the money. If you did, you're in the wrong job. There has to be some other reason for you wanting to be an executive headteacher, and often it will have developed organically – you were given the opportunity to grow something new, and the safest way to do that was to hold on to your current job.

I've spent most of my leadership career running more than one setting, and on two occasions it was because I'd been asked to develop a new site. This sort of executive leadership is akin to parenting; you've birthed a new school and feel emotionally very tied to both it and the parent school you started at. That's natural, and will possibly be the most exciting opportunity you'll have come across in your career. What follows can almost feel like walking for the first time. You're not sure how your role will change, but you know that it will.

## LESS HUMAN

The most notable of those changes will affect your relationship with staff and pupils, particularly in the new setting if you're growing from your first. You won't have the same closeness that you likely enjoy at the moment, which can take

some adjusting to. A head will often pride themselves on knowing the name of every staff member, pupil and most parents. Once you've crossed the threshold of managing more than 600 pupils and 100 staff at different locations, you'll have to reconcile yourself to not knowing every name, let alone knowing about their lives, how they tick and so forth. Your role has become more strategic and less human.

Note that I don't mean that in a cold, robotic way – simply that you'll struggle to manage human problems, particularly with low level concerns from parents, that persistent child who requires a bit of TLC on a daily basis or the staff member confiding that they've just separated from a partner. If you're socially geared up, then you may find this loss costly.

In this case, if you're given the choice between assuming the role of exec or



head, then perhaps choose head. The pay is typically the same (particularly since high profile media stories in recent years have caused salaries to adjust down from what used to be dizzying six figure salaries), and you get to throw all of your energy into one project. Sometimes you won't have a choice, because your school can no longer afford a hefty head's salary and has decided that the best approach will be to share its costs and expertise with another local school. In which case, how should you allocate your time?

### RATTLING AROUND

Firstly, decide when you're going to be at each site and be consistent about it. If you've resolved to be at site X on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, then stick to that. Remember that you now represent more than the well-known headteacher role – arriving unexpectedly may throw people, particularly your head of school!

Also be clear with what you intend to do, because if you're not careful you could easily find yourself rattling around. Your fundamental job is to drive forward standards, which means attending pupil review meetings, particularly in the first instance. The more you understand your schools and trust your staff, the less you'll need to be involved – but until you reach that wonderful stage, don't skimp on the meetings.

Next, set clear and agreed targets with the leadership. Again, it's your job to be ambitious and push colleagues beyond their comfort zone. Come inspection time, it'll ultimately be your head that's on the block if you can't evidence improvement in standards.

### YOU ARE THE SAVING

Budgeting is often an aspect of school leadership that aspiring heads are wary of, but you shouldn't be. It's really no more than an extended version of what you likely do with your home budget already, albeit with the vast majority of your finances taken up with staffing.

In the early days, executive heads would have ambitions of managing staff across several schools, such as a school business manager or SENCo. The truth, however, is that this isn't necessarily that easy or straightforward. Circumstances change, and you may well find that you've created a short term solution rather than saved your budget. Remember, it's you that's the main saving for that school.

Also, don't treat your various budgets as all part of one single pot – they're still needed to manage the schools they were originally allocated to! What you do have now, though, is buying power that will save you money time and again. Not just via bulk purchasing, but also in terms of

how you can now negotiate your spending on hefty supply teacher and NQT recruitment costs.

### EYES AND EARS

Staff development is critical. In my experience, the most important of your staff roles is head of school – they're our eyes and ears, but also the most likely to leave and become headteachers themselves, if you've trained them well enough! This is important, since we're still witnessing a national shortage of heads with the result that growing leaders is now arguably a national need.

A good head of school should eclipse you, after which you should be encouraging them to find their first school. And thus the cycle begins again.

The final point I'd make is that I'm not entirely convinced 'executive headship' should be a permanent fixture. Once a school is up and running, you may find yourself asking whether you've done your job and overstayed your welcome. If you feel this to be the case, then bow out quietly and gracefully. There are plenty of other schools out there that need your support.



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

# BRING STAFF ARGUMENTS TO AN END

How skilled are you at preventing arguments and disputes between staff – and should any arise, how quickly can you resolve them?

**W**hen leaders, peers and colleagues behave collaboratively and respectfully towards each other, it helps to build a positive and supportive culture. Happier staff are better able to focus on their important work and more likely to deliver improved outcomes for their pupils and for the school. A positive culture can help with tackling long-term recruitment and retention issues, too.

Incidents of inter-staff strife, disputes and conflict achieve the opposite. The current climate, in which staff are under pressure to consistently deliver strong results, has given rise to conditions that can cause tensions to sometimes boil over and arguments to emerge. Other exacerbating factors, such as staff shortages, funding cuts and curriculum changes, further add to the likelihood of staff falling out with each other.

It was encouraging to see the Education Secretary commit to plans for clearer accountability at the NAHT annual conference in May this year, but these will go to consultation first, so it will be some time before any benefits are felt. At the same time, however, he also set out enhancements for staff that included greater support for new teachers and improved development and progression, with clearer pathways for those wanting to stay in the classroom. All very welcome, but again it will take time before any real changes filter through.

So what steps can school leaders take now to better maintain harmony among their staff?

## PREVENTION'S BETTER THAN CURE

Successful line managers will be aware of behaviours and practices that make staff arguments less likely. Examples of these include mediation, being objective, dealing with issues head on and resolving them and not acting as a 'peacekeeper'.

The behaviours needed are shown within three of the 12 competencies found to prevent or reduce staff stress, based on research by Goldsmiths, University of London commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive. Understanding what sits beneath each of these and modelling them every day will mean that staff are more likely to work together effectively and ensure that issues are picked up and dealt with at an earlier stage.

Distributed leadership is key, and every line manager has a role to play. They should schedule regular check-ins and conversations with each team member, and ask questions about what's happening with them both in and outside of work. It's also important to be fair, deal with underperformance issues promptly, monitor staff workloads, praise often and make sure that effective appraisal conversations are being held regularly.

You can find further details concerning the HSE's three competencies and self-assess against them at [tinyurl.com/psm-12-comp](http://tinyurl.com/psm-12-comp).

## WHEN THINGS ESCALATE

Prevention isn't always possible, however, and there will inevitably be times when two or more members of staff are in dispute with each other. In some cases, even where leaders have become aware of poor behaviour, arguments or inter-staff disputes, too many will fail to act early enough, or worse, delay until a disagreement escalates into something more serious.

This inaction can stem from worries about upsetting those involved, concerns at what others might think, reluctance to spoil a good working relationship or friendship, or a failure to prioritise and find the time. It's a big reason as to why managing difficult conversations is such a popular topic for training, particularly among middle leaders.

Yet prompt action is what will be

needed. Here's a brief step-by-step process to follow:

### 1. IDENTIFY THE ISSUE AND ITS CAUSES

Leaders must be specific when confronting the issue. Find evidence and identify what's causing it. You can't base your response solely on the views or opinions of those directly involved. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to hold a preliminary meeting with the parties concerned to understand their respective views of what's happening and why.



## 2. ESTABLISH THE IMPACT

How serious is the issue, how many people is it affecting and is it having an impact on staff performance? This will help you decide on the action needed and the urgency with which the matter should be dealt with.

## 3. MEET WITH THE STAFF MEMBERS

Think about where your preliminary meetings should be held – preferably in a location that's private and confidential – what notice to give and the time you'll need to set aside.

Begin by setting out the purpose of the meeting and what is to be discussed. The staff member needs to know what the issue is, why it's a problem and the impact it's having on others and the school. What

follows should be an open discussion, where they'll have the opportunity to put forward their point of view and be heard.

## 4. DEVISE A SOLUTION

Ideally, the solution should come from the staff members themselves. This might not always be possible, but by sharing evidence, asking effective questions and listening to the staff members' answers, leaders can help them identify ways of moving forward.

You should try to pull ideas from the staff you talk to, identify common ground and keep the discussion focused on the facts and outcomes needed. You can then offer them assistance in areas such as training, development, coaching, mentoring, the expectations placed on them or their levels of responsibility.

The meeting needs to finish with the agreement of a clear action plan. There can be no grey areas or doubts as to what is expected. Your action plan should include:

- Agreement on specific expectations for future behaviour
- Details of any follow-up training, development and support and when this will be provided
- The consequences (particularly with more serious or repeat issues) and next steps if they don't deliver on what's agreed

## 5. REVIEW

Leaders must subsequently review with the staff involved at an agreed time and provide feedback and encouragement. Even if the issue appears to have been resolved, a follow-up meeting should still be scheduled so that you can acknowledge the actions taken and thank staff for their response. Poor behaviour can sometimes be repeated if success has been declared too early, or in the absence of an effective follow-up.

If the expected outcome hasn't been achieved, more serious action may need to be taken. That might include further coaching, issuing of formal warnings, capability assessments, or in the most serious cases, termination of employment.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Fortunately, serious arguments and disputes among school staff remain relatively rare, but with staff facing high stakes accountability measures, long working hours and the increased stress that can accompany those, the prospect remains a real one. Make sure your senior and middle leaders fully understand how their daily behaviours set the climate for those they lead.

Equipping yourself and your senior colleagues with the tools needed to quickly and effectively deal with such problems before they start to affect others will ultimately mean more of your staff stay with you, and deliver the required outcomes.



**Mark Solomons is a school governor, author, leadership consultant and the founder of School Wellbeing Accelerator**

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# GET OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Newcomers to senior leadership soon discover how vital it is to get colleagues on side. Here, Jon Tait outlines the best way to go about doing so...

**I**respective of how good you are, or how good you think you are, nothing is achieved in senior leadership without the support of the team around you.

Understanding and appreciating this is going to be key to your success as a leader. There will be times when you need advice, guidance, help and even the odd reality check. It's therefore essential that there's a mutual trust and respect between you so that, no matter what, you know they'll go that extra mile for you.

Trust and respect don't just come from your job title; you have to earn them and work on them. Granted, in the first few weeks of your new role, staff will be out to impress you and get on the right side of you, but this will soon wear off if they find out that you're not a nice person to work for.

Yes, they'll do as you ask, but that's as far as it will go. No running through walls or going the extra mile. That only comes when you have the utmost respect for someone, because you know that they'd do the same for you. Every school is different and will operate in a different context, but in almost every school you'll have to build up professional working relationships with the following groups of people.

## GOVERNORS

The mistake that many inexperienced senior leaders make is to not go out of their way to forge strong and immediate relationships with significant members of the governing body. Over the course of your school improvement journey, you'll need to rely on your governing body to support you through change management, so having their 100% trust and confidence in you will make things significantly easier.

As a newly appointed member of the leadership team, the best time to build up this trust and confidence is straight away. The governing body will still have you fresh in their minds after recently

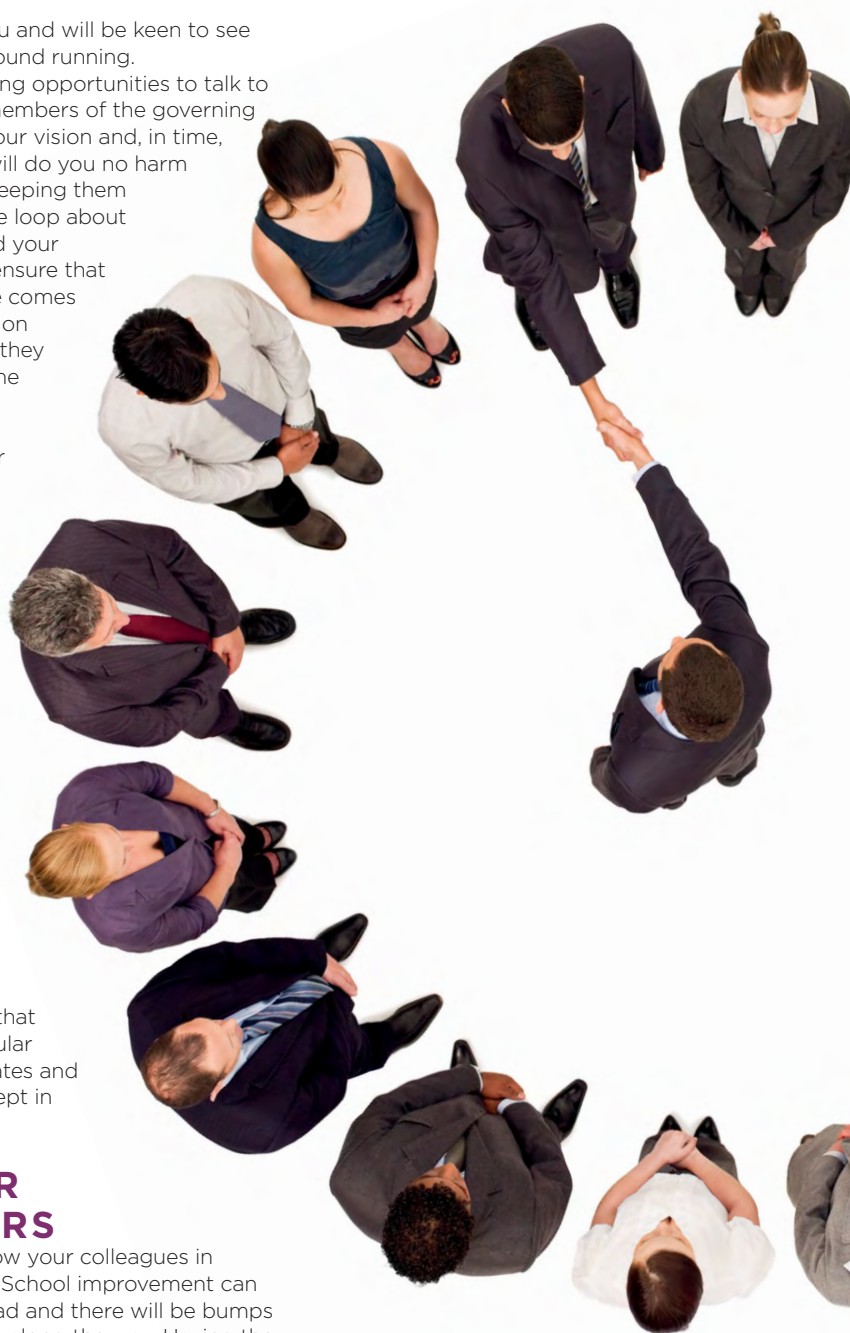
appointing you and will be keen to see you hit the ground running.

Manufacturing opportunities to talk to the relevant members of the governing body about your vision and, in time, your impact will do you no harm whatsoever. Keeping them regularly in the loop about your plans and your progress will ensure that when the time comes for you to call on their support, they are on the same page as you.

In most schools, senior leadership teams will have designated school governors for different areas of the Ofsted framework so they can hold the leaders responsible to account. Good practice is to schedule termly meetings with your link governors so that they have regular progress updates and are formally kept in the loop.

## SENIOR LEADERS

Getting to know your colleagues in SLT is a must. School improvement can be a tough road and there will be bumps and diversions along the way. Having the



full support of your colleagues through these testing times is so important, especially if you're new to the school.

Seldom will you not need a hug, a cry or a general pick-me-up conversation during your time as a senior leader in today's educational landscape. Strong relationships are key for this. Getting to really know your colleagues lets you feel you can open up to them, but also be there to support them in their hour of need. This bond and togetherness is what successful teams pride themselves on.

There's no real complicated strategy to making this happen, apart from just spending time with them. Taking the time to sit with them, talk to them and get to know them is easy; it's just that when we're so busy, this social

bonding seems to be not as important as some of the other things on our list. However, the time you invest in people by talking to them about work and their own lives away from school will reap you the rewards in the long term. Social nights out with your colleagues can also bring people much closer together and let people see you as a real person away from the day-to-day stresses of the job.

Just remember, though, that when alcohol is involved, things can sometimes go differently from how you may have envisaged them. Having a few drinks is fine, but remember that you're trying to build a positive impression of yourself to your new colleagues.

## TEACHERS

If people believe in you and see your authenticity as a leader, they'll follow you and your vision. In a big school, getting to know each and every member of staff in the way you might do your fellow senior leadership colleagues is going to be unrealistic; however, there are a few easy strategies that will quickly build up your professional relationships with staff, giving them confidence and trust in you as a new leader.

Get out of your office as much as you can. One thing that people in any organisation don't like is leaders who hide away in their offices and don't know what it's like on the ground. No matter how busy you might think you are, spending time in the school corridors, the school playground or the dining hall at break and lunch time will raise your stock in the staffroom overnight. Sending that message to staff that 'I'm with you' can mean everything to some people.

The very nature of being out and about in the school allows you to talk to people and start building up those professional relationships. Imagine the teacher who wasn't sure of you coming in as a new leader in the school and was wary until she or he got to know you. By stopping to talk in the corridor with them at breaktime, you can instantly let them get to know you a bit better and have a normal conversation about the weather or what you both did at the weekend, letting them see you as a real person, just like them.

# Headmaster

Something people in any organisation hate is having to do things without being told why. Leaders sometimes forget that the people on the ground don't always see the bigger picture because they haven't been privy to the same information or experience as you. Therefore, some decisions and new policies can seem pointless, excessive and a general waste of time. The last thing you want as a new leader in a school is for your first new policy change or strategic implementation of an idea to go down like a lead balloon because the staff don't see the point behind it.

## SUPPORT STAFF

Support staff in any school are the unsung heroes who make the school tick. They're usually among the lowest paid staff, but do some of the most important day-to-day jobs. No matter what role you do as a senior leader, you'll need significant help from the support staff in your school.

Whether it's answering the phones in the school office and being the friendly face that parents and visitors see, the administration work they do on the attendance data-crunching or the letters they send out for you, you wouldn't be able to do your job without them. Taking the time to stop and thank them can make all the difference if you're wanting to build strong and lasting positive relationships.

**Jon Tait is an experienced senior leader, currently working as a deputy headteacher at a**

**secondary school; this article is an edited extract taken from his book *Bloomsbury CPD Library: Senior Leadership* published by Bloomsbury**



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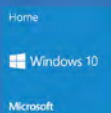
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**Kate Penfold-Attride**, Deputy Head, St Matthew's CE Primary School, Redhill, Surrey



‘As a senior leader our school NATRE membership helps in many ways. I find it a particularly useful way of keeping up to date with changes and new ideas that I can use in meetings with our RE Leader and in appraisal. Also, there are often resources or ideas in the RE Today publication we get with our membership ... that guide what we should be looking for during learning walks. I have used NATRE resources when working with our RE Governor to develop our curriculum and organise RE days and Inset. It's invaluable to have high-quality resources readily available to help further develop this important subject in our school.’

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# Are you teaching RE successfully?

## DID YOU KNOW?

NATRE members have access to over a thousand resources, just like this one. You can download the full version of '10 ways governors can help RE', plus a complimentary copy of *REtoday* magazine, by visiting [tinyurl.com/natre-resources](http://tinyurl.com/natre-resources)

*Looking to get your governors engaged with RE? Then here are five ways in which they can help improve RE in your primary school*

### 1. Is our school already good at RE, or is the subject a low priority for our teachers?

Across the country, primary RE is a mixed bag. Good schools will allocate it a reasonable budget and set aside sufficient lesson time. All classes gain knowledge and understanding of different religions and beliefs, learn how to disagree respectfully and develop the ability to express their own beliefs and values with increasing clarity.

Bad RE teaching comes about when there's little or no time, money or interest. Children continue to make Diwali cards and hear about the Good Samaritan, but make poor progress otherwise. Ask yourself where you are on the spectrum of provision – and consider how you would know. Is the teaching of RE something that's discussed at governors and curriculum meetings? Is it examined during learning walks?

### 2. Are our teachers confident in handling different religions and beliefs?

Many primary teachers are anxious about teaching RE. They don't want to cause offence (this is good!), and they feel they don't know enough about either religion in general, or a particular religion that they're expected to teach (this needs putting right). If you were to ask your teachers to rank the subjects they feel most confident about teaching, you'll likely find that RE, music, languages, PE and ICT usually make up the bottom five.

Try this exercise at your school, and look at what you can do to address any lack of confidence on the part of your



teachers. Why not plan a day of whole school RE professional development? Chances are you already do this for other subjects – so include RE too.

### 3. Do we know what we're doing in RE – and why?

Governors will be aware that RE has to be taught in all school types, but do they know why? Invite your RE subject leader to discuss the purpose of RE with them and share examples of pupils' work. It's important to carry out a curriculum audit against your local syllabus or diocesan guidance, but it's also worth looking at whether your school has ever run an RE day, entered an RE competition, sought the RE Quality Mark or demonstrated any other signs of lively practice. Is RE linked to any particular strengths your school might have in other areas, such as forest education, performing arts or local history?

### 4. What do the teachers say about RE?

Are your class teachers excited about open-ended discussion of big issues? Can they link the subject to art, music, history and/or English? Is your RE provision led by Philosophy for Children ([philosophy4children.co.uk](http://philosophy4children.co.uk))? Or does the conversation stop at 'RE? \*gulp\* Don't ask me!' Ask your teachers what they need to make their teaching of RE (even) better.

### 5. What do the pupils say about RE?

A pupil voice survey of children's perceptions regarding RE can be very revealing and will likely make governors sit up and take notice. Get some older pupils to run the questionnaire, analyse the results and present their findings to the governing body. What do the school's children enjoy in RE? What do they want to find out about? What have they learned?



*REtoday* magazine is published three times a year and provides readers with all the latest RE news, developments and reviews along with classroom ideas and activities.

A regular subscription to the magazine is one of the benefits of NATRE membership, alongside curriculum books, discounts on courses, online seminars, access to RE Advisers and more.

**To get your FREE copy of *REtoday* and the Governors resource please visit [natre.org.uk](http://natre.org.uk)**



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# WIN 5 Samsung tablets for use in your school

**T**rusted by over 2,000 schools across the UK and around the globe, Classroom Monitor supports teachers and school leaders to dramatically cut workload. The easy to use markbooks provide educators with one simple input to record all their formative assessment and evidence; freeing up time that can be better spent in the classroom improving outcomes.

With Classroom Monitor, you can clearly see where pupils are below expectation, on track or above expectation; meaning you can put timely interventions in place to improve individual pupils, cohorts or whole class learning outcomes.

School leaders enjoy instant access to ready-made data reports that deliver real insight. There are pre-set reporting packs for Ofsted, governors, parents and Multi Academy Trusts, so you can prove to all your key stakeholders that you're on top of school improvement.

Classroom Monitor's goal is the same as teaching staff both nationally and internationally; to improve teaching and learning for every child as well as cutting down on teacher workload.

## *Measuring what matters*

Classroom Monitor allows schools to create their own bespoke assessment frameworks, as well as being able to adapt existing off-the-shelf frameworks to match the needs of their learners. Recording judgements in Classroom Monitor little and often is one of the key ways of helping reduce the time teachers spend on assessment. Using the system in the classroom – especially with the Classroom Monitor Teacher App – is an effective way of doing this. Available for Android and Apple devices, the app gives teachers a simple way of recording assessments instantaneously, plus the ability collect photo or video evidence and upload it directly to their markbook.

**Classroom Monitor believes that classroom assessment is fundamental to teaching and learning. To support this, it's offering one PSM reader the chance to win five 7-inch, 8GB Samsung Galaxy Tab A tablets for use in their school. To enter, simply visit the link below and take part in our poll on the teaching and learning impact that data is currently having in your setting.**

**[www.teachwire.net/giveaways/classroommonitor](http://www.teachwire.net/giveaways/classroommonitor)**

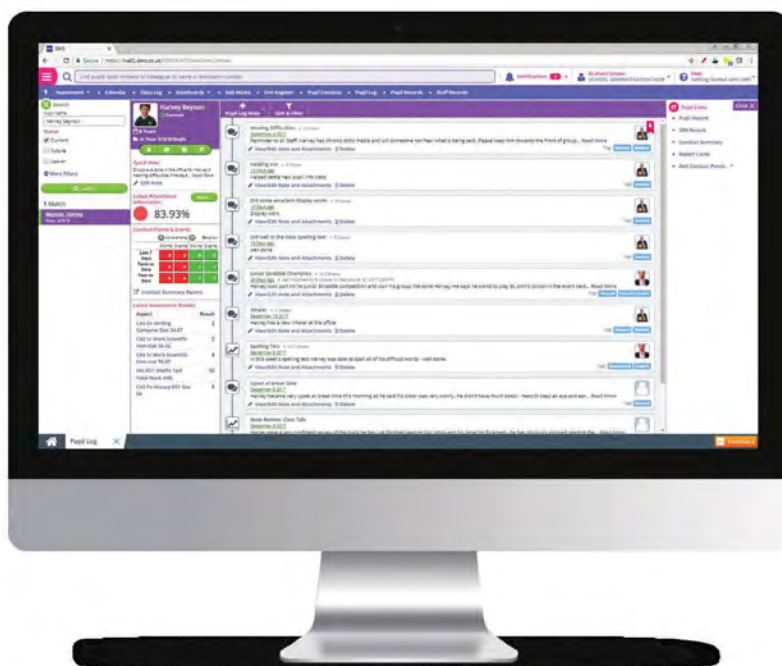
\*Competition closes at 5pm on 3rd December 2018. Winners will be notified within 21 days. Full terms and conditions available at [teachwire.net](http://teachwire.net)

# SIMS Primary

A redeveloped management information system that produces intelligent and integrated data insights for teachers

- Designed to help busy teachers complete tasks easily
- Provides razor-sharp analytics to help you make informed decisions
- Updates and backs up automatically to the cloud
- In-built flexible assessment system for easy attainment and progress tracking

Reviewed by: John Dabell



Is it possible to get excited about management information systems? I didn't think it was until I toured the latest version of SIMS from Capita. It's got a whole new look and yes, it's actually very exciting. Its predecessor was good, but this is a great leap forward and a dynamic evolution.

The interface of SIMS Primary has changed for the better. It's bright, colourful, interactive and matches the vibrancy and energy of primary schools. It's modern, advanced and fit for the way schools operate today.

The terms 'user-friendly' and 'intuitive' get bandied around quite a lot, but SIMS Primary has nailed it. The site is easy on the eye and a pleasure to navigate because it has been exceptionally well designed.

Although it packs a lot of information in, you don't drown or get bogged down in complexities. You won't need to go hunting for the information you need because it presents itself to you through bright, colourful and engaging signposts.

Everything you need to do as a class teacher is in one place, with highly accessible information points for effective classroom management including calendar, class log, pupil log, contacts, records,

register, assessment, dashboards and more.

I love the new pupil log screen, as this lets you see all the information about every child in your class using notes in a Twitter-feed style timeline format. This is a masterstroke, because here you can record a variety of comments, pin them for importance, add attachments and very quickly build up a narrative picture of each child's life in school. It feels familiar and encourages you to interact and add data.

Another new feature is the class log. Here, you can see your whole class in a single screen – and not just names, but photos too. What's clever about this feature is that filters enable you to see who's who in terms of birthday, FSM, SEND, pupil premium, medical information and important notes. Click on a photo to enter into the register and award positive points in an instant.

SIMS Primary will save you time and help you manage it like a workload wizard. It proves that management information systems don't have to be boring. It's a dedicated data analyst that could quite possibly be your new best school friend.



## VERDICT

- ✓ Explore rich real-time information
- ✓ User-friendly
- ✓ Clean, colourful, engaging and fresh
- ✓ Helps teachers focus on key information and make effective use of it
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# TOP OF THE CLASS

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## 1 NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

The government has pledged to invest £1.4 billion in transforming children's mental health – and primary schools are at the centre of this strategy. 20% of pupils have issues that require therapeutic support, a responsibility on top of including education on mental health within the curriculum. The relevant White

Paper is still being drafted, but it will require that the therapy provided must be evidenced-based. Only Play Therapy UK has a substantial evidence base of over 49,000 outcomes based on referrer and parent observations, and the 300,000+ session activities that produced them.

Keep your school ahead – email Monika to arrange a chat at [mokijep@majemail.com](mailto:mokijep@majemail.com)



## 2 COSY

Outdoor play equipment can be what children make it to be. We delight in providing more unusual items for outdoor play – if we can stop something going to landfill, and instead use it to create an opportunity for physical development outside, then we will. Our new favourites at the moment are the recycled Tiny Tyres (product code 33304), around which we've developed different products to support outdoor physical development and play.

[cosydirect.com](http://cosydirect.com)



## 3 FRONT ROW

As part of an effective Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP), schools need to support their life safety systems with communication technologies that help optimise responses to a wide range of scenarios. Many schools use networked systems daily for paging, intercom, and bells, but only in recent years have they employed networked technology to support crisis situations, where clear communication and speed are critical.

FrontRow's EPP communication solution incorporates all of these elements, helping you build a versatile EPP communication infrastructure that can easily carry out evacuation alerts, for example, or silently notify headteachers, teachers or administrators that an event is unfolding.

[GoFrontRow.com/psm-conductor](http://GoFrontRow.com/psm-conductor)

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



## 5 HODDER

RS Assessment from Hodder Education is an assessment provider with a reassuring history. We bring together expertise and experience from Rising Stars (a leading provider of assessments for over 11,000 primary schools) and Hodder Education (provider of rigorous assessment for over 40 years) to organise regional workshops, interactive webinars and in-school training.

We know that all schools are different, so we've worked with the very best assessment experts and teachers across the country to commission a bank of events that will help you to discover the real worth of making the most from your assessment data.

[risingstars-uk.com/assessmentcpd](http://risingstars-uk.com/assessmentcpd)



# Why I Love...

**Sallie Boyd**, senior leader at Sutton Veny CE Primary, shares her plans for Christingle's 50th anniversary celebrations

Over the past 50 years, thousands of schools across the country have held Christingle celebrations for The Children's Society. The vital funds raised help to give vulnerable children a Christmas free from fear and full of hope.

**“We are excited about the anniversary**

We celebrate Christingle every other year in our school. We always use The Children's Society as our chosen charity, for many reasons. First and foremost, it's to make children aware of the plight of those less fortunate than themselves, some of whom may be in our communities. It helps raise awareness and compassion for others and the children are always willing to support in any way they can. It also helps pupils understand the idea of 'stewardship' and how, as a church school, we can help those in need.

**“The Children's Society's resources are fantastic**

The resources that The Children's Society provide really help, both in a practical sense (the candles, tape, etc), but also for lesson planning and suggestions for activities to help with the history and reasoning behind Christingle. We have used some of the extracts from the resources in our services. They are easy to use and follow.



**“We're planning an extra-special service**

We are hoping to celebrate The Children's Society's 50th anniversary by focusing on a theme of 'Children at Christmas: near and far'. We'll look at children around the world (which is what the orange of a Christingle represents) as well as the lives of children in our country. The collection during the service will be for The Children's Society and we also keep a collection box at our entrance desk during this period. For our school, Christingle is spiritual, thought-provoking and a welcome tradition.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Christingle, The Children's Society has created a range of free teaching resources for schools that

make it easy for you to hold a joyful, unforgettable Christingle celebration. Its teaching resources support your pupils' learning and creativity and include assembly plans, a specially commissioned 50th anniversary song and fun craft activities. This year, the charity has also created a special video which you can show at your celebration to let attendees know how their donations are allowing vulnerable young people in this country to enjoy a first Christmas free from fear.

Visit [christingle.org/video](http://christingle.org/video) to download it. For more information or to order your resources, visit [christingle.org](http://christingle.org) or call the friendly Supporter Care team on 0300 303 7000.



# “THE JOB DOESN'T DEFINE YOU”

As another academic year gets underway, don't lose sight of the need to pursue a healthy and rewarding life outside of the school corridors, says Beth Cubberley...

**A**s I write these words, I think back to that final Friday of a long summer holiday, when my TV was stuck on *The Jeremy Kyle Show* after my dog decided to hide the remote control. The daytime TV isn't something I miss, having now returned to work, but I do miss the time spent with friends who I barely get to see between holidays, the opportunities I had to read books and feel relaxed, plus the ability to visit the doctor, dentist and other such services at my convenience – something I rarely get to do during term time.

With the start of a new term, I'm excited to see what the year will bring, particularly the new initiatives we have starting and the new pupil intake we're supporting. Whether I can keep the 'chilled out' persona the summer holiday brings out in me seems unlikely, however, with the stress and true extent of my – and everyone else's – workload now starting to unfold.

The work/life balance debate has been the focus of much discussion for a number of years at this point, with more and more teachers choosing to

leave the profession because they're unable to reconcile having a working life that allows them to spend quality time with their family and friends with the hard work involved in successfully helping children discover their talents while improving standards.

Is it actually possible for today's teachers to manage both? Whether it is or not, the important thing to remember is that being a teacher is a privilege, but the job doesn't define you. It's a career path that many have chosen before and continue to pursue now – but with the increased expectations, larger volume of paperwork and constant pressure to reach set targets we've seen in recent years, none of us can overlook the need to keep ourselves sane, well looked after, rested and focused. If we don't, we'll bring nothing to the role other than our sense of exhaustion.

Unfortunately, I don't think there are any easy wins and simple answers when it comes to coping with the pressures of the job, particularly when the start of each school year brings with it an increase in workload and changes in expectations with regards to parts of what we do.

Achieving a good work/life balance remains imperative, however. Everyone needs, and indeed has the right to switch off – to go to the gym, spend quality time with family, throw themselves into hobbies and enjoy rest and recreation time without thinking about an ever-swelling to do list.

There are, however, some practical ways of managing this. Plan out your weeks at work ahead of time, and do your best ensure that you complete as many of those tasks during work hours as possible, so that you won't have to bring as much home with you each night. Learn some strategies for switching off, so that you can leave the stresses of the job at school.

It's important to talk to colleagues when you're feeling stressed, or when things seem to be getting too much. There's no failure in sometimes feeling that the stress is overwhelming. There's only success to be had in being able to admit this to others, and in finding ways to prevent the job from becoming all-consuming. Pursuing a rich life outside of school will ultimately enable you to keep things in perspective.

Sadly, however, the main challenge many schools now face is in coming up with practical solutions that can help their staff at a time when budgets are decreasing and more is continuing to be expected of everyone.



**Beth Cubberley** is assistant headteacher and SENCo at Grove Wood Primary School in Rayleigh, Essex



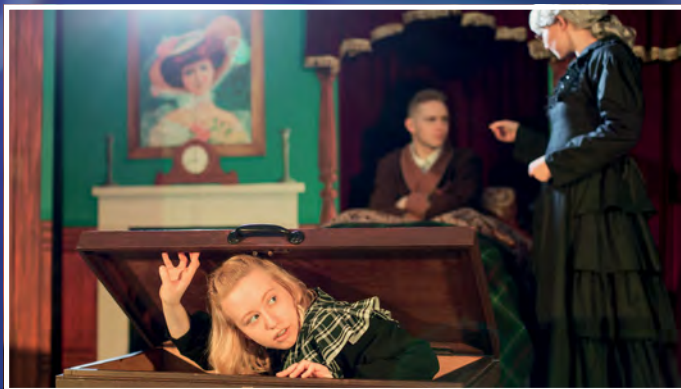


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Our productions educate Primary School audiences through the powers of entertainment and imagination, whilst at the same time encouraging children to read for pleasure and explore their creative abilities. We balance humour with serious messages, evoke emotions in a sensitive and relevant manner, and encourage appropriate and valuable audience reaction to a wide range of moral and historical issues.

Our wonderfully constructed sets and special effects, adaptable to any venue, allow for this experience to be enjoyed by the whole school, in the safety of their own surroundings.



### CLASSIC LITERATURE ADAPTATIONS

As well as promoting reading for enjoyment, our Classic Literature Adaptations provide an immersive, accessible and memorable way to learn about many of the real life issues that come under the PSHE core themes. These productions can evoke questions, encourage discussion and initiate communication relating to the many social, emotional and ethical situations portrayed.

*"It was a fantastic show and the children were so engaged. It's amazing that we can give the pupils these experiences.  
It was worth every penny"*



### PANTOMIMES

Every one of our Pantomime productions is packed with fun, laughter, excitement, great music and larger than life characters. Written specifically for children by our experienced team of professionals; our scripts, costumes, scenery and special effects all combine to ensure that from the very beginning, the audience will enjoy a truly magical theatrical experience.

*"Lights, cameras and lots of action! Nursery to Year 6 - staff included - were totally enthralled by a colourful, exciting and engaging performance"*

# **Capture** your children's *imagination* and **nurture** lifelong readers

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