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INTERVIEW

**CHARLIE HIGSON:**
*"I was very shy, with all that comes with it"*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

# "Welcome...

I write these words on the eve of the government's great mid-May easing of lockdown restrictions. It's been fascinating to observe people's reactions to the gradual parcelling-out of liberties we all took for granted before the spring of 2020 – gratitude from some quarters, angry impatience from others and a whole lot of wariness.

One of the great unknowns at the moment is how quickly and enthusiastically we're going to embrace our newly returned freedoms. For every family desperate to shed their face masks, another will be united in their reluctance to take theirs off – as headteachers up and down the country will probably be in the process of discovering by the time you read this.

There's at least been a transition of sorts for schools, following the return of pupils back in March. What the reuniting of friends and families, reopening of venues and return to regular socialising holds in store for society at large is impossible to predict, but it seems safe to say that as a people – in the UK or anywhere else – we're not equipped to suddenly bounce back from the kind of collective upset we've all experienced over the past year as if nothing's happened. The transition's going to be a bumpy one, and the unpleasant memories will persist.

And yet, move on we must. As school counsellor Sarah Standish observes this issue (p14), we should acknowledge the damage that COVID-19 has done to our students' futures, but fixating on this too much risks discouraging them from the type of dreaming, hoping and aspiring for a *better* future that they really ought to be doing at their age. Aside from anything else, health hesitations notwithstanding, the post-pandemic recovery offers scope for renewal, and the refashioning and reimagining of things that perhaps ought to have been done away with long ago – which in the eyes of some might include harsh accountability measures (p19) or the gradual hollowing-out of teachers' professional agency (p80).

Let's stay vigilant and journey onwards cautiously, then – but let's also allow ourselves to put a little spring in our step...

Enjoy the issue,

**Callum Fauser**
**callum.fauser@theteachco.com**

## On board this issue:

Bhamika Bhudia is a teacher of English

Dr. Paul Heery is CEO at The White Hills Park Trust

Steve Smith is a teacher educator and author

Zoe Enser is a specialist advisor for English at The Education People

Dr Alex Gardner-McTaggart is a lecturer in education at the Manchester Institute of Education

Katy Chedzey is head of teaching, learning and assessment at the Chartered College of Teaching

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## Essential reading:







MAY/JUNE '21

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## Features



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THE teach COMPANY

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# The newsletter

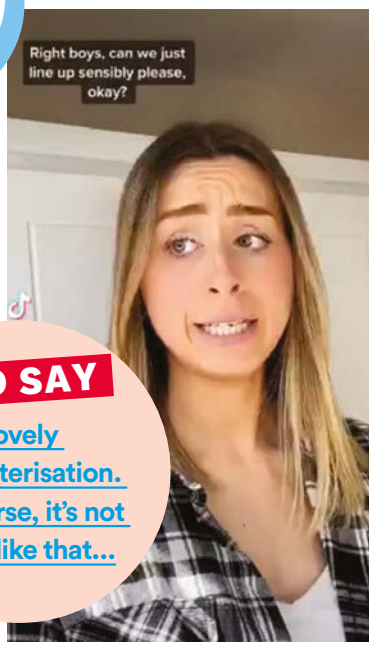
Grab a coffee and spend five minutes exploring the lighter side of CPD...

## The UNINFORMED teacher's guide to...

### @MONICAGELDART

You might not know prolific TikTok comedy performer Monica Geldart, but she knows you – teachers, that is. Across a range of of videos that pack in an impressive amount of comic invention, Geldart incisively skewers a whole host of mannerisms, facial expressions and turns of phrase that anyone working at the education coalface will instantly recognise.

Having closely observed her subjects during her day job as school art technician, she's able to conjure up an array of bite-sized comical character studies – from the PE teacher with a blithe disregard for any pupils not in the school's sports teams, to the incorrigible staff room gossip and the hilarious tragicomedy of 'that one unorganised teacher', it's riveting, rib-tickling stuff. And it's not just teachers – her TikTok, Twitter and Facebook feeds also play host to memorable takes on recalcitrant Y10s pulled out of lessons and pushy PTA parents. Truly, all of school life is here...




**DO SAY**

Lovely characterisation. Of course, it's not really like that...


**DON'T SAY**

You planted a hidden camera in my classroom, WHERE IS IT?!

## BEAT THE BUDGET

**What are we talking about?**
First Aid Champions by the British Red Cross

**What the targeted age range?**
11- to 18-year-olds

**What's on offer?**
A series of short films, picture diagrams, lesson plans and quizzes aimed at familiarising students with 17 distinct first aid skills. Each skill is explained by focusing on a key action, making them simple to explain and easy to remember.


**How might teachers use the resource?**
To meet the now statutory requirement for all school-aged to learn first aid skills, following the addition of first aid to the National Curriculum in 2019.

**Where are they available?**
firstaidchampions.redcross.org.uk/secondary

## DON'T QUOTE ME...

*"Much of the so-called inflation was (e.g.) the phenomenon of the government paying teachers for not very much teaching, when lockdown closed schools"*

*Robert Peston, Political Editor, ITV News*

## Think of a number...

**£13.5 billion**

The cost of reversing the damage done to pupils' learning following the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a report by the Education Policy Institute

**58%**

of LGBT+ young people have felt safe at school on a daily basis in the past 12 months

Source: Just Like Us

**85,000**

The number of calls and messages received by the NSPCC child abuse helpline in the year to March 2021, setting a new record high

Source: NSPCC

## ONE FOR THE WALL

"Education is the vaccine for violence"

*Edward James Olmos*

## SEND snapshot

Ofsted has produced a small scale study highlighting children and young people's experiences of SEND provision in mainstream schools, based on interviews conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the regulator's own admission, the resulting findings shouldn't be taken as a representative nationwide sample, but the direct testimonies it received from 21 pupils, (as well as staff and parents/carers) across seven mainstream schools in two different LAs highlight some notable issues.

The schools included in the survey largely favoured a pupil-centred approach when identifying needs and planning provision, but staff did not always know pupils well enough to do so properly – particularly pupils without an EHC plan.

Pupils with SEND were found to be often spending time working out of class with one or more with TAs, with some respondents raising concerns about the subsequent possibility of social exclusion and tendency for pupils to become over-reliant on individual adults. Related to this was the discovery that some pupils with SEND were spending portions of curriculum time with TAs on intervention activities taking place outside the classroom, suggesting their access to high-quality teaching was more restricted, compared to their peers.

The settings identified as offering the most effective SEND support, meanwhile, were those prioritising effective collaboration and trusting relationships between the school and parents and carers. The full report can be downloaded via bit.ly/ts104-send

## KEYNOTES AND CORRESPONDENCE

Forget the media-friendly soundbites – what else was in those speeches you missed?

THE HEADLINE:

### Education Secretary addresses the Confederation of School Trust's 2021 Annual Conference

**WHO?** Gavin Williamson **WHERE?** Online
**WHEN?** 28th April 2021

Disorderly classrooms don't just have a significant impact on children's ability to learn. They can equally have an effect on a child's mental health and wellbeing. This has always been the case. It is not a Covid byproduct. Every classroom and every playground should be a wholesome and carefree environment where every child can develop and learn and play. No parent wants to send their child to a school where bullying is rife.

So it is vital we have calm and orderly schools where pupils are able to study and learn without interference from others and where, critically of course – teachers can teach. I know that so many of the Trusts represented here today already have strong and effective behaviour policies and, just like a strong curriculum or inspiring teaching, I want this to be the case in every school in the country.

One thing I am absolutely convinced about is that every school should be mobile-free. Mobile phones are not just distracting, but when misused or overused, they can have a damaging effect on a pupil's mental health and wellbeing. This is not acceptable. I therefore fully support headteachers who ban mobile phones from the school day.

We are going to be consulting on how we can help more heads remove phones from the school day, alongside other revisions to the behaviour and discipline and expulsions guidance, later on in the year.

THE HEADLINE:

### ASCL comments on government's relaxing of rules concerning the wearing of face masks in schools

**WHO?** Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders **WHEN?** 10th May 2021

The government's decision to relax the rules around face masks in secondary schools and colleges is hard to reconcile with evidence published by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies. This evidence quite clearly said that it was important to maintain the current mitigation measures in schools, including mask wearing, in the coming months.

It seems to us that school and college leaders are once again being placed in a very difficult position because many parents and staff will obviously feel that pupils should continue to wear masks regardless of what the government thinks. For the sake of a few more weeks all this unnecessary anxiety could have been avoided and we don't understand why the government is in such a rush over this issue.

## SAVE THE DATE

21-25 JUNE National PTA Week | 16-30 JUNE Festival of Education | 21ST SEPTEMBER Free and Equal?

### 21-25 JUNE

**National PTA Week**
**Online**
**parentkind,org.uk/National-PTA-Week 53**

A week-long celebration of parent volunteers, this year's inaugural National PTA Week will include a series of informative workshops covering fundraising, marketing and events, and culminate in a virtual Awards Ceremony honouring PTAs' achievements in community engagement, school improvement and other areas, with winners receiving a financial boost to their fundraising efforts.

### 16-30 JUNE

**Festival of Education**
**Online**
**educationfest.co.uk**

This mainstay of the education calendar may have once again been forced out of its venue of Wellington College due to COVID-19, but the second virtual Festival of Education promises to deliver another array of thought-provoking panels and renowned guest speakers, plus two CPD-packed 'Friday Fest' days, across a busy two weeks in June. As was the case last year, access to the event's sessions will be entirely free.

### 21ST SEPTEMBER

**Free and Equal?**
**Lytchett Minster School in Dorset and online**
**beyondthis.co.uk/stand-up-conference**

Organised by teacher and speaker Peter Radford, in liaison with Amnesty International UK and Unicef UK's Rights Respecting School Award, Free and Equal? is a conference for schoolchildren and teachers that will examine strategies for tackling racism and inequality. Attendees will hear first-hand accounts of growing up in the UK as a person of colour, and reflect on how prejudice and unconscious bias perpetuate injustice.

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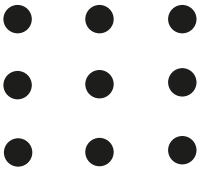
# MATHS CORNER

Intriguing problems to inspire curiosity

## Maxagon

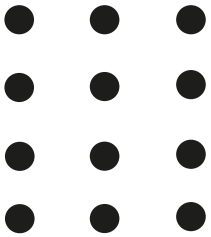
**(Wild Maths Pathway: Open spaces)**

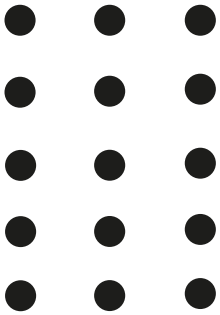
**Draw some polygons by joining the dots on a 3 x 3 grid.**



What is the greatest number of sides that your polygon could have?

What about on a 3 x 4 grid, or a 3 x 5 grid?





What about on a 3 x *n* grid?

Can you explain the pattern by which the 'number of sides' increases?

**We hope that your students enjoy Maxagon; don't forget to check the latest Live Problems at nrich.maths.org/9451 – the NRICH team looks forward to receiving solutions from your students and will publish some of the best ones on the NRICH website.**

## A FEW MINUTES OF DESIGN

### #15 JOINT ENDEAVOUR

Explain in a drawing how you would join the objects or materials on the other side of this card. You can cut them and/or multiply them if you need to. Label the drawing with instructions and indicate any extra materials you would need to make the joints sound.

It doesn't have to be a product with a recognisable function; you just have to work out how you could join the parts neatly and securely.


# Get Into Film

HE NAMED ME MALALA (2015, PG, 87 MINS)

***CURRICULUM LINKS:***

*Citizenship, Politics*

In 2012, 15 year-old Malala Yousafzai was targeted by Taliban assassins after daring to speak out against the closing of schools for girls in her area. Miraculously surviving a gunshot to the head, Malala has used her horrific experience to promote peace and advocate for access to education, especially for girls who are at risk of being denied this right.

Assembled from intimate footage filmed during 18 months with Malala and her family, this documentary from Oscar-winning director David Guggenheim charts her rise to prominence on the international stage, the reprisals from the Taliban leading to her assassination attempt and her defiant recovery.

**Discussion questions:**

- What is the effect of the footage that shows Malala at home with her family? What difficulties is Malala shown as having to face in her everyday life?
- What do the animated sequences add to the film? Why do you think the filmmaker included these?
- How does the film present the rise of the Taliban as a destructive and dangerous force in the lives of Muslim people in Iran?

***Discover more inspiring films and associated information at intofilm.org***

# Retweets

**Who's been saying what on Twitter this month?**

**Miss P Teaches @TeacherBusy**
**Perhaps I'm naive but why do we need to stick right-wing/left-wing labels on teachers just because they like discipline in their classrooms? I want smart uniform, I want discipline, I want respectful classrooms & adherence to standards. That doesn't make me right-wing.**

**Ben Parnell @MrBenParnell**
**I'm guessing leaders who kept asking to cancel exams might be looking at their staff now and thinking maybe it wasn't such a great shout... Let's never cancel exams again.**

**Follow us @teachsecondary – and let us know what you're thinkin**

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[ MATHS PROBLEM ]

# ADDING FRACTIONS

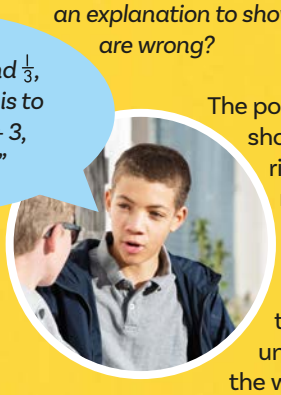
Students will often try to add fractions by separately adding the numerators and the denominators – this lesson by **Colin Foster** helps them to see why that can't be right...

**Every student knows what the 'addition' symbol means. But the familiarity of this operation can lead them into misapplying it when dealing with fractions. This lesson helps students see that simply adding numerators and adding denominators *cannot* give the right answer, and leads them to see why the correct process is needed.**

## THE DIFFICULTY

This task places an error in the mouth of a fictional student, and gives the real students the job of correcting them.

*What do you think about this? What would you say to this student?*




Some students may agree with the fictional student, but most will probably realise from how the question is posed that something must be wrong. Certainly, the fictional student's method is 'easy' – but the real students will quickly realise that it can't be right.

*Can you draw a picture to explain why the student is wrong? Can you come up with an explanation to show them that they are wrong?*

The point here is to just show why $\frac{3}{8}$ can't be right, not necessarily to find the correct answer yet. It's important to first spend time understanding why the wrong way is wrong, before rushing to the correct method.

## THE SOLUTION

Here are two ways of seeing why $\frac{3}{8}$ can't be right:

### 1. Think about size

*Roughly how big are $\frac{2}{5}$, $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{3}{8}$?*

One way to answer this might be to convert them to decimals or percentages, perhaps using a calculator: $\frac{2}{5}$ = 0.4, $\frac{1}{3}$ = 0.333... and $\frac{3}{8}$ = 0.375. We can now see that $\frac{2}{5}$ by itself is more than $\frac{3}{8}$, so $\frac{2}{5} + \frac{1}{3}$ must be even more!

Another way to illustrate this would be to make sketches, using circles or bars of equal total size *(fig 1)*.

### 2. Think about equivalence

*Write down some fractions that are equal to $\frac{2}{5}$.*

Students might list $\frac{2}{5} = \frac{4}{10} = \frac{6}{15} = \frac{8}{20} = \frac{10}{25} = \frac{12}{30}$, etc.

*Write down some fractions that are equal to $\frac{1}{3}$.*

Students might list $\frac{1}{3} = \frac{2}{6} = \frac{3}{9} = \frac{4}{12} = \frac{5}{15} = \frac{6}{18}$, etc.

You can then highlight from these the two red fractions, which we certainly can add up, because their denominators are equal: *(fig 2)*

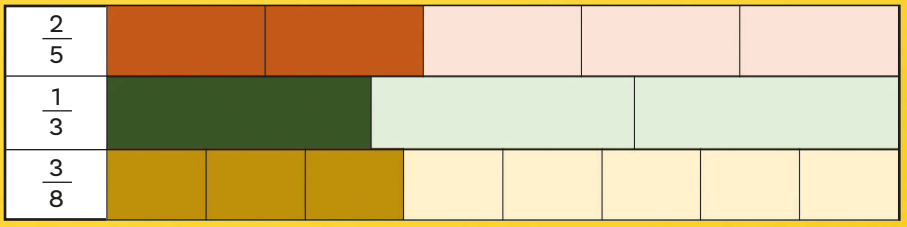
This gives the correct answer, $\frac{11}{15}$, which is a much more sensible size!

### Checking for understanding

This task will help to assess how students' understanding has developed – *Work out $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{2}{3}$ and explain in sentences how you know that your answer must be*

$$\frac{\overset{6}{\cancel{2}}}{\underset{15}{\cancel{5}}} + \frac{\overset{5}{\cancel{1}}}{\underset{15}{\cancel{3}}} = \frac{11}{15}$$

*(fig 2)*




*(fig 1)*

Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Reader in Mathematics Education at the Mathematics Education Centre at Loughborough University. He has written many books and articles for mathematics teachers. foster77.co.uk

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# The Vocab Clinic

Support your students towards better language use, with the help of our resident word-wizard, **Alex Quigley...**

## TRY THIS TODAY: ABC FEEDBACK

One essential way of developing pupils' vocabulary is to scaffold and extend upon their classroom talk. A helpful approach to extending and developing dialogue between pupils in class is to use 'ABC feedback'.

ABC offers a handy structure for pupils to build upon the vocabulary and insights of one another. Put simply, A stands for 'agree with', B for 'build upon' and C for 'challenge'. When this model is practised and honed, pupils can make more developed verbal responses, increasing the likelihood that rich, academic vocabulary is used, but also clarified and challenged.

## Cracking the academic code

Academic writing is characterised by both its vocabulary and the elegant variation of its sentence structures. Most adult experts grasp this variation intuitively, whether in an email or an essay, but for pupils, we need to make these intuitions more explicit. One feature of varied sentence openers is to begin a sentence with subordinating conjunctions, e.g. 'since', 'whereas' and 'although'.

For example, in a history essay on Henry VIII, pupils can avoid beginning each sentence with Henry himself: '*Even though the Catholic church was enraged, Henry…*' or '*Although the church resisted his advances, Henry…*'

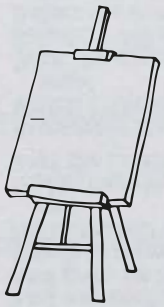
## DO THEY KNOW?

The most commonly misspelled words on CVs include 'liaise', 'university', 'achievement' and 'responsibility'

## ONE FOR: ART STUDENTS

### EXPRESSIONISM

**Derives from:** Latin for 'the action of pressing out' particularly the expression of a feeling
**Means:** In art, Expressionism was a 20th century art movement that conveyed strong, personal emotions
**Related terms:** Emotion, self-expression, Abstract Expressionism, primitivism
**Note:** The most famous Expressionist artists include Vincent Van Gogh and Edvard Munch.



## I DON'T THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS...

### TONE

**In English literature**
*= the writer or narrator's attitude towards an issue or a subject.*

**In Art**
*= the relative lightness or darkness of a colour used in a piece of art.*


## One word at a time

Often associated with drudgery and endless classroom exercises, the word 'grammar' has a rather startling story! It originally derives from Greek and '*grammatike techne*', meaning 'art of letters'. Our modern notion of grammar has since narrowed to written language and the teaching of writing. In the Middle Ages, knowledge of Latin and Greek was highly prized, so the word came to broadly mean special, often secret knowledge. In Scotland, an 'r' was switched for an 'l' to refer to the magic of a spell – and so it came to be that grammar birthed the word 'glamour'...

Alex Quigley is a former teacher and the author of *Closing the Reading Gap* and *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*; He also works for the Education Endowment Foundation as National Content Manager

# Let's ditch the despair

**Sarah Standish** explains why going heavy on the negative predictions concerning young people's post-COVID mental health carries its own set of risks...

When the world dramatically changes to the point where life as we knew it is but a memory, it's reasonable to evaluate and consider the resulting impact on the human experience.

Consequently, over the past few months we've been bombarded by news items informing us of the many negative ways in which lockdown and the pandemic have, and will continue to affect most areas of our lives. More recently, headlines have described the future of our young people in damning terms – but the messages they carry may actually be harmful.

This may sound controversial coming from a professional counsellor based at a large secondary school. In my 28-year counselling career, I've never been more acutely aware of the losses, pressures and concerns that young people are facing. I see the impact of the pandemic on a daily basis – which is why I feel we need to be more measured and thoughtful in how we discuss and debate its impact on our children's future.

## A sense of loss

How we talk as adults trickles down to those we parent, teach, mentor, coach and support. Warnings of dire future consequences and long-term damage aren't just negative and harmful in themselves, but can risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

That's not to say that young people aren't struggling, or haven't experienced emotional issues – but in my clinical experience, such responses seem entirely appropriate and normal, given the circumstances.

The predominant challenge for young people right now would seem to be the numerous losses they have experienced. In extreme cases, this has amounted to COVID-related familial deaths that have left students grieving. Initially, there was considerable concern within schools over how bereaved students would manage, but in my experience they have fared better than expected. Some have been able to benefit from short-term counselling, and most have found that with time and family support, they've managed to cope with the resulting emotional pain. A very small percentage have required more intensive support.

This picture of the bereaved is fairly consistent with what I'd have seen pre-pandemic; being bereaved is, after all, a natural, healthy response to the loss of a loved one.

Young people have also, of course, faced extreme loss in other areas of their lives, including massive disruptions to their daily routines, an absence of structure, struggles to maintain a sense of purpose day-to-day and little face-to-face contact with people outside their immediate families – to say nothing of the extracurricular provision, trips and other activities they might have otherwise taken part in over the past year.

Developmentally, young people need access to such opportunities in order to progress and create meaning in their lives. Taking risks, trying new things, experiencing success and failure, navigating social challenges, tolerating routines, developing discipline, discussing their ideas – all are necessary for growth, maturity and development, and our young people's ability to eventually develop confidence, resilience and positivity concerning their abilities and futures.

**"We need to be more measured in how we discuss the pandemic's impact"**

## Changes versus diagnoses

Moreover, young people need the physical freedom to move around, be active, control their changing bodies, compete with peers and explore their sexuality. Limiting these necessary freedoms has caused some young people's social, emotional and intellectual development to be stunted or slowed.

Connecting with similarly-aged peers is essential for young people's wellbeing. Many students have asserted that not being able to see their friends has been the hardest aspect of the pandemic to deal with, so we weren't surprised when our students greeted their return to school enthusiastically. Concerns remain over their academic progress, but it's been encouraging to see the students quickly getting stuck back into their school and social lives, and the positive impact this has had on their emotional wellbeing.

At the same time, however, I've also seen an increase in requests for counselling support from both students and parents. Students with pre-existing mental health diagnoses have experienced a higher incidence of worsening symptoms and/or crisis.

I should clarify at this point that a 'diagnosis' is far more significant than a 'mental health change'. A diagnosis requires comprehensive evaluation by a team of experts, and is usually completed by a local CAMHS team. This is why I struggle when I see people using such terminology loosely, since changes to mental health in a pandemic are normal, whereas a mental health diagnosis is a long-term health condition. Many children have, and will continue to experience mental health changes; I very much doubt that we're going to see a soaring number of new diagnoses.

## Emerging trends

That said, there have been several emerging patterns that are worth acknowledging. For one thing, I've witnessed more young people struggling with

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eating issues and disordered eating, which I attribute to higher levels of anxiety, lack of routine, infrequent exercise and the social aspect of enjoying food.

Extended periods of eating problems will eventually lead to mental health and physical concerns. GPs and local CEDS (Community Eating Disorders Services) have been a reliable resource for evaluations – though again, a very small percentage of young people have been diagnosed with eating disorders. Others have benefited from family support, nutritional guidance and a return to school and social life.

Another emerging trend has been the way in which extended periods of isolation appear to have increased the prevalence of suicidal thoughts. To be clear, this is a very concerning development, but one which may be a natural response to extended periods of lockdown and lack of stimulation.

Disturbing and concerning though this is, it's my experience that creating space for young people to discuss such thoughts and feelings is the most effective way of dealing with the issue. There are extensive resources available to those in serious crisis, but options for in-person support remain limited for now. Once the NHS fully reopens the doors to all of its services again, young people will be able access the vital support they need.

## A message of hope

A recent Academy of Ideas Forum (see bit.ly/ts104-aoi) discussed these matters at length, and a number of ideas for the future were considered. The consensus was that it was critical for young people to resume their education in school, and reconnect socially with their peers.

I would go further, however, in saying that it's critical for us, as adults, to offer messages of hope and positivity. Life has undeniably changed due to the pandemic, but young people shouldn't be denied opportunities to thrive academically, socially and physically.

I therefore encourage anyone in regular contact with young people to inject messages of hope into your interactions. You'll soon find that young people have been craving such messages, and that hearing them will help them persevere and thrive moving forwards.

I would also encourage schools to re-establish circumstances in their settings that are as near to normal as possible. Where it's practical to do so, rolling back some of the more extreme COVID-related measures in the classroom during extra-curricular, play and social activities will help generate the sense of optimism and re-engagement our young people will need to rise above this difficult time.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Sarah Standish is a school counsellor at Nower Hill High School, Pinner

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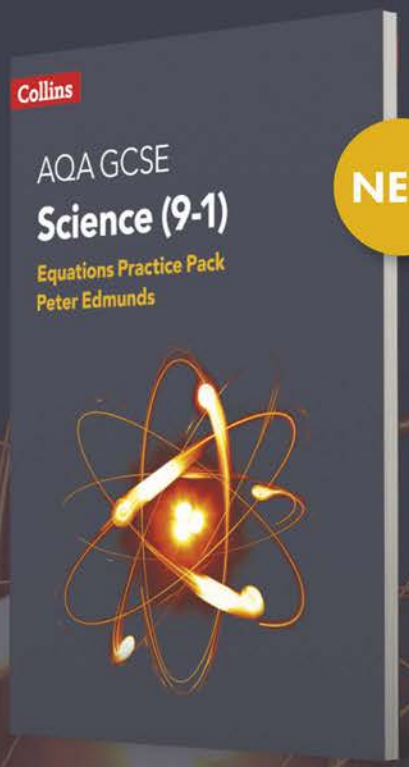


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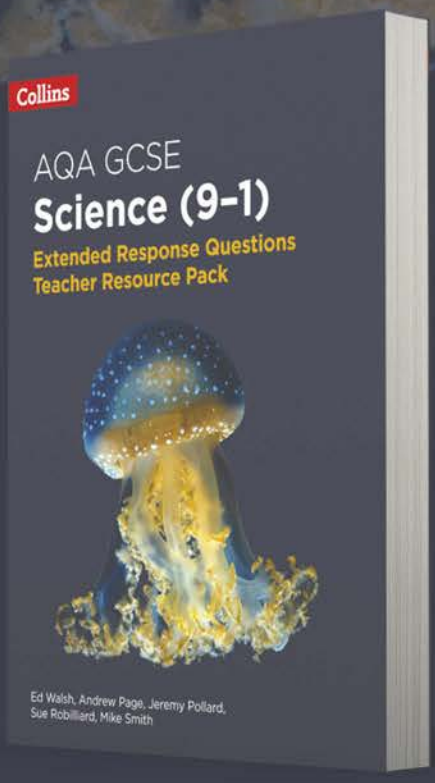


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Given the lack of co-ordinated support headteachers have had throughout the pandemic, we shouldn't be surprised if a sudden return to pre-COVID accountability measures causes many to leave the profession...

# Melissa Benn

**I've talked in this column before about the unique challenges headteachers have faced over the past year. Many still see the job in a similar way to one ex-Trust CEO, who sardonically describes it as '*The best in the world ... until it isn't.*'**

Headteachers cherish the increased appreciation of their efforts among parents and the wider community, and feel a real sense of pride at being able to keep schools going during an unprecedented public health crisis. In many ways, they've grown in professional standing – but before we get too complacent, we should recognise that there's a burgeoning problem around school leadership.

## Breaking point

A recent survey of headteachers conducted by the ASCL found that 72.4% of respondents didn't feel that they had an acceptable work/life balance, with 47.7% believing their workload to be unmanageable. More than half of the survey respondents said that they were considering quitting.

Burnout was already a growing problem well before the pandemic. A 2019 survey from the charity Education Support found that 84% of heads reported being stressed – up from 80% in 2018. Talking to headteachers over the past few months, however, it's become clear that how trusts and LAs act in relation to their school leaders is a vital element in determining how well heads are able to manage.

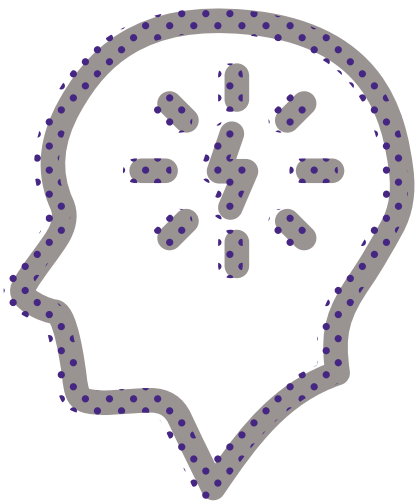
Some heads have been offered little meaningful practical support by their trusts or LAs; worse, some school leaders have even been pressured to produce the kind of data required by Ofsted before the pandemic. Coming on top of the need to manage mass remote learning while dealing with ill staff and pupils, such pressures have pushed several to breaking point.

Compare that to the position of those who have been relatively well-supported throughout the crisis, such as the 40+ secondary and primary heads within GLF Schools – a MAT educating over 16,000 pupils over five regions in the south of England.

GLF CEO Jon Chaloner told me that, "When the virus hit, our thinking was 'How do we take as much pressure off our heads as possible, so that they're able to run the school as best they can?'"

GLF's immediate response was to set up a COVID Response Committee, which, according to Chaloner, organised, "Daily Teams meetings, and prepared regular incisive communication to help heads make sense of the flood of often contradictory and ever-changing information."

For GLF primary school head Alastair Johns, this top-down provision made all the difference, enabling him to process "All the material, much of it outside my skillset. Instead, I've been able to concentrate on teaching, and pupil and family need."



## A world of difference

The lack of ongoing, nationally co-ordinated support for headteachers has even prompted one group of ex-heads to form their own professional advice line, by the name of Headrest. In fairness, the government did set up a helpline, but only as a time-limited pilot scheme funded to the puny tune of £90,000. If we don't want to see a mass and sustained exodus from headship in this country, then there's a great deal more that still needs to be done.

Firstly, government has to start listening. One of the most common problems reported to the DfE-funded helpline was that the government didn't understand what things were like on the ground. It's the belief of many heads that the government only listens to a few favoured school leaders, while not consulting widely enough or taking advice.

Secondly, once the pandemic eases, there has to be a scaling back of the unreasonable accountability demands that have been placed on schools – particularly those in disadvantaged areas. The 'Pause Ofsted' campaign had been gathering momentum before COVID-19; now, support for it will surely snowball.

Thirdly, there needs to be ongoing mentoring and support for school leaders. As one head recently put it to me, "Language is so important here. A 'helpline' implies that you're already in trouble as a professional. There's a world of difference between that and the offer of ongoing coaching, mentoring or peer-to-peer support."

The government can't say it wasn't warned. If Johnson and co. want our schools to be run properly in the years ahead – or indeed to be run at all – then they must pay urgent attention now to the many pressing needs of our nation's hard-pressed headteachers.

Melissa Benn is a writer; her latest book is *Life Lessons: The Case for a National Education Service*, published by Verso

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Rather than fixate on whether Behaviour Hubs are the 'answer' to ongoing discipline issues, we should focus on the real drivers for student behaviour – the guidance, consistency and messaging of a school's leadership...

# Nick Hurn OBE

**The government-backed Behaviour Hubs programme aims to improve pupil behaviour in schools by taking a whole school approach.**

Nominated lead schools or trusts will work closely with schools experiencing behaviour issues in order to diagnose what can be improved, before developing and launching new behaviour approaches and policies within said schools, alongside ongoing mentoring and support.

I wholeheartedly support the idea of providing guidance, systems and frameworks in order to set a high bar when it comes to students' behaviour and conduct. In my view, however, systems, guidance and rules governing behaviour are useless if not applied assiduously; should they fail, blame can invariably be placed on the quality and character of the leadership within any school establishment.

The quality of the individuals in key leadership roles will always determine standards of behaviour and attitudes among students. Leaders must be able to demonstrate to parents, staff and students alike that they possess the strength of character, determination and strategic sense needed to manage any disruptive, violent or abusive individuals intent on bullying, threatening or assaulting their peers or members of staff.

## Untended and ignored

Successful school leaders will always seek to establish good discipline and obedience early on. How else will they learn to trust others, have respect for authority and become responsible members of society?

Unfortunately, however, in today's society we often see good manners, respect, honesty and moral development go untended, or even ignored altogether. Morality, honesty and empathy have given way to moral relativism, with 'rights' spoken of more frequently than duty, care and responsibility.

It's incumbent upon any leader to ensure that the safety, happiness and general wellbeing of their staff and students is always their priority. Good behaviour and conduct within schools derives from fair, consistent and clear instructions delivered by leaders who are unflinching when difficult decisions are required.

## Under siege

And yet, all too often I've seen examples around the country of school leaders who have made correct, but difficult decisions, only to quickly retreat and reverse those decisions after being systematically attacked, pressured and even bullied by the press, parents and social media users.

When school leaders are weak and lack the conviction or courage to see such decisions through, you can assume that there will be high levels of disruption within their schools, and that their staff will feel vulnerable, unsupported and under siege.

Weak leadership, coupled with poor decisions regarding student behaviour and discipline, will result in an erosion of trust within the school community, leading to high staff absence and sickness and the eventual departure of the school's most able staff.

In 2018, the Policy Exchange think tank reported that almost two thirds of teachers were considering leaving the profession due to disruptive students, while 71% of would-be teachers were being put off by concerns around poor pupil behaviour.

## Useful tools

Behaviour Hubs, guidance, policies and systems are all helpful, but not an answer to this problem. They are merely tools that need to be wielded appropriately by the real solution to this challenge – our leaders.

If we want young people to leave school as well-rounded citizens with moral vision and a sense of service, then we need an intelligent, unshakeable and critical moral awareness to be cultivated and inspired by our school leaders.

It doesn't matter who's on the bus, or what type of bus is being driven – it's far more about the smoothness of the journey, and the safe arrival of the bus and its occupants. The success, or otherwise, of the trip will ultimately be determined by the quality, character, and the skill of the driver.

Nick Hurn is CEO of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust

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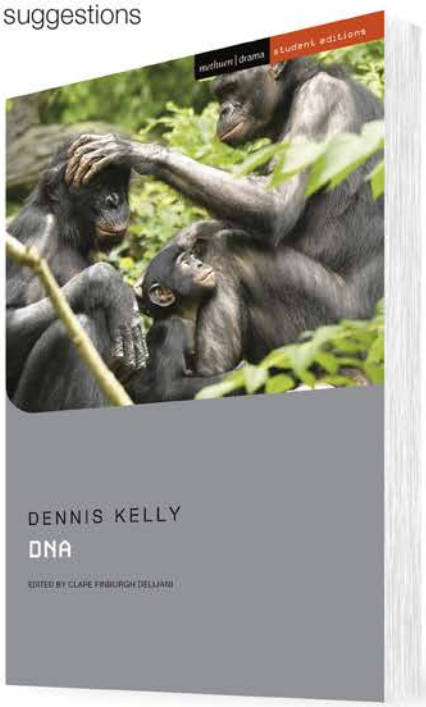


Dennis Kelly's popular play *DNA* centres on friendship, morality and responsibility in odd circumstances. When a group of young friends are faced with a terrible accident, they deliberately make the wrong choices to cover it up and find themselves in an unusually binding friendship where no one will own up to what they've done.

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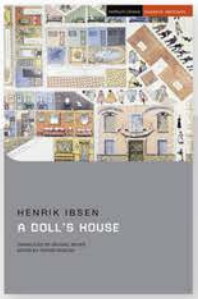


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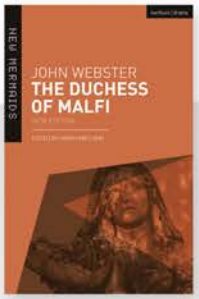


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It doesn't seem right that a school's safeguarding provision can go unaudited for as long as five years – but changing that will mean having to rethink the role that Ofsted currently plays in the process...

# Vic Goddard

**It would be fair to say that the safeguarding leads and teams at our schools have had a somewhat challenging last 15 months.**

What's become screamingly obvious to all of us is the role that we, and the education system as a whole, currently play in keeping young people safe, simply by seeing them five days a week.

The culture of safeguarding we all look to create in our schools means that staff notice things. Not just the big, obvious signs like black eyes and broken bones, but also the smallest, easy to overlook indicators that can help to fully fill out the picture of a young person's life.

## Too late

During lockdown, teachers across the country carried out doorstep visits, video calls and other home checks, because we knew that if we didn't, then who would?

Some young people were, and continue to be supported by social care services, of course – but the ability of agencies to check in on families was desperately limited, simply because the job was too big.

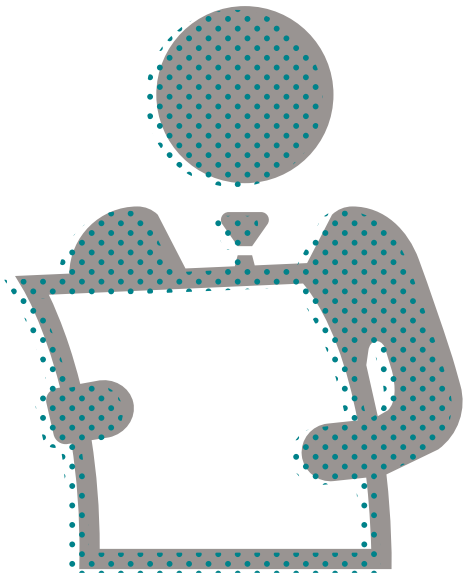
The fact is that when safeguarding goes wrong and a young person suffers, it becomes *big* news, warranting front page headlines, and rightly so. So how is it that we're still stuck with a system that allows schools to go for many years without first-hand scrutiny of its safeguarding provision through an Ofsted inspection?

Some will correctly point out that most LAs will ask schools to carry out a safeguarding audit every couple of years. But how happy are we that a self-evaluation, of one of the most important parts of our job, can be the only check taken at some schools for five years or more?

As our safeguarding lead at Passmores says, *"It's vital that no school finds out what they don't know, or what they aren't doing, when it's too late."* 'Too late' in this context could amount to a heartbreaking incident involving a child, as well as Ofsted coming in and a school failing an inspection within minutes of it starting. The long-term impact of such events will be life-changing, one way or the other.

## Safeguarding plus

In an ideal world, then, what would we want from our government so that we could feel not just monitored, but also helped to improve – before it's too late? Like many schools, we get that support and guidance by paying for it from an external provider. We subscribe to the excellent service provided by safeguarding expert Andrew Hall at SafeguardingPro (safeguarding.pro), which enables us to check our compliance against statutory requirements, and also start looking at how we might carry out 'safeguarding plus'. That is, not just doing those things we have to do, but also begin doing other things that will develop the strong safeguarding culture we all want to see as being commonplace in schools.



It's vital that safeguarding be given it's own sense of importance, away from inspections. The danger of the current setup is that safeguarding is seen as something to 'get through' when the inspection team arrives, and that the important part of getting at least a Good rating begins once we've passed that hurdle.

This is surely the wrong message. It seems to me that the best organisation to assume responsibility for checking safeguarding and improving it would be our LA. We're lucky that the safeguarding manager for Essex is excellent at her job and has been a great source of support, but she has far too little in the way of resources to be truly proactive.

Safeguarding must become an annual and developmental part of school accountability and improvement. Having support in place that can feed into our planning and signpost best practice elsewhere is the very least our young people deserve. Taking this beyond mere checklists and compliance to an in-depth understanding of need will require a greater investment of time.

If safeguarding is seen more as a hurdle to clear, rather than an ingrained part of the school's ethos and practice, then we risk making mistakes. Implementing the change I suggest would provide a real opportunity to move past the competition of Ofsted grades and league tables, and into a space of true collaboration and shared care for the communities we serve.

Vic Goddard is headteacher at Passmores Academy – as seen on Channel 4's *Educating Essex* – and author of *The Best Job in the World* (Independent Thinking Press, £14.99)

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# Know your rights

Attacks by pupils against teachers may be on the rise following lockdown, cautions **Ben Pepper** – so it's worth knowing your legal options, should the worst happen...

Recent figures released by the NASUWT have revealed that teachers received compensation totalling £11,724,853 last year for a variety of claims, including personal injury, discrimination, unfair dismissal and victimisation. Of that figure, more than £340,000 was paid out following assaults.

Teachers rightfully expect their employers to ensure their health and safety whilst at work. LAs are responsible for the majority of schools in the UK, with independent schools and MATs overseen by their own governing bodies. While the majority of injury claims brought by teachers tend to involve trips, slips and manual handling accidents, there are numerous claims being made following acts of violence.

## A teacher's rights to claim

If a teacher is assaulted by a pupil, they can bring a claim against their LA or governing body where it can be established that the teacher was owed a duty of care, that the duty was breached and that the breach caused the harm suffered.

An injured teacher might allege that the LA or governing body failed to:

- Assess the risk that the pupil might become violent
- Devise a handling plan for the pupil
- Train the teacher in relation to the pupil's needs
- Ensure that the pupil had received adequate one-to-one support.

As with all personal injury claims, each case will turn on its own facts. The experience of the individual teacher and the history of the child in question will be taken into consideration. If it can be established that the LA or governing body were responsible for the assault occurring, the teacher will need to demonstrate the extent of their injuries and losses.

Assaults in the classroom can give rise to a variety of injuries, from relatively minor soft tissue injuries to brain injuries. The severity of the injury will dictate the level of damages awarded, as will the level of financial loss suffered. The latter might include loss of earnings, and costs of care, treatment, medication and travel expenses – all of which will need to be demonstrated with evidence.

If a claim against the LA or governing body can't be established, due to there being no breach of duty, the teacher could look to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) – a government agency that provides compensations for victims of violent crime – for damages.

Personal injury claims must be issued at court within three years of the date of the incident. If proceedings aren't commenced within that time, the claimant will be legally barred from bringing a claim. The time limit for CICA claims is shorter, with applications needing to be received within two years of the incident.

## The impact of lockdown

That aforementioned figure of £340,000 in assaults compensation may seem high, given that a significant amount of teaching has been carried out remotely over the past year due to coronavirus, but it can take years for personal injury claims to come to fruition.

Many of the cases settled last year are likely to have arisen due to events preceding the pandemic. It can take time to gather documentation from schools, statements from witnesses and medical evidence concerning the severity of teachers' injuries. The recent spike in remote teaching may therefore result in such compensation levels falling over the next couple of years.

Following that, however, we could see a rise in incidences following the re-opening of schools earlier this year. Children may have struggled mentally with multiple lockdowns, and their behaviour may have declined as a result. Existing family problems at home may have been aggravated from living in close proximity for such an extended period, potentially manifesting in challenging behaviour in the classroom.

Teachers who have been assaulted by pupils should always ensure that such incidents are reported and recorded. If they wish to seek compensation for their injuries and losses, they should seek expert legal advice.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Ben Pepper is an associate at specialist law firm Bolt Burdon Kemp; for more information, visit boltburdonkemp.co.uk or follow @BoltBurdonKemp

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# Don't delay – report it

If a school receives accusations of sexual assault, any thoughts of the implications for its reputation should be far down the priority list, says **Amy Shaffron**

Recent news reports have thrown into sharp focus the multitude of sexual assault and rape allegations made by students at various schools and universities and subsequently posted to the Everyone's Invited website. In one case, a dossier compiled by current and former pupils of Highgate School claimed that rape culture was even 'tolerated' by staff, and that the school's leadership put its reputation before its pupils' welfare.

England's Children's Commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza, has since been reported as saying that schools 'Must involve police' in any serious allegations of sexual violence or harassment. That advice couldn't be any clearer, yet concerns remain that some schools are actively delaying the reporting of such allegations to their local constabulary.

It's widely suspected that a key reason for these delays is the decision by some schools to prioritise their local standing and national reputations. The reporting of sexual abuse allegations oftens leads to incident details entering the public domain – something naturally worrying for school leaderships that want to assure parents that their schools are safe environments for children and teenagers.

If that suspicion is correct, then we could be looking at a situation where children's safeguarding and wellbeing is at risk of being compromised by the very institutions that should be protecting them.

## Fair and just?

Schools that don't act expeditiously to report allegations to the police will prejudice the rights of both the victim and suspect to a fair and just trial. Delays in reporting inevitably lead to an inability to preserve crucial evidence, which could be capable of proving either innocence or guilt, thus leading to injustice.

First accounts from victims, witnesses and suspects that are delayed will become less accurate over time. Opportunities to obtain forensic evidence will be missed, and independent evidence such as CCTV footage may be deleted. This means the chances of a fair and just investigation by the police will be hindered when – or indeed if – an allegation is eventually reported to them.

Conviction rates in rape and sexual assault cases are very low, in large part due to 'evidential difficulties' experienced by prosecutors who have to rely on delayed and patchy investigations conducted at the start of a case.

In September 2020, government-sourced statistics revealed that only 1.5% of reported rape allegations that year led to a suspect being charged or receiving a summons. 56% of cases had failed due to 'evidential difficulties', while 32.1% had not yet been assigned to an outcome.

So what of those cases that went to trial? 2019-20 saw the number of rape convictions in England and Wales fall to a record low of 1,439, equating to a conviction rate of 68.5%, according to CPS data.

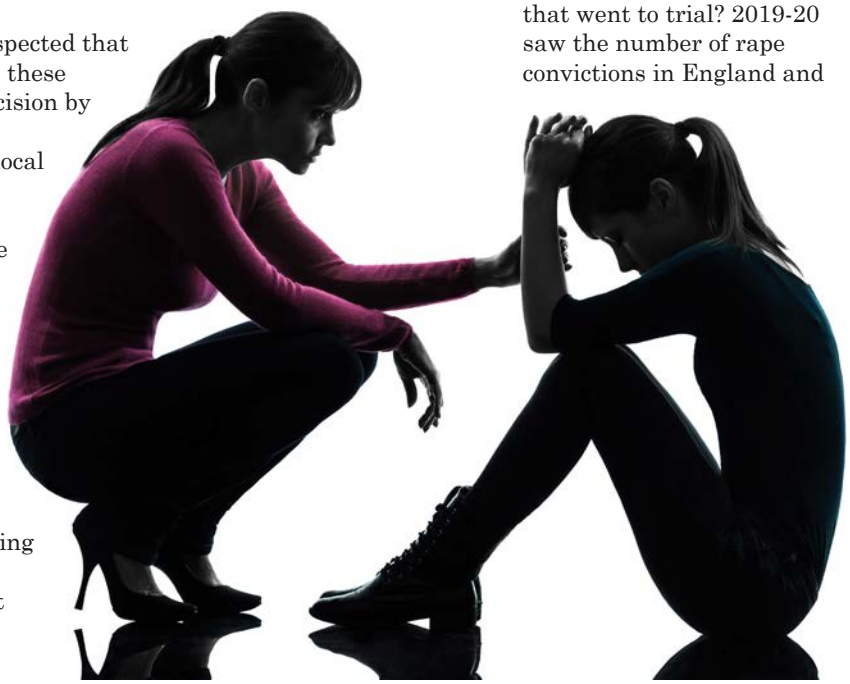
Given the high percentage of cases already impacted by delays and/or evidential difficulties, combined with the low conviction rates that follow, it's imperative that educational institutions don't hinder investigations further by delaying or failing to report matters to the police in a timely fashion.

## How should schools respond?

At its simplest, any school faced with allegations of serious criminal activity of any type, not just sexual misconduct, should report it to the police immediately.

The police are trained in evidence gathering, in a way designed to ensure fairness for both victims and suspects and avoid miscarriages of justice.

Any school that fails to report allegations may find itself in even hotter water later down the line. For an indication of what this might look like in practice, it's worth noting that Ofsted has confirmed its inspectors will be visiting all schools cited in student accounts of sexual assaults posted to the Everyone's Invited website.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Amy Shaffron is a partner at JMW Solicitors; for more information, visit jmw.co.uk or follow @jmwsolicitors


CLASSROOM LIFE

# The only way is up

Upon being appointed headteacher at All Saints Academy Plymouth, **Lee Sargeant** found dysfunction, turmoil and failure – making it exactly the type of setting he'd been looking for...

**When I saw the headship vacancy advertised at All Saints Academy Plymouth in 2018, it was a failing school in Special Measures.** It had been through considerable turmoil in terms of staffing and leadership, but the post was tempting and I was excited to apply. Having previously enrolled in Future Leaders programme, I was well-versed in what headship at a school like All Saints at that particular time would entail.

I've always felt motivated to join schools that are in challenging circumstances, because the aspect of school leadership I enjoy most is coming on board, sorting out problems, setting a vision and embarking on that journey out of Special Measures and towards Good.

My initial aim was to give the community a really good school where children would have good learning experiences, be taught well and achieve good outcomes – because when I got here, the school was fundamentally broken in all senses of the word. I believe it was actually on a Minister's list of the worst 100 schools in the country. Outcomes were poor, as was behaviour, and its leadership had been lacking.

I remember feeling a profound sense of injustice, that these children deserved better. If they went to school five miles down the road, they'd be getting a very different learning experience and potentially very different life chances as a result. It was a disparity I couldn't stand, and became determined to give these children better opportunities.

**I REMEMBER FEELING A PROFOUND SENSE OF INJUSTICE, THAT THESE CHILDREN DESERVED BETTER. IF THEY WENT TO SCHOOL FIVE MILES DOWN THE ROAD, THEY'D BE GETTING A VERY DIFFERENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND POTENTIALLY VERY DIFFERENT LIFE CHANCES.**

***LEE SARGEANT, HEADTEACHER***

## Calm and purposeful

We began by spending a considerable amount of time working on culture, behaviour and recruiting good teaching staff. There were multiple teaching vacancies when I arrived, for the simple reason that nobody wanted to work here. Getting the students good teachers therefore became a key priority, alongside creating a calm and purposeful learning environment. We also made sure to get a range of extracurricular activities up and running, so that we could become a school where students would actually want to spend time, and in which they could feel safe.

Over the past couple of years we've almost doubled the number of children getting a good GCSEs in English and maths, but there's still work to be done. Outcomes at GCSE can be improved further, but we're well on our way to achieving that. We've been able to recruit a full complement of staff in terms of subject specialists, and can therefore offer students a great range of subjects to support their career ambitions.

Needless to say, the pandemic hasn't exactly helped with our school improvement journey over the past year, but we're now back on track. The students have all returned, to what's a fundamentally better school compared to how things were three years ago. The children enjoy coming to school, which certainly wasn't the case back then.

## Clear boundaries

When it came to behaviour, I took the opportunity early on to encourage a culture of mutual respect. Our mantra here is '*Work hard and be kind*'; we expect students to work hard and be kind to one another, and will support them in doing that via a system of rewards when they get things right.

Every Wednesday, for example, students are encouraged to show us work that they're really proud of, for which they may be rewarded with a goodie bag containing stationery and chocolate. Students need the motivation to want to come here, because that's ultimately how we're going to change the school for the better – not just by giving out detentions and excluding children.

We aim to set out very clear boundaries in terms of what's

## IN NUMBERS

**Established:** Founded in 1960s as Barrington Community College, later renamed to John Kitto Community College and finally All Saints Academy Plymouth upon joining the Ted Wragg Trust in 2018

**Converted:** In 2013, with Diocese of Exeter as principal sponsor

**Student population:** 600 on roll

**Staff:** 40

expected from our students. In every classroom there's a poster that says, *'As a student, you deserve disruption-free learning, 100% of the time'.* Students know that if they disrupt the learning of others, they can't and won't remain in that lesson.

### Wraparound care

We've also made sure to put in place some robust support mechanisms. Soon after arriving here, I invested heavily in the school's pastoral support team. Every student in the school is assigned to a student support officer – non-teaching members of staff who are each responsible for around 150 students, and whose duties involve checking in with students every morning and being available throughout the day to resolve any problems. They've been instrumental in helping our students continue to thrive.

Our student support officers also serve as the main point of contact for families, so that if, for example, a family is entitled to financial hardship funding for school uniform, they'll receive support in obtaining it. We also have a group of staff in school who, pre-COVID, used to run parental workshops on Fridays, with a different theme each week.

As I know from my own children, being a working mum or dad is really tough, which is why we want to support our students' busy families as much as we can. We provide wraparound care that functions in much the same way as similar provision in primary schools, including before-school breakfast clubs and after-school activity clubs.

Looking back, the support we introduced definitely helped with our response to the pandemic, though we had to review the role of student support officers when the bulk of students weren't present in school. They would assist with our pastoral team's daily home phone calls and check-ins, and were out delivering food parcels when required – they were absolutely fantastic in terms of the support they were able to provide when we entered lockdown for the first time.

### Lessons learned

We entered the second general lockdown having learnt a number of lessons, and after formulating contingency plans over the summer of 2020. Things were much smoother as a result, and we had far more engagement with our online learning, due to how our offering had evolved and the ways in which we'd set things up.

The main thing we learned was to not underestimate the importance of frequent check-ins. The first lockdown saw us contacting some of our parents daily, but not all of them, and not always in direct response to distance learning concerns. During the second lockdown, the moment it became clear that a student wasn't logged on in the morning, they'd be contacted immediately, while any students that persistently didn't engage would revert to learning in school.

The second lockdown also saw us incorporate more lessons on mental health and wellbeing into our online learning, weekly assemblies and class discussions. We set up shared spaces where students could post messages, and hosted a number of live lessons and assemblies that gave the children the chance to talk directly to members of staff.

Our next steps now are to carry out a five-year plan we devised in late 2019 called Vision 2025, focusing on delivering a high quality curriculum through high quality teaching and learning, and securing good outcomes that will the students set up for further education and employment training.

**DOWNLOAD**

A graphical illustration of All Saints Academy's Vision 2025 plan at

**teachwire.net/all-saints**

Another component of the plan is to continue developing the pastoral work we do, so that all students know that they're well supported when in school.

When our children leave us at the end of Y11, I obviously want them to do so with a great set of exam results – but also as good, well-rounded, tolerant and respectful people. We want them to be the kind of individuals that can go on to become leaders themselves, and in time, hopefully contribute to making the world a better place.

# Time to reflect

*Moira Marder, CEO of the Exteter-based Ted Wragg Trust, looks back on her main takeaways from the past year...*

The past year has highlighted for me some of great things about being a local values-driven trust. It's made me love what I do even more, which sounds a bit wishy-washy, but it's the truth. We've got an opportunity now, in the absence of Ofsted and league tables, to really reflect on our practice, what works and how the system can be configured more effectively to support mental health strategies, reduce exclusions and improve attendance.

It's possible to become quite fixated on a narrow side of education, whereas we now have the opportunity to think much more widely about the impact of education in its truest sense. More practically, the introduction of blended learning and remote communication isn't going away. I still consider those face-to-face, human connections to be really important, but I'm also now able to link with networks outside of my own trust, and communicate and learn from leaders elsewhere in the country in a much more efficient and effective way than than was possible prior to the pandemic. I can see that continuing to really enhance what we're able to do, moving forward.

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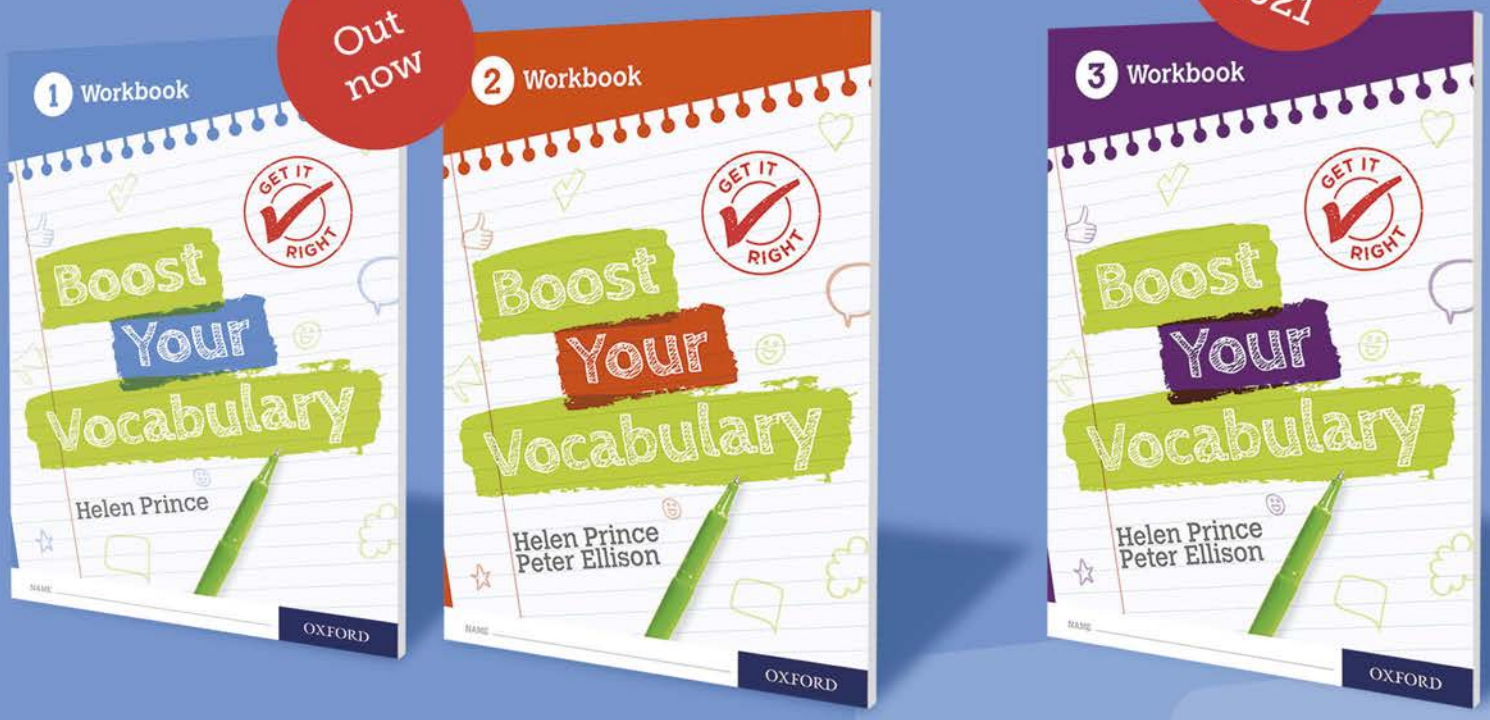


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OXFORD

REASONS TO TRY...

# 5 Get It Right: Boost Your Vocabulary

Find out how this Oxford University Press series can take your students' vocabulary to the next level

## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Each workbook in the *Get It Right: Boost Your Vocabulary* series offers targeted support for expanding students' vocabulary and addressing the word gap by exploring ambitious words in context and unpicking layers of meaning, resulting in more confident readers and articulate writers.

### 1 RESEARCH-INFORMED CONTENT

Each workbook includes a range of carefully selected tier 2 words drawn from the Oxford Children's Corpus (a unique database of authentic children's language that contains over 440 million words written by, and for, children) and from academic vocabulary. These aspirational words have been selected to help students access more challenging texts and empower them to use more sophisticated vocabulary in their own writing.

### 2 WORD WEBS

Each unit in the workbooks uses a single, aspirational word as a starting point, together with accessible definitions and student-friendly examples. However, these words aren't explored in isolation; each focus word is also presented alongside a 'word web' that includes a selection of synonyms, antonyms and other related words. These 'word webs' encourage students to build a rich schema by making connections between words, unpicking layers of meaning, and exploring connotations and nuance.

### 3 AN ACTIVE APPROACH

This series provides a clearly structured, active approach to building students' vocabulary through a sequence of levelled activities, alongside a selection of engaging fiction and non-fiction extracts. Comprehension-style activities serve as a useful checkpoint for teachers and learners, testing students' basic understanding of each word and teasing out misconceptions. 'Explore the meaning' activities encourage students to think more deeply about layers of meaning, including connotations and synonyms. Reading tasks help students to contextualise the focus words, while writing tasks challenge students to put those new words into practice.

### 4 ENGAGING FEATURES

The workbooks are bursting with interesting features designed to energise vocabulary teaching and learning. 'Have your say' tasks support the use of oracy in vocabulary learning and offer thought-provoking questions to encourage lively discussion and debate. The 'Word knowledge' feature, meanwhile, provides key information about the etymology or morphology of a focus word, helping to deepen students' understanding and provide them with the tools they'll need to decode other unfamiliar vocabulary that they encounter.

### 5 EASE OF USE

The workbooks are designed to be used flexibly, depending on your students' needs. Each standalone unit can fit seamlessly into existing schemes of work, while the short, sharp and focused nature of the content makes it ideal for lesson starters or targeted intervention. Each workbook contains all the information students will need to confidently complete the activities, including definitions for synonyms and 'word web' vocabulary, making it perfect for homework.

All answers can then be obtained via the Oxford University Press website, saving you valuable time.

**Contact:**
Find out more at www.oxfordsecondary.com/boostyourvocabulary

## KEY POINTS

- A highly flexible, standalone literacy resource that can be easily incorporated into existing schemes of work – ideal for intervention or homework
- Carefully chosen, aspirational words drawn from the Oxford Children's Corpus: a research-informed children's language database
- Each workbook in the series features a number of contextualised activities, based on a wide variety of engaging fiction and non-fiction source texts
- Produced by expert authors with extensive classroom experience and an understanding of the primary to secondary transition

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TEA-AD-0006 04/21

# A theatrical nation

**Jenna Omeltschenko** highlights the valuable role of local partnerships between schools and theatres at an uncertain time for both...

When live performances of *Dick Whittington* at the National Theatre were closed last December during the third UK lockdown, the National Theatre worked quickly to find a way of sharing the production so that families and schools could still partake in their annual festive visits to the pantomime.

The production was brilliantly captured by our Broadcast team, and streamed for free on YouTube for families and young people across the world to enjoy. We also created activity packs to help children further explore the production, learn about pantomime traditions and create their own reviews. The materials were made available online, and 3,675 physical packs were posted out to schools, community centres and youth centres across the UK.

## Inequality of access

This type of nationwide work forms part of the NT's Theatre Nation Partnerships initiative, aimed at growing and sustaining audiences for theatre productions in collaboration with local theatres and schools across six key regional areas – Sunderland, Wakefield, Doncaster, Hornchurch, Greater Manchester and Wolverhampton.

Over the past three years, the project has sought to broaden audiences through touring productions, creating theatre with local communities and working closely with schools and teachers. As such, it's more important than ever that we listen to and support teachers in ensuring that the arts remain an integral part of the curriculum.

We know from our discussions with teachers that the many lasting effects of the pandemic are set to include a further erosion of arts provision in schools, worsening the inequality of access to arts education that already exists in some parts of the country. Drama, after all, is a practical subject combining group work, movement and vocal exercises in a way that's very difficult to recreate online. Some teachers are concerned that their students have fallen behind in their practical skills, to the extent that their confidence will need to be rebuilt.

And yet, even as theatres remain closed, many have been quick to reach out to schools and share various resources with them, in an effort to provide young people with creative opportunities they can take part in and help keep the spark of theatre alive.

## A sense of fun

The NT recently filmed a 90-minute contemporary production of *Romeo and Juliet* (pictured) – the most widely studied of Shakespeare's plays at GCSE. We were able to share the production with 70 other schools through our Theatre Nation Partnerships network, so that pupils and teachers could watch the production together in their classrooms, and get to recreate at least part of the experience of being in a theatre.

This was accompanied by a set of digital resources exploring how the production was developed. These included video rehearsal diaries with cast members, plus a documentary examining the craft involved in the play's staging, as well as scripts, guidance on lighting design and replica props to help bring the production to life in lessons. We wanted to create a sense of fun and theatrical magic for teachers and young people alike, in recognition of the challenging year they've had.

Teachers currently have the option of taking part in the National Theatre's digitally delivered professional development, which looks at how the production can be used creatively to teach English and drama. We've also invited teachers and students to share their own creative responses to the production with our national network.

We hope to now build on this work by continuing to share the production among even more schools across the UK. At the NT, we must do all we can to support teachers – with the help of the aforementioned resources, but also by sharing our optimism that theatres will eventually reopen, once again making it possible to enjoy that collective live theatre experience that's like no other.

**National Theatre**

The NT makes theatre for everyone, staging productions in London, on tour nationwide and worldwide, and via digital broadcasts, while supporting creative education through nationwide learning programmes.

Jenna Omeltschenko is the National Theatre's touring partnerships manager; for more details, visit nationaltheatre.org.uk/learning or follow @NationalTheatre

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# THE TS GUIDE TO... LITERACY

This issue, we examine reading in school – at the factors preventing students from becoming enthusiastic readers, and at why raising literacy levels is everyone's responsibility...

## IN THIS SECTION



## IN FIGURES: COULD TECHNOLOGY IMPROVE TEENS' LITERACY SKILLS?

**49.5%**
Percentage of 11- to 14-year-olds who say they enjoy reading; the same sentiment is expressed by a markedly higher 71.9% of 9- to 11-year-olds

**34.3%**
Proportion of young people who agree with the statement 'Reading on screen is cooler than reading a book'

**23.3%**
Proportion of teachers who report having had no initial or ongoing training in using technology to support the learning of literacy

Source: National Literacy Trust

**3** TEACHWIRE ARTICLES FROM THE ARCHIVES

**LITERACY LEVELS IN CHALLENGING SCHOOLS**
Sarah Hancock describes how a city-wide network in Stoke-on-Trent found a way of helping every student unlock GCSE success
**bit.ly/104special1**

**USING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT LITERACY**
Avoid the 'distraction factor' in digital learning and use edtech effectively to boost pupils' literacy, says Sophie Thomson...
**bit.ly/104special2**

**HELP STUDENTS SPOT FAKE NEWS**
In a world of increasingly outlandish reality, it's crucial that we arm students with the skills they'll need to read between the lines, says Jonathan Douglas...
**bit.ly/104special3**

# READING AND REGISTRATION

**Zoe Enser** unpacks the power that a teacher-led, tutor time reading programme can have

We know that being exposed to stories – be it via listening to them, creating them or independently reading them – improves standards of literacy. It's a statement that feels intuitively right. One of the very first things most parents will do with their children from babyhood is pore over the pages of books like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, before heading off together on a bear hunt with glee.

Young children love storytelling, and the process of immersing themselves in elaborate tales that help to shape their understanding of the world around them – yet all too often, this kind of shared creation and reading of stories is abandoned once they leave primary school.

## Teacher-led reading

Stories are powerful tools for learning. In his book *Why Don't Students Like School?*, Daniel Willingham devotes a whole section to the importance of stories, arguing that, "The human mind seems exquisitely tuned to understand and remember stories – so much so, that psychologists sometimes refer to stories as 'psychologically privileged', meaning that they are treated differently in memory than other types of material."

It seems, then, that stories are a vital tool for learning, with the human mind literally hardwired to remember them. Throughout history, stories have been shared within communities to not only to pass on wisdom and knowledge from one generation to the next, but from one person to another. Stories are powerful.

To return to our previous statement about stories improving literacy – what if we could find an additional place for stories in school, outside of dedicated English lessons? What potential might there be for a carefully designed tutor programme, one focused on teacher-led reading, to support whole school literacy?

Historically, tutor reading programmes have relied on a personal choice of texts. While I'd be loath to tell students eager to enhance their reading skills they can't have any choice, the time we have with our students in school is limited. That means that if we're serious about developing students'

***"Stories are a vital tool for learning, with the human mind literally hardwired to remember them"***

literacy, then a good place to begin would be with a tutor reading programme, whereby teachers read shared texts with the whole class.

## A positive start

In 2017, the University of Texas published a short article outlining how sharing stories and reading them aloud to students had a notable impact on literacy levels (see bit.ly/ts104-lit1). By reading to students across all subjects, with staff modelling fluency and the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar vocabulary, they found a general increase in students' phonological awareness and language development, which sounds like a positive start.

Reading aloud also has the added benefit of positioning teachers to guide students through challenging texts which they may not yet be able to access thselves. This gives students opportunities to engage with interesting, enriching stories that might feature sophisticated vocabulary and structures, as well as challenging content.

Some students will prefer to stay firmly within their comfort zones when reading independently, sticking with familiar books that offer little challenge. There's no doubt that developing reading can be hard work, but sticking only with what you know means less exposure to rich vocabulary, and less chance of fostering a well-developed inner voice – without which, a student's ability to enjoy the pace and rhythm of more advanced stories will be severely diminished.

How many students have you met who have continued to slog through the same small selection of texts – or indeed the same text – for most of the school year?

Some students may be able to decode the words before them, but when you try to discuss the text with them, they'll often be found to have lost the thread of even relatively simple stories, their narratives becoming increasingly fragmented as they limp through yet another session, accompanied by the ticking of the clock and the rustle of their neighbour's pages, drawing them out of a story frequently designed for much younger readers. Is it any wonder that personal reading sessions within tutor time are often filled with readers who are competent, but reluctant to engage?

## Fast reading

Research carried out at Sussex University in 2017 further seems to suggest that teacher-led reading could deliver significant benefits for all students (see bit.ly/ts104-lit2). In a small-scale study, the researchers examined the technique of 'fast reading' – in which two challenging texts are read aloud back to back in English lessons – and explored the impact on readers below their chronological reading age, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who already achieving well in reading tests.

On average, the students made reading comprehension gains of 8.5 months. The team concluded that students often encounter texts as fragments across the curriculum, just like those students plugging away at personal reading during tutor time and losing the thread.

The benefits of hearing the pace, rhythms and structures of whole texts had a significant impact on students' understanding of the stories being told – stories we know they're already primed to remember in the long term, despite the material being challenging.

This again suggests that a well thought out, teacher-led reading programme conducted in tutor time could prove fruitful in developing reading comprehension – but that's not to say that there are gains to be had in literacy alone.

There's also an opportunity here for us to use this as a vehicle for broadening students' knowledge and cultural literacy too. If we can enable students to access a range of texts they might never have experienced without us, then we can build firm foundations for their later learning and later life.

## Primed for retention

Great literary texts of all persuasions tend to be in dialogue with some of the most important questions humanity has grappled with throughout the ages and across many cultures. By giving students access to a wide range of authors, settings, characters, and stories, we can empower them to engage further with such ideas themselves.

They may not love all that they read within those sessions, of course – but through experiencing the villains, heroes, trials and triumphs of great literature, they will at least be much better equipped to explore similar issues in their own lives as they encounter them.

Returning to Willingham's earlier point, these are also stories that are likely to stay with students, since their brains are primed for retention. Think back to your own days at school, and consider what you're still able to recall and why. Chances are, at least some of those memories will involve stories you heard read aloud (for me, it was *The Owl Service*) and tales related to you by teachers and friends.

It's these that can stick with us the most, lingering on in the background of our minds and ultimately shaping who we are and who we want to be. Reading in tutor time can free us from the constraints of content coverage, mark schemes and analysis that often plague our curriculum. Instead, we're allowed to experience stories in a wholly different, and much more positive way.

## ALTOGETHER NOW...

The communal experience afforded by a shared tutor reading programme is worth keeping in mind. After all, there's a reason why performance and theatrical traditions have had such prominent place within our society, going right back to ancient Greece.

As we laugh and cry, both at and with the characters we follow, our sense of group cohesion strengthens and our relationships grow as a result. Even in the absence of any impact on student literacy levels, this communal experience alone would make every page shared in tutor time well worth the effort.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Zoe Enser is a specialist advisor for English at The Education People; for more information, visit theeducationpeople.org or follow @greeborunner

# 5 REASONS TO TRY... Read Write Inc. Fresh Start

A phonics-based literacy intervention for struggling KS3 readers

### 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Read Write Inc. Fresh Start is a catch-up and intervention programme for 9- to 13-year-olds still struggling with learning to read. Specially designed to engage and motivate older learners with age-appropriate resources, it's proven to give them a fresh start with reading and writing.

## 1 PROVEN TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS

Fresh Start teaches students step-by-step to read accurately and fluently with good comprehension, spell correctly and compose their ideas for writing. Using a proven phonics-based approach developed by Ruth Miskin, it accelerates progress with finely-levelled Modules, supplemented by age-appropriate Anthologies. A five-and-a-half month trial conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation found that learners supported by the Fresh Start programme made three months' additional progress in reading when measured using the New Group Reading Test.

## 2 SUCCESS FROM THE START

Engaging stories and non-fiction texts in the Fresh Start Modules and Anthologies are matched to students' increasing phonic knowledge and familiarity with 'tricky' words, ensuring they experience success from the start and quickly grow in confidence. Texts are read and discussed several times to develop fluency, while a range of comprehension and writing activities provides practice in the sounds and graphemes taught in the phonics lessons. The lively, magazine-format Anthologies provide further phonics practice in school or at home.

## 3 CONFIDENT COMPOSITION

Alongside reading, Fresh Start students are taught spelling, vocabulary and grammar. Writing every day, students rehearse out loud what they want to write sentence-by-sentence, until they are confident enough to write independently, drawing on their increasing phonic knowledge. The breadth of vocabulary introduced in their reading soon leads to an adventurous choice of words in their writing too.

**Contact:**
For more information about Read Write Inc. Fresh Start, please visit oxford.ly/FreshStart

## 4 SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WHO NEED IT MOST

Fresh Start can be delivered flexibly, depending on the number of students requiring support and the staff available. A clear structure helps you fit it into your timetable, with step-by-step guidance for all lessons and day-by-day lesson plans. Students are assessed and grouped according to their phonic knowledge, with integrated ongoing assessment, so that you can ensure every student makes the best possible progress.

## 5 INTENSIVE TUTORING

Fast Track Tutoring breaks down the Fresh Start programme into smaller steps to provide focused catch-up support for individuals or pairs. Tutor Packs and take-home Student Packs at three different levels, supported by expert training, allow tutors to intensively target specific gaps in a student's reading to help them make speedy progress. Offering 25 minutes per day of intensive tuition, Fast Track Tutoring is particularly useful for schools with low numbers of struggling readers at different starting points.

## KEY POINTS

- A carefully-levelled phonics programme, written and developed by Ruth Miskin, that's been proven to deliver improved results as measured by the New Group Reading Test
- Made to flexibly fit into your timetable with detailed guidance – choose the full Fresh Start programme or Fast Track Tutoring according to students' needs
- Training delivered by Ruth Miskin Training helps you practise and prepare before teaching, and model management strategies for better engagement and rapid progress
- Designed for ages 9 and up, Fresh Start's Modules and Anthologies contain lively stories and non-fiction texts that will engage older learners while matching their phonic knowledge

# *A shameful* FAILURE

Concerns over 'lockdown illiteracy' serve to conceal systemic issues with reading in schools that stretch back decades, says **Katy Parkinson**

The Prime Minister's admission last month that we're on the cusp of an 'illiteracy surge' came as no shock to me. Throughout this pandemic year, I've discussed with the staff here at Lexonik, as well as various schools and colleagues across the country, my fervent belief that gaps in reading and vocabulary skills for disadvantaged children heading into Y7 will be worse than ever. And that's not even the worst of it.

The greatest tragedy is that many of us who have spent years at the coalface of education and literacy attainment have long recognised that the system has needed to change – and yet nothing ever has. We've been talking about these issues in some form or other for so long that it's become a well-established 'fact' that children living in 'persistent poverty' are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to making academic progress.

## Headline-grabber

What we therefore can't do is let the government frame its action on literacy now as some kind of 'COVID catch-up' effort. To do so would amount to a shameful dismissal of a problem with roots stretching back decades.

Having been a teacher for 25 years, I created Lexonik out of frustration at how literacy and vocabulary cognition was understood at the time. Back then, I couldn't see why it had taken so long to recognise that children needed help in learning the methodology behind literacy, and seeing it as a skill.

This latest headline-grabber comes across to me as little more than rhetoric. Real, sustainable improvement would involve changing our delivery and how teachers practice the art of teaching literacy.

I applaud every teacher and parent who has done such incredible work over this last year. I've been gratified to see how the value of online learning has become widely recognised over the course of the pandemic – but I also know, without any shadow of doubt, that children thrive with face-to-face teaching.

Literacy development demands far more than the teaching of structure via screens – it also requires exposure to the nuances of expert questioning and oral reasoning, which is best delivered when students are in the physical presence of a skilled teacher.

## Serious concerns

I have serious concerns regarding the ability of Y6 pupils to adjust to the reading expectations of Y7. I simply don't believe that they'll be fully prepared for the secondary curriculum, due to the disruption of their literacy progress over the last 12 months. As well as widening the gap for disadvantaged youngsters, we should acknowledge that we may well see less, or non-disadvantaged children affected as well.

In cases where two parents have been busy trying to work from home, while grappling with the time and resource challenges presented by home schooling, we can expect to see a notable lack of progression.

I remain hopeful that these issues will prompt some significant change in how literacy is taught and understood – but without meaningful action from government and support directed towards education professionals, I fear we'll continue to have those conversations for many more years to come...

## 4 TIPS FOR INCREASING LITERACY ATTAINMENT:

1 **Explicitly teach reading and vocabulary skills**
The language of your subject – and ensuring students understand it – is just as important as the content itself.

2 **Teach the need, not the label**
Diagnostic assessments will pinpoint students' needs; these can then be taught in small group interventions or with a whole class.

3 **Reading automaticity is vital**
Don't practise aspects of literacy with students until they simply get them right – practise until they can't get them wrong.

4 **Ask for help**
Not everyone's an English teacher; if there are areas of literacy you don't feel comfortable with, you should feel able to ask for training and support.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Katy Parkinson is the founder and director of the literacy education system Lexonik, and a former senior learning and language advisor; for more details, visit lexonik.co.uk or follow **@LexonikST**

# *Why literacy is a* TEAM EFFORT

A school's English department will be the first line of response when it comes to raising students' literacy levels, says **Jayn Sadler** – but teaching staff in other subjects have a crucial part to play as well...

One of the biggest pushes in literacy we've seen over the last couple of years is in reading not just for purpose and pleasure, but also the promotion of successful, whole school reading.

Teachers up and down the country have been sent on courses designed to help address reading demands across the secondary school environment. Lots of fantastic ideas have been shared throughout the teaching community, making for a collaborative approach to 'reading' that in lots of ways has been a great success., Many teachers now possess the tools necessary to engage and encourage reading amongst young people, no matter which faculty they belong to.

## Ambling through

And yet, whilst I'd love to confirm that reading amongst young people has shot up dramatically, giving rise to a whole new generation of comparatively advanced readers, that sadly isn't the case.

On the contrary, promoting the cause of reading within schools can still feel like an uphill, almost unwinnable battle.

Of course, it hardly helps that we're all increasingly concerned with how much 'reading' – of books, specifically – has been cast aside in favour of other 21st century pastimes, such as social media, round-the-clock television and gaming. In my honest opinion, though, as both an educator and a mother, the main problem we face with respect to reading stems mostly from the younger generation's propensity to seek immediate gratification.

The act of reading a novel simply can't compete in this area, at a time when the modern world is so drenched in technology – but then it was never meant to. It's still the case that some of our more proficient students can read a book within a day, while most will amble through a book over the course of a couple of weeks, or perhaps longer.

It appears that reading books simply takes too long these days, since the transfer of information – from the world to individuals, and from one individual to another – can now be conducted at breakneck speed, thanks to the internet and digital platforms (both of which only serve to exacerbate those cravings for immediate gratification even further).

## An uplift of reading

There may be no hard and fast answers to the challenges of how to engage students with reading, but as educators we do need to be at the cutting edge of the latest strategies for addressing engagement with reading wherever possible. We also need to make sure that every department within the school community can play its part in a general 'uplift' of enthusiasm for reading.

> ***"The issues we currently face around reading demand a more holistic, joined-up approach"***

Far from being the sole preserve of English departments, responsibility for encouraging engagement with reading and widening access to literacy should rest with everybody, regardless the subject they teach.

What, then, are some 'quick wins' that teachers of other subjects can secure when it comes to enhancing students' reading skills?

### Terminology booklets

Every department can contribute to the production of regularly updated 'Subject terminology' booklets that incorporate all the specialist terms students will need to know for every subject. These could be issued to students upon starting at the school or when entering a specific year group, and potentially be updated annually.

There may be time and cost considerations involved, but if possible, it should be a physical document, rather than an electronic publication that lives online. This might seem like an old-fashioned reversion to the slow, pre-digital era,, but having the booklets exist in physical form will allow students to freely browse through them and cross-reference terminology from across all faculties, helping them build on and widen their vocabulary in a flexible and straightforward way.

### Word etymology

Investigating a word's etymology, by borrowing the approach shared by palaeontologists, historians and archaeologists, can be a great way of uncovering a word's true meaning and/or derivatives. Getting students to play around with the etymology and morphology of subject-specific terms can form the basis of great starter activities. Ask students to apply common prefixes and suffixes, or experiment with nouns, adjectives and adverbs, in order to help them expand their vocabulary.

### Ongoing professional development

All teachers should be trained in how to deliver

reading skills. It really is that simple. Every teacher needs to understand the common barriers that can inhibit students' ability to read, and how to overcome these. As an English teacher myself, the teaching of reading skills is my professional bread-and-butter. At the same time, I've learned to never underestimate just how little some teachers in other fields know about the effective teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation!

That's perhaps inevitable, given the fierce passion that many teachers have for their subject, to the exclusion of everything else (rare is the dedicated maths genius who also takes a close interest in the wonderful comma). Yet it remains the case that the issues we currently face around reading demand a more holistic, joined-up approach, due to an evolution of what's needed, in terms of general teaching and learning.

Any in-school literacy training programmes for staff should be written and implemented by those in charge of teaching and learning, and delivered regularly to ensure that the issue of whole-school literacy doesn't fall off the radar. It always amazes me to see how many fantastic initiatives simply wither and die after their initial introduction, due to the various highly pressurised daily demands that come with the job.

### Reading weeks

These can work extremely well, given sufficient implementation time and buy-in from colleagues. Schools could introduce competitions around reading and vocabulary work, and set aside a designated week (or even month) for school-wide, reading-related activities, communicated via consistent messaging and branding.

Those activities could, for instance, include a 'Shakespeare soliloquy' competition, 'science versus religion' debating competitions, marking the week with a specially produced departmental student newsletter, a student contest modelled on *Countdown*, or even a 'Word Fayre', where students gain digital credits for using certain vocabulary in class or in their written work, which they then get to spend at a Fayre held at the school, exchanging their credits for selected items and gifts.

### In-subject, guided reading

Finally, teachers in every subject should read to students, read together with students, or have students echo the reading. Many do this already, of course, but a fair few don't. It's always important to remind teachers that reading to, and with children is the quickest route to developing reading skills.

As teachers of other subjects read to their students, they should try to model their own thoughts and questions at relevant 'stops' within the text being read, so as to encourage and teach students how to understand what questions to ask themselves, whilst they read.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Jayn Sadler is an English teacher based on north Essex

# REIMAGINING KS3 ENGLISH

**Jo Heathcote** recalls her determination to stop GCSE English preparation from encroaching on the spirit of discovery and enquiry that ought to characterise students' learning at KS3

For some time, I'd been thinking about how KS3 English could be approached through a fresh lens; one that equipped students with the core skills of comprehension, knowledge regarding the language and structure of texts, and plentiful writing opportunities – all wrapped up in thematic packages that would allow students to develop over time.

In my role as principal examiner for the foundation tier, I'd been involved in the development of the new GCSE English language exam for one of the major exam boards, through which I developed a GCSE (9–1) exam practice textbook for Collins. I wanted to establish a clear methodology for GCSE English students, in which success would be achieved by directly targeting assessment objectives and alleviating what I considered to be its greatest myths.

The myths in question are those things that cause the least confident students to become anxious or disengaged – that there 'isn't a right or wrong answer'; that 'the marking of English is subjective'; and that 'you can't revise for English.

## GCSE at KS3

Almost as soon as the textbook was published, I began to hear that some schools were so concerned about the demands of the new specification that they had started teaching the relevant texts right from Y7. My thoughts therefore turned to KS3, and how could we seamlessly embed the skills required for the new KS4 without repeating texts, while opening up opportunities for more breadth and enrichment.

The vision for the Reimagine Key Stage 3 English project began to emerge after I returned to KS3 teaching as a head of department. I'd been disappointed to learn that prior my arrival, students had essentially commenced their GCSE course from Y7. This prompted me to initially implement my GCSE methodology with the Y10 and Y11 cohorts I'd inherited, but also find ways of rolling this back into KS3.

That way, once students came to KS4, the key methods would already be securely in place. They would only need to practice and apply them to the specific questions on the language paper, and the essay tasks on the literature papers.

This also meant that my students would have extensive experience of a range of texts, around which they could build cultural capital, before tackling the increased rigour of the new specifications.

At KS4, we could thus focus on building confidence in approaching unseen material, develop students' writing skills and really enjoy the study of the literature texts, knowing that every student would have clear methods for addressing the exam tasks already in place.

## Varied texts

So it was that long before Ofsted frowned upon the practice, I removed all references to KS4 from KS3. With the GCSE so prescriptive, and with such little room for coursework, KS3 can become this magical opportunity for departments to really make the most of those three years, by providing a varied, diverse and broad learning experience.

For each year group I introduced a work of modern prose, a collection of poetry and a Shakespeare text – one that we definitely *wouldn't* be studying for GCSE. But there was something missing.

I proceeded to devise a project for each year group, based on an overarching theme. For example, the theme '*How We Treat Others*' came about in the course of us looking at *The Diary of Anne Frank* for our prose study, a collection of war poetry spanning WWI to the present day, and *The Merchant of Venice* in Y8.

The projects I created represented a

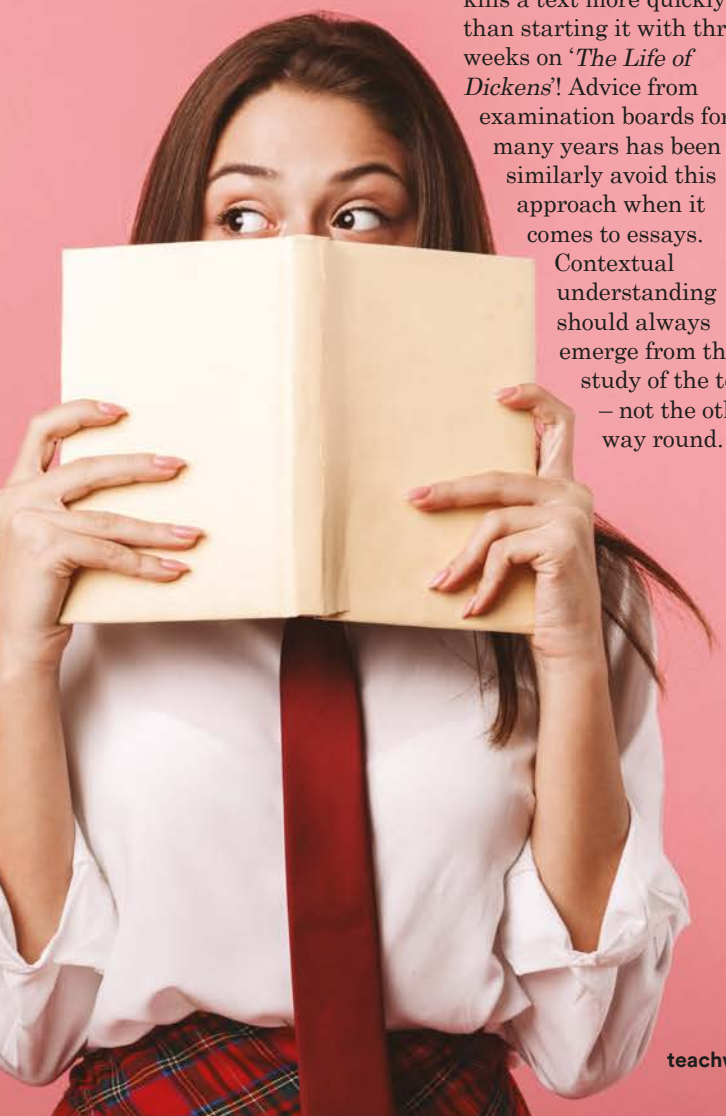
> *"Nothing kills a text more quickly than starting it with three weeks on 'The Life of Dickens'!"*

half term of work, alongside my other texts and study. Slowly, the vision of a wider resource emerged – one that could be used in each term, or in a differentiated way, to underpin teaching at KS3 and introduce clear methodologies from the very start of Y7 for all students, irrespective of the skill they brought with them from primary.

It was out of this that Reimagine Key Stage 3 English began to take form. While developing the idea for Collins, I came to the conclusion that each project should contain some 19th century prose and some classic poetry, which would lead into some creative writing. The focus would then shift to 19th century non-fiction, since I knew this to be a source of anxiety for many colleagues. We would then link in some modern non-fiction, and finish with some discursive writing.

These projects weren't intended to be just about imparting comprehension and analytical skill, though; I wanted each project to contain a range of texts on a key theme to build contextual knowledge and cultural capital in a subtle way, rather than through 'bolt-on' quasi-history lessons.

This is just my personal view, but for me, nothing kills a text more quickly than starting it with three weeks on '*The Life of Dickens*'! Advice from examination boards for many years has been to similarly avoid this approach when it comes to essays. Contextual understanding should always emerge from the study of the text – not the other way round.



## IN THE MIX

***Seven key ingredients that make up Reimagine Key Stage 3...***

**Flexibility:** can be used before, or alongside a class reader to complement its themes and ideas

**Supportive:** ideally suited to differentiated teaching and class cover involving non-specialist teachers

**Rich and varied:** utilises a selection of texts that are age appropriate, linked to theme and which have word counts that build reading stamina over the course of the Key Stage

**Stepped approach:** involves the study of three projects in each year group, based around a common 'introducing', 'developing' and 'securing' structure

**Detail:** includes sequenced lesson plans that contain clear objectives, suggested answers and timings

**Well designed:** supporting materials that include friendly worksheets, as well as PowerPoint presentations containing tasks, modelling, key exposition and colour images

**Student friendly:** progress trackers to help students identify skills they have acquired and reflect on their understanding

## Transformative results

So what of the results? Within my own department, we saw students becoming very confident with AO1 comprehension methods by the start of Y8, confident with AO2 analytical methods by Y9, and able to build longer, essay-type responses before embarking on GCSE course content. Even with a wide range of abilities and a high number of EAL students, we still saw a clear increase in our GCSE exam performance, compared to similar centres.

Following the publication of the resource last summer, we've received some amazing feedback from teachers. It seems that the highly structured and well-planned lessons have been a boon for busy departments during periods of lockdown learning. After all, the planning is done, the sequencing is meaningful and the projects are differentiated.

More than that, though, it seems the Reimagine Key Stage 3 English resource has also lent itself really well to online delivery. Each lesson has an accompanying PowerPoint, and every worksheet is fully downloadable for easy submission by students to platforms such Teams and Google Classroom.

Our lesson plans are sufficiently detailed that they can be readily used by non-specialists, or perhaps in tandem with tutors helping to provide interventions. Heads of Department can meanwhile feel confident that pupils are experiencing consistency. As a writing team, we're proud to have been able to support remote learning in such a way – something which has been a real bonus, on top of our original intent.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jo Heathcote is an experienced teacher of English based in Manchester, as well as a former principal examiner for a major examine board, principal moderator and author of numerous textbooks and study guides

# What's New?

Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education

## 1 Bringing PSHE to life

With topics relating to PSHE rarely out of the news, your students will likely want to discuss such issues more than ever. Written by experts with an impressive track record in PSHE, Chameleon PDE's 11-18 resource library provides everything you'll need to deliver up-to-date, relevant lessons that will empower staff, engage students and prepare them for life beyond school.

The library of easy-to-use teaching packs enables teachers to quickly tailor each session to their students' needs. Comprehensive activity notes and supporting teaching resources are included, along with a suggested model for evidencing student progress. The library is mapped to the PSHE curricula of the four UK nations and the PSHE Association Framework, ensuring both coverage and compliance. The included 'How Are You?' survey will additionally help you gain insight into your students' PSHE-related attitudes and behaviour. To find out more, visit **chameleonpde.com** or contact **info@chameleonpde.com**.


## Essential know-how

Dyslexia Action is a leading provider of high quality training for educators in the field of specific learning difficulties (SpLD). We have successfully delivered more than 15,000 courses to education professionals since 2010, and have been established for over 40 years.

We provide tutor-supported online training through our user-friendly VLE, enabling participants to engage in courses at the times and locations that suit them. Our training courses and qualifications are accredited by The Dyslexia Guild, The CPD Standards Office, the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) and the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC).

Visit dyslexiaaction.org.uk for details of all our upcoming courses – including our popular online Summer School starting on 12 July – or email **trainingcourses@dyslexiaaction.org.uk**

## 3

## 4

## Smart self-improvement

*Howard Jackson, CEO of Hub4Leaders* – Evaluat-Ed is the most dynamic self-evaluation and improvement tool for the education sector ever created. The software asks you challenging questions regarding every aspect of running a school, and tells you what 'Outstanding' or 'Good' looks like, based on the data provided.

The system then proceeds to highlight all Outstanding areas of the school, while flagging up any areas for further development. It's easy to use and highly intuitive, but extremely powerful in its ability to carry out a thorough analysis of your school, academy or trust.

For more information, or to arrange a free 15-minute tour, email **info@evaluate-ed.com**, contact **01625 467 530** or visit **evaluate-ed.com**

## 2


## Let there be light

Degna Stone, in collaboration with GCSEPod, has curated a series of audiovisual resources, or 'Pods', to celebrate Black and Irish authors of African and Caribbean heritage, and shine a light on their lives, influences and works.

There are 25 Pods in total, designed to be easily accessible by teachers, pupils and parents and contribute to learning both in the classroom and at home. Written by Degna herself, the Pods examine each author's background, influences and approaches to writing, in order to introduce students to the work of these brilliant and too often overlooked writers. Degna researched 100 writers across Britain and Ireland to ensure a real range of lived experiences, before finally refining her shortlist to 25 figures. For more information, visit **gcsepod.com / degnastone.co.uk**.

## 5

## InDependent Diabetes Trust

The InDependent Diabetes Trust offers support and information to people with diabetes, their families and health professionals on the issues that are important to them. Our helpline offers a friendly understanding ear when the going gets tough.

IDDT also supplies information packs to parents and teachers to help them better understand the needs of children with diabetes in school, and provides much-needed aid to children with diabetes in developing countries.

Diabetes can cause serious long-term complications – with a cure still elusive, IDDT additionally funds essential research. As a registered charity, IDDT relies entirely on voluntary donations. For more information, or to join IDDT, contact **01604 622 837,** email **martin@iddtinternational.org** or visit **iddtinternational.org**

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## Committed to teaching

Future Teaching Scholars are a special kind of mathematics and physics graduate. They are committed to teaching, and knew they wanted to become a teacher before starting their degree.

Our Scholars are on a six-year programme, giving them part-time teacher training at an Outstanding Teaching School alongside their degree to build up in classroom experience. We continue to support them through their first three years of employment, including ITT, with professional development workshops, national and regional events to ensure they thrive in their teaching career and school.

A new cohort will soon be graduating from university and looking to embark on their ITT year. Find out more about the Scholars and how to employ a high-quality maths or physics graduate at **futureteachingscholars.com/ITT**

## The right chemistry

The Royal Society of Chemistry's education website is designed to inspire teachers in their classroom teaching. The site features over 1,000 resources which will enrich lessons, spark excitement and encourage better understanding and interaction among students. The website also offers access to a well-rounded CPD programme that supports a holistic approach to professional development.

For even more access to information and resources, with no upper limit, teachers can sign up for a free Teach Chemistry account, which provides access to exclusive benefits and resources, helping teachers deliver inspirational chemistry teaching inside the classroom and fostering a supportive and effective department. For more details, visit **edu.rsc.org**.

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## Planning ahead

It's never too late to talk about your retirement plans. As a teaching professional, we know you're likely to be short on time. We can take you through your retirement planning, confident that you're in the right place to get the support you need.

At Wesleyan Financial Services, we understand the unique financial needs of teachers. Our expertise in teachers' pension schemes means that we can help you make informed decisions about financial matters, review your pension savings and support you in achieving your financial goals. Book your no-obligation appointment today – see **wesleyan.co.uk/teachersretirements** for more details.

8

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## Productive partnership

Whizz Education is a partner accountable for learning outcomes, founded on the belief that every child deserves a learning experience that caters to their individual needs and pace of learning.

We work with schools, MATs and governments to understand your challenges and partner with you to deliver measurable learning gains in maths. We would be pleased to consult with you on specific areas of importance, and discuss how you can achieve your goals in areas such as curriculum delivery (including for SEND and highly able students); teacher knowledge and CPD; individualised learning; assessment tools; and teacher readiness to deploy ICT for learning.

Contact support@whizzeducation.com to find out more about our complimentary 10-week pilot programmes, or visit **whizzeducation.com**.

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## Tech know-how

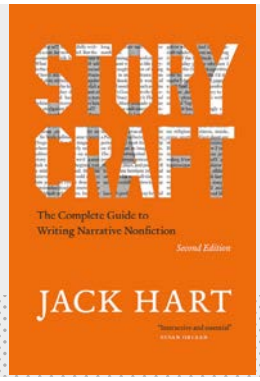
When it comes to remote learning, you need reliable technology that's quick and simple to use. The Samsung Chromebook 4 and Chromebook 4+ are designed to help teachers and students work productively.

The built-in Google ecosystem helps to simplify and enhance learning, offering greater possibilities in and out of the classroom. The all-new solidity design helps protect the devices from the rough and tumble of daily life. The Samsung Chromebook 4 Series offers outstanding performance at an affordable price.

For more details, contact **0333 344 1916** or email **samsungexperiencestores@prs-and.com**

# Off the Shelves

**Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore**

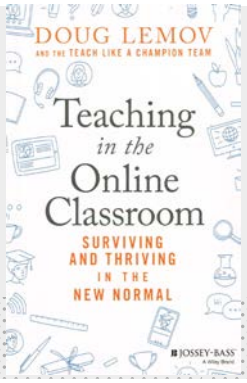



## *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction (2nd ed.)*

***(Jack Hart, University of Chicago Press, £15)***

Why shouldn't nonfiction writing be as well-crafted and exciting as fiction? Hart suggests that while writers may not have control over facts themselves, they very much do have a say in how those facts are conveyed. Scene-setting, characterisation, dialogue, points of view – all have important parts to play. A series of accompanying diagrams invite readers to draw comparisons with cinematic conventions and devices, such as 'plot points' and 'story arcs'. By applying these to real-life examples, Hart is able to show how factual accounts can be transformed from boring recitations of facts into compulsive page-turners. Though ostensibly aimed at professional writers, English teachers will likely find *Storycraft* to be a very useful repository of tools and techniques that can inform their lessons.

***Reviewed by Terry Freedman***




## *Teaching in the Online Classroom*

***(Doug Lemov, Wiley, £15.99)***

Over the last year or so, teachers everywhere have had to adapt to completely new ways of teaching. By stating at the outset that he and his colleagues were as initially unsure as everyone else, Lemov paradoxically enhances his book's authority. He acknowledges upfront that face-to-face learning makes for a better all-round experience than its online equivalent, before proceeding to look at how teachers might begin to approach the richness of the in-class experience when teaching at a distance. Each chapter includes a number of clearly highlighted hints and tips and a neat summary at the end, while the book itself finishes with a very useful concise summing-up of the preceding 22 teaching techniques that Lemov has detailed. The signposting in the text to supplementary video clips round out this densely informative read.

***Reviewed by Terry Freedman***


## *SPIN – Time and task management in teaching*

***(David Gumbrell, Critical Publishing, £15.99)***

If you've ever found yourself confronted by a bulging to-do list and a set of pressing deadlines, David Gumbrell has your back. His aim in *SPIN* is to help teachers become calmer, more focused and better placed to demonstrate their resilience and decision-making skills. Drawing on the behavioural model developed by Steve Peters in his book *The Chimp Paradox* – which posits that 'irrational chimp' resides in our brain, whose impulses have to be managed – Gumbrell proceeds to serve up 39 bite-size chapters that elegantly dispense practical advice on time management, prioritising, filtering and self-care, with frequent use of sometimes surprising, yet iilluminating metaphors. Also of note are the eight anonymised interviews with practising teachers at the book's conclusion, which serve as helpful and reassuring aids to self-reflection.

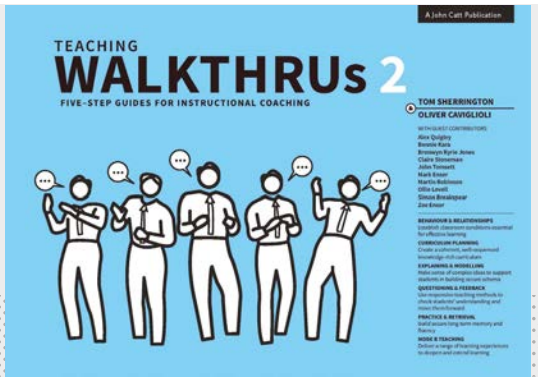
## THE WORD

**Find out what our regular student reviewer, Oliver Minter-King (Y13) has been reading this month...**


### *Rapids*
***(Anna Bowles, ZunTold, £9.99)***

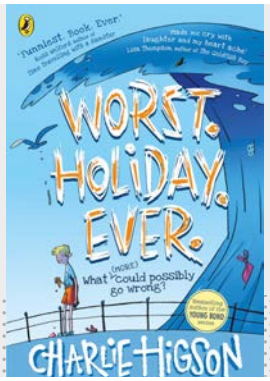
After passing her AS levels and struggling with her mental health, Yan and her best friend Chel venture from their hometown of Brockford to London for a week of soaking in the sights and exploring their future college options. Yan, however, is also harbouring a hidden agenda, and finding it harder to control herself...

The strength of this novel lies in its exploration of undiagnosed hypomania – an erratic state of mind that's a common symptom of bipolar II disorder. Bowles effectively utilises inner monologues to convey Yan's impulsive mental state throughout the novel, providing a great insight into how people with bipolar disorder think and react. The gradual escalation of Yan's outbursts makes for a progressively suspenseful narrative that kept me engaged throughout, before culminating in a dramatic, yet hopeful finale. *Rapids*' portrayal of the detrimental effects that can arise from living with bipolar disorder results in an impactful and emotive portayal of life with a mental health condition.




### *Teaching WalkThrus VOLUME 2*
***(Tom Sherrington and Oliver Caviglioli, John Catt £12)***

This second entry in Sherrington and Caviglioli's planned trio of teaching guides informed by instructional coaching follows the template of its acclaimed predecessor. Readers are guided through a series of over 50 helpful ideas and suggestions derived from leading educational thinkers and contributed by a team of 10 guest authors, spanning areas including behaviour and relationships, curriculum planning, questioning and feedback, and practice retrieval. The presentation throughout is exemplary, with each distinct 'WalkThru' boiled down to its purest essence and given superb visual clarity via Caviglioli's crisp illustrations. Far from being a rigid 'how to', the book succeeds as an inspiring and eminently browsable guide, with the potential to take your practice in a whole host of interesting new directions.




### *Worst. Holiday. Ever.*
***(Charlie Higson, Puffin, £6.99)***

Charlie Higson has followed up the intensity of his seven-volume dystopian horror *Enemy* series with this comparatively breezy, comedic read for younger readers. Our protagonist is Stan – a callow boy on the verge of adolescence, who finds himself somehow agreeing to accompany his schoolfriend Felix on a two-week family holiday to Italy. Initially terrified at the prospect of what this might entail – strangers, 'mad driving', 'weird food' – Stan's breathless present tense narration gradually takes on a more philosophical tone as his holiday companions help him learn some valuable life lessons. Long-term Higson fans will enjoy the book's sharply observed characters (particularly Felix's quasi-Bohemian relatives) and subtle class satire. There's pathos too, with the book's latter half containing some pointed commentary on the notions of courage and masculinity.

# Meet the author

## CHARLIE HIGSON

**After your post-apocalypic *Enemy* series, *Worst. Holiday. Ever.* seems like something of a departure...**
After finishing *The Enemy*, which was a big, heavy project that took up eight years of my life, I wanted to write something quick and light. I'd had this idea knocking around for a while about a kid going on holiday with someone else's family and thought, yeah, I could write that quickly, that'll be fun. Let's do something completely different, something funny for younger readers.

**How did it feel to be writing a new story again, outside of any existing settings or characters?**
As a writer, you have to convince yourself every day that you're a genius, the greatest writer who's ever lived, in order to have the confidence and energy to press on. You can look at your writing and 'Who would want to read this?' In the end, it's usually the feedback you receive from readers that gives you the will to keep pushing that boulder up the hill.

**Who or what inspired the book's narrator, Stan?**
The *Young Bond* books I'd written previously were about a fantasy hero – a kid who's incredibly brave, self-reliant and self-confident – but that's not what most kids are like. They're much more similar to Stan in the book. I know I was. Very shy, with all that comes with it, lacking in social confidence and a fussy eater.

The events of the book are based on incidents that happened to me as a kid when going on holiday and growing up more generally, as well as things that have happened to my boy and his friends. I had all these funny memories stored up, so I thought I should write them down.

**The book' setting perhaps comes across as more exotic now than you'd originally intended, though...**
I finished it almost three years ago, thinking '*Kid has nice summer holiday in Italy, perfect holiday reading – that'll do well...*' It was originally meant to be published in 2020, but being a summer book it had to be out at a certain point of the year, and therefore ended up being put back. Hopefully now it will be able to fit the new spirit of optimism – or at least help readers enjoy their own Italian holiday vicariously...

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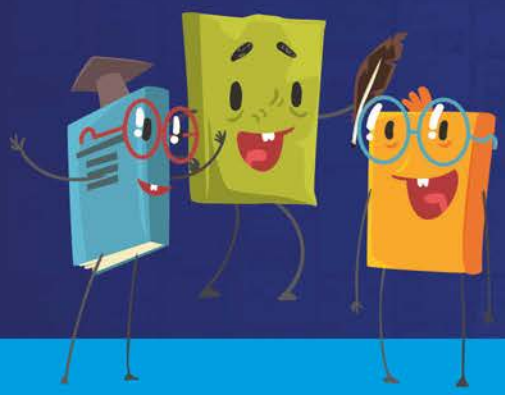

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# *Break the* RECRUITMENT CYCLE

Schools in deprived areas can face an uphill struggle when it comes to recruiting staff, but it's possible to get the teachers you need by following some simple steps, writes **Adam Riches...**

Recruiting staff in schools in deprived areas can be tough. There's no two ways around it – in education there are certain myths, and those myths can lead to difficulties in appointing individuals to jobs at certain schools.

As many of us will know, the reality is that working at schools in deprived areas is one of the most rewarding things you can do as a teacher. It's no secret that such schools have their challenges, but rest assured, all schools do.

With COVID having somewhat changed recruitment processes across the board for the time being, it's become more difficult than ever for certain schools to recruit. It sounds like a cliché, but you really do have to see a school functioning in order to really get a feel for it.

However, if the school you're considering applying to is in an area with a certain reputation – or the school itself has a certain reputation of its own – prospective candidates might not get that opportunity to dispel such misconceptions.

In many ways, COVID has made it harder for schools to recruit effectively, with a number of people expressing concerns that schools in deprived areas will find it hardest of all (or rather, even harder than do at the moment). But not all is lost. There are some simple strategies that can help ensure candidates see what they should when applying for jobs at schools in deprived areas, thus enabling them to make more balanced and informed decisions regarding the roles on offer.

## Reputation management

Prejudice continues to present one of the biggest barriers to staff recruitment for schools in deprived areas. Whether directed towards the school specifically or the area more generally, this can have an enormous impact on your potential pool of candidates before the recruitment process has even started.

Though it pains me to say it, prejudice of this kind can sometimes be fuelled by other teachers in the local area. Stories can be passed on – often fourth- or fifth-hand – in a way that very quickly puts off prospective teachers.

Reputations can, of course, be difficult to shake off. I work in a school that's seen rapid improvement in a few short years, from Inadequate to Good with Outstanding leadership, but it's been a slog. Staff and students, as well as parents and the wider community, have all banded together, and with direction from the right trust, the school has been transformed.

I'm immensely proud to have played a part in those efforts, though in many ways, the reputation of the era we've left behind is still what's initially referenced

***"Schools in deprived areas have exceptionally strong bonds within the staff body and are often the most supportive"***

whenever the school is discussed among the local educational community.

But still, that reputation is mentioned less often now than it was. A combination of effective PR and celebrations of the school and the achievements of its students and staff has started to sway the balance. Social media has played a big part in this, as has effective communication with the local press, so that when the school is searched for, positive sentiments are more easily discoverable than they used to be. With so much misinformation passed around due to word of mouth, dispelling the myths about teaching in deprived areas remains extremely important.

## Needs and wants

Misconceptions around working at schools in deprived areas, and the associated pressures of such jobs, can cause candidate pools to be smaller than those for schools in more prestigious areas. As such, it's often the case that the narrowed choices school leaders are left with work against their 'wants' when it comes to the shortlisting of candidates.

Schools in deprived areas tend to have significantly higher rates of staff turnover. Research by Education Datalab found that teachers in the most deprived 10% of schools were 70% more likely to leave than those in the least deprived schools. This leaves the leaders of deprived schools with even less room for manoeuvre, making the process of filling posts a delicate balancing act.

The secret is getting the right candidates through the door. By effectively advertising the post with clear and well thought through parameters and role requirements, you're more likely to get an appropriate candidate.

Careful consideration should be paid to how the advert is worded. Archaic traditions involving heavy implicature of language ought to be a thing of the past. If you're looking for a teaching and learning lead who can deliver CPD, make that explicit. There's nothing worse than finding out you've shortlisted the wrong people because you made the advert too broad in the first instance.

## The right support

There are challenges regularly faced by schools in deprived areas that many teachers won't have had to confront, or been trained for during their ITT and NQT years. Some may well have been on placements at such schools, but just as many won't. Similarly, leaders with a certain type of contextual experience might lack some of the more refined skills that come from working in deprived areas – or may even possess those qualities, but won't have had the chance to put them to good use.

When recruiting, one of the key challenges is therefore seeing candidates' potential, and considering what training and support they may need to thrive in your context. That applies to all teaching posts, of course, not just those in deprived areas – but be aware of the time that may need to be put aside for acclimatisation.

Publicising the support that your school is able to offer new teachers joining you can be a great way of dispelling any persistent myths that might be circulating around your setting. I've found that schools in deprived areas have exceptionally strong bonds within the staff body, and are often the most supportive. I know this first-hand, having worked in a number of such schools myself. Showing prospective candidates explicitly what kind of transitional support you can offer will go a long way towards helping you get the staff your school needs.

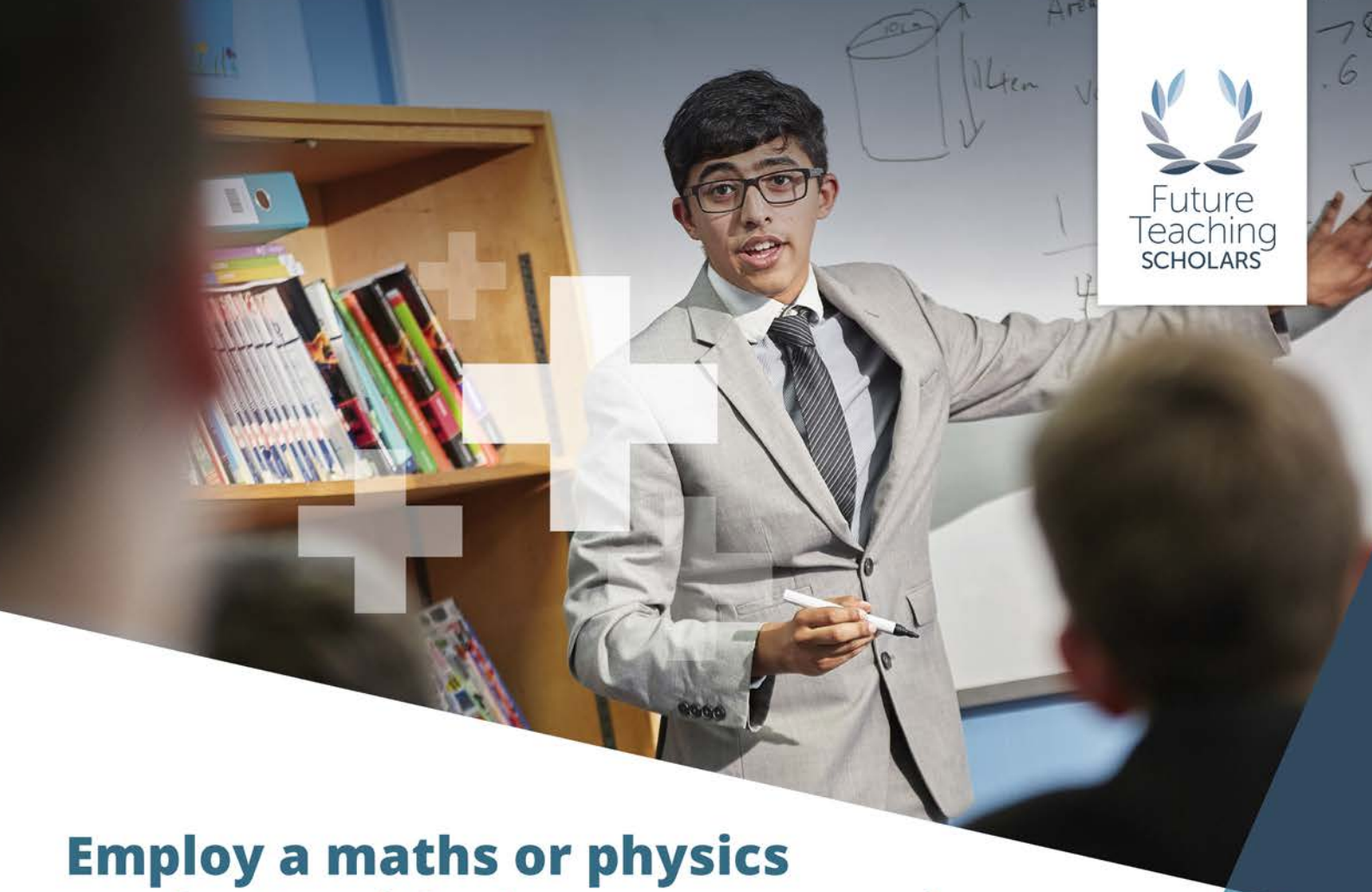
We know that staff make the biggest difference to student outcomes, so making sure the right people are teaching your lessons is of paramount importance. Teachers – don't overlook schools in deprived areas when submitting those job applications, and assume that they're no-fly-zones, and leaders – do what you can to make sure your school doesn't look like one.

## ACTION POINTS

- Avoid traditional rhetoric and be clear as to what you want
- Showcase what you have to offer new staff – make the support you can provide visible from the start
- Celebrate your successes and cultivate a positive reputation via effective communications
- Emphasise the impact you have on the local community

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Adam Riches is a senior leader for teaching and learning and author of the book *Teach Smarter: Efficient and Effective Strategies for Early Career Teachers* (£16.99, Routledge); follow him at @teachmrriches



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# Our key to moving forward

How Hitchin Boys' School have used their 'catch-up' funding for the benefit of the whole school

## IMPLEMENTING AN EDTECH SOLUTION

*John Rayner, Assistant Head teacher and GCSEPod lead, explains why the faculty has signed up to the online learning platform – and the positive difference it is making to both students and teachers...*

The school prides itself on moving with the times and the award-winning digital content and revision provider is trusted by more than 1,800 schools across the globe. It is renowned for its 'Pods', which are short, snappy, teacher-written three-five minute videos covering 28 GCSE/IGCSE subjects.

Constantly innovating, GCSEPod's Check and Challenge assessment offers scaffolded support for students, and the exam-style/ready-made assignments are a huge hit with teachers – especially for gathering evidence to support assessed grades. There is a Boost playlists feature that identifies knowledge gaps, student engagement can be tracked and monitored, homework automatically marked, and the platform encourages independent learning.

## RECOVERY PLANS

At end of November 2020 we used our catch-up funding for the purchase. We were looking at how we could support all our GCSE students, and GCSEPod ticked all the boxes.

The Pods allow students to listen, watch and learn what they need. Using Check & Challenge and ready-made Assignments they can then practice and test this knowledge to see how they're doing. In terms of subjects, maths, physics, history, and English have seen the most Pod usage.

We are seeing a lot of independent and teacher-led learning. It's the ease of use that's so compelling – students can go on, easily find what they need and work through it. If teachers need to set something up, the process is very intuitive. This is not a platform that stands still.

## RELIABILITY AND REDUCED WORKLOAD

One of the things we all love is that the platform monitors all student and teacher activity. We can tell who has watched the pods and know that they have completed the required work and learning. Between GCSEPod doing the marking for staff, the pre-made Assignments and videos that teachers know are of high-quality, we've saved condiderable time on planning and marking. It also links in with our MIS system, so if you want to find out how your form group or year group is doing, that's all done for you.

For us, GCSEPod was the strongest package which existed. We can say to our staff, here is something that will make your workload easier; here's something with high quality resources, but also something that wil give the boys the option to actively push themselves.

## Did we mention?

GCSEPod has recently launched a number of additional tools aimed at addressing workload issues and providing detailed analysis. A 'co-marking' feature now allows multiple teachers to mark assignments for a class, alongside the ability to combine multiple ready-made assignments into one – great for end of term tests and exams. A 'Progress Markbook' function, meanwhile, allows results from multiple assignments to be pooled over time, allowing teachers to track and compare the attainment level of different groups. All data can then be easily exported and printed to provide evidence of attainment.

**Contact:**
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**THE CONTEXT:** **Hitchin Boys' School has a long and illustrious history. Founded nearly 400 years ago as an 'old free school', it has gone through several reincarnations over the centuries.**

**THE CHALLENGE:** **Now a comprehensive with 1,200 students drawn from 40 feeder schools across north Hertfordshire. The challenge was to have a recovery solution that was fair and focused for everyone.**

# "Students have lost the rigour of testing"

Maths teacher **Sarah Trevena** shares her thoughts concerning the multiple complexities and challenges presented by this year's teacher-delivered GCSE assessments

I think I speak for most maths teachers when I say that teacher assessment is at the core of what we do – and have always done.

Thanks to the nature of mathematics, our grade estimations are often spot on. Students can generally climb through our curriculum while learning mathematical skills and mastering them, before then applying these skills in context and hopefully, reaching the pinnacle of using them to solve problems.

The task of teacher assessment is now at the forefront of all our minds, dominating conversations in school among peers and students alike. How do we thoroughly, fairly, and in a non-discriminatory and accurate manner, gather evidence for such skills, when those skills aren't explicitly attached to grade boundaries?

Should we refer to past exam papers that have grade boundaries attached to them? If this were the solution, then surely we'd be sitting an actual exam – and so we find ourselves back at square one.

## The rigour of testing

The students in front of us have not only potentially missed out on learning content, but have also lost the rigour of testing. The skills of revision and retrieval haven't been embedded into their current practise. What we'd usually expect of a grade 7 student can't possibly equate to what a grade 7 student can produce this year, which is foremost in our thoughts as we frantically gather our evidence.

As a fairly small department of seven maths specialists, we began this task with discussions regarding what methods would best assess the skills of our students. We took into account the content we hadn't covered and the evidence we'd previously collected from formal mock assessments, and dissected the guidelines and directives given to us by the exam board. We had yet to finish teaching the course to many of our students, and unanimously felt that using past papers wouldn't be a fair measure to assess with – despite this feeling like the more secure method for us as teachers, and definitely more in line with our definition of 'normal'.

Like many schools, we hit the task head-on and have written our own assessments using past exam questions, breaking the curriculum down into distinct, manageable sections for our students to focus on. The assessments contain a breadth of questions from covered content, which falls into varying levels of difficulty as outlined by official grade descriptors for the course (in line with what we'd usually expect to see on a published exam paper).

Practically, this has meant we've been able to focus our students' revision by using topic-specific published resources. Online resources, such as GCSEPod and Hegarty Maths, have been at the core of this process, as students can be directed towards specific Pods and videos to watch, before practising the attached questions. The new exam-style papers available from the GCSEPod site are a superb addition and a great time saver, able to provide targeted assessment in maths, as well as other subjects.

Online resources are currently written into our scheme of learning mainly as homework tasks, though these have seen much more prominent use over the past year with the shift to online learning. Where we might have traditionally deployed textbooks or worksheets, much of our independent work is now focused around online resources – especially those that are student-centred, and which allow students to personalise their own revision process, rather than focus on set tasks

assigned by teachers (though the latter do have their place).

## Assigning grades

The current value of online resources is, in my opinion, priceless, since not all students can be physically present in our classrooms. By giving our students structure, focus and resource options, we can help them take control of their studies, while trying to keep them calm and reducing their anxiety levels.

Moreover, there have been times when we've needed to do all this whilst simultaneously managing students who are isolating, dialling in online, and attempting to teach to rooms filled with covered faces. Our intitial return to school was accompanied by numerous challenges definitely not conducive to effective teaching.

The main difficulty we continue to have is that we're currently assigning grades where no official grade boundaries exist. This is where we draw on the experience of our team, many of whom are examiners. We're thankful for having continually assessed our students for years – we baseline our students annually, and use data comparatively to predict future performance.

Like many, we teach the GCSE course in distinct units, revising each chunk of work and testing understanding at the end of every section. We track the performance of cohorts termly using past exam papers, so that we can compare progress year-on-year.

We therefore feel rather fluent with teacher assessment, since we report on predicted grades constantly throughout the course, using our data as a basis for intervention where needed. Now, however, we're faced with a further challenge – what about those students we don't know very well? Those who have just joined the cohort, or those struggling to give us the evidence we need, despite a history of a certain performance level, often through no fault of their own?

We're trying to give these students as many chances as possible to show us the mathematics that they're capable of, and are actively trying to encourage all students by selling this 'situation' as an opportunity to really take their learning into their own hands.

## A fair system?

Inevitably, there will be some students who don't provide the evidence we think they may have been capable of – just as there are students every year who don't reach their target grades from an exam series. This year, however, we'll be the ones who have to write down that grade.

We're finding that not all students will fit into the initial plans for our assessment process. As time continues to tick by, many other schools will be amending their resources and assessments to give them 'what they need', because it seems that for the most part, we're confident in knowing what grades our students can achieve. The difficulty comes in assigning evidence to these grades, in line with the opinions of all other teachers in the country, whilst at the same time, somehow hoping that the system remains fair.

**"How is what you teach representative of the class that you see in front of you?"**

I have no doubt that the integrity and professionalism of teachers will enable us to meet this challenge. The coming months will inevitably produce much fuel for discussions around performance data and furious moderation of student work, with the mental health and wellbeing of students (and our colleagues) remaining our absolute focus.

I do, however, wonder how many schools will revert to using past exam papers with published grade boundaries as part of their evidence – those being an easy crutch to lean on, and likely to be comparative to their own assessment grades.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Sarah Trevena is a maths teacher at Kings Priory School, Tynemouth

# 4 REASONS TO TRY... Maths-Whizz

Roxanne Muller, UK country lead at Whizz Education, discusses how the Maths-Whizz virtual tutor can help close the summer learning gap

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CLASSROOM VOICES

# "Teachers need to challenge sexist behaviour"

Preventing the spread of harassment and 'rape cultures' within schools will require more – and better – teaching around consent, writes **Rachel Scales**

I was once teaching an RSE lesson on sexual harassment when some female students in the class mentioned how they carried 'rape alarms' during winter months, as they didn't feel safe travelling to and from school when it was dark.

When they took out their rape alarms to show the rest of the class, some male students immediately began laughing, and asked for them to be set off so they could hear how loud they were. I was struck by the extent to which they saw the safety of their female classmates as a laughing matter – just one event among many which highlights how much we need stronger education around consent and rape culture.

## NON-VERBAL CONSENT

In the wake of the student testimonies posted to the Everyone's Invited website, and Ofsted's recent announcement of reviews into safeguarding policies, schools everywhere are now paying much closer attention to how they teach consent to students.

In my experience, schools' teaching of consent tends to focus on the explicitly sexual aspects. What's missing is teaching of consensual communication beyond binary 'no means no' responses to unwanted sexual activity. Educating students about non-verbal consent behaviours, such as body language and facial expressions, will allow teachers to paint a clearer, more realistic picture of how consent is communicated.

The teaching of consent should start with formal scenarios, before progressing to consent within friendships and relationships – and only then, within sexual scenarios. Discussion of non-verbal, non-sexual consent in the context of healthy relationships, boundaries and privacy is vital for effective consent education, and preparing students for the challenges of modern relationships.

Teachers can open class discussion around these ideas by asking questions such as, 'Is it right to look through your partner / friend's phone without their permission?' and 'Should you enter your partner / friend's bedroom without their permission and start looking through their things?'

Framing questions in this way allows students to apply the principles of consent to relatable scenarios, thus helping them develop a clearer understanding of what's acceptable.

Some mixed schools will separate their male and female students when talking about consent, but I feel this is counterproductive. Doing so could alienate students who are transgender or identify as gender neutral, when lessons of this nature should be inclusive of all. Separating students also sends the message that consent – and the implications of consent – are different for males and females, or anyone who may identify otherwise, when consent applies equally to everyone. That said, students can benefit from hearing different ideas and experiences relating to consent in a safe classroom environment, and the increased empathy and understanding this can bring about.




## LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

Incidents of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and assault will often originate from low level sexism and misogyny. Calling this out whenever it appears is therefore key to challenging the spread of harassment and rape cultures within schools, before such incidents enable more severe behaviours.

As such, all teachers – not just those delivering PSHE / RSE – need to be equipped with appropriate training and the confidence to challenge sexist and misogynistic behaviour, but unfortunately, this is where I believe many schools fall short.

Most will have some form of compulsory annual safeguarding training that all staff must complete, but not all will provide compulsory RSE / consent training – despite this being a major element in protecting students. I've often spoken to staff who don't know the difference between 'sexual harassment' and 'sexual assault', or indeed what even counts as sexual harassment, with respect to the law. If staff lack understanding of these issues, how can they effectively educate their students?

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rachel Scales is a RSE coordinator and teacher based at a secondary school in Essex; her book How Do I Answer That? – A Secondary School Teacher's Guide to Answering RSE Questions is available now (Critical Publishing, £14.99)

# *Understanding the* TEENAGE BRAIN

The aftermath of lockdown has left teachers contending with teenage behaviours they've never encountered before – **Katie Hill** examines what the best response might be...

Lunch duty on the school field, on the first Monday back after lockdown 3.0. I don't think I was the only teacher welling up behind my mask and misty sunglasses. There was a sense of relief – a big sigh that we'd done it again – and overwhelming joy at seeing students playing football together, and sitting and chatting in their bubbles.

It felt like the valve had been loosened on two months of ever-increasing pressure; teenagers cooped up during the cold winter months, finally set free to roam in their natural habitat again, amongst each other. A sign of things to come for the rest of society? Let's hope so.

## Perceived threats

Despite the relief and joy that was so apparent, however, it's with an air of caution that we have to talk about the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A new unknown awaits us.

Don't get me wrong, I certainly don't believe that every child will be permanently scarred by the experiences they've had, but there are some huge issues to be understood and worked on to ensure that our young people can thrive in the coming months and years.

The main issue presently is the lack of teacher training around teenagers' emotional needs. We have metacognition in the bag. Work in this area has been incredible over recent years, producing much in the way of theory and practical application, but we now need to look underneath – at the foundations of our students' attitudes, behaviours and characteristics. We need to understand what our basic needs are as humans, and how we can support our students in ensuring these are met. We also need to understand what is happening to teenagers' brains when they encounter perceived threats.

COVID has posed a huge perceived threat over the past year, causing the vast majority of us to become caught in a fear response. When we're in this response, the most primal part of our brain (the amygdala) acts as a burglar alarm, shutting down much of our ability to think logically and rationally. It's a natural, human reaction, and therefore doesn't mean we are failing in any way, shape or form.

> **"For teenagers, the rational part of the brain is a work in progress"**

For teenagers, that logical, rational part of the brain is still a work in progress. It won't be fully developed until they reach their mid-20s, so their ability to think ahead is limited even further. Instead, their brains are busy deciding whether to leg it as far away as possible, freeze like Anna in *Frozen*, or fight as though their life depends on it.

## Flight, freeze or fight

You'll probably be able to categorise your students quite quickly into one of those three categories – *flight*, *freeze* or *fight*.

Why is this useful? Because when those moments occur, we know it often isn't because students are 'playing up', but because they perceive threat, whether it be the threat of a contagious virus, their best friend kissing their girlfriend or an assignment they can't begin to comprehend.

So how should we tackle these flight, freeze and fear moments? The key is in soothing the amygdala and meeting emotional needs. If we're able to calm that primal part of the brain, we leave space for the strategic part of the brain (the pre-frontal cortex) to develop more effectively.

If we look at the five emotional needs developed by Dr Gerald Newmark (founder of The Children's Project), the two that stand out as most lacking over the past year are 'control' and 'belonging'. As a society, we've lost huge swathes of control and become disconnected from our tribes, the latter of which is acutely apparent among teenagers.

Teenage brain development depends on them being able to develop independence and break away from parental bonds to build their own social networks and attachments. We know this if we look back at the powerful, intense bonds that many of us developed at a similar age (however fleeting they may have been!).

## Brain bandwidth

This lack of control to make decisions, and the restrictions placed on being able to join a tribe, will have left a potential gap in our students' essential development. We might see this expressed in 'low-level disruption' (or a need to connect and socialise); loud voices in the classroom (or the need to express a desire to belong to the pack); and

'inappropriate behaviour' (or the need to relearn the structures and guidelines involved in being part of that tribe). We're likely to see such behaviours for many months to come.

Alongside these issues, we can't forget the overload that many of us experience when our 'brain bandwidth' is at its full capacity. If we consider, as Nicola Morgan (AKA The Teenage Brain Woman) does, that every mental and physical action takes up some bandwidth, and that this bandwidth is finite, we can acknowledge the sensations we feel of being overwhelmed when we're approaching capacity.

Tasks we're very familiar with, such as walking, take up very little bandwidth. New challenges, such as adjusting to extended hours of screen time and conducting online conversations, can take up a lot. If we apply this understanding to the transition our students have made over the past couple of months, it's hardly surprising that the 'brain bandwidth burnout' is very real.

We also know that if emotional needs aren't met, the likely consequence will be a long term impact on mental health that could manifest as anger, anxiety or depression. There's no clear, linear explanation for how or when these issues arise. There's still much to be done in the world of neuroscience.

But what we can do in the meantime is spread awareness among ourselves and our students – by which I mean more than just one additional form time session dedicated to teenage brain development.

## 5 STEPS TO POST-COVID WELLBEING

1. Organise discussion and training around the 'fear response', brain development and how we respond mentally and physically to stress
2. Integrate the inherent need for 'control' and 'belonging' into everyday school life
3. Give students and staff the space and time to switch off from activities that lead to 'brain bandwidth burnout'
4. Prioritise 'wellbeing' as more than a tick box exercise; ask staff and students what they really need and listen
5. Acknowledge the power we have as a collective to make this wellbeing an educational priority

### Nurturing wellbeing

What we're suggesting is to include a whole school focus on emotional wellbeing in school development plans, assemblies and PSHE lessons. Engage students in the physiological and psychological impact of stress, and pledge to prioritise wellbeing for your whole school community.

At a cultural level, this might mean normalising the struggles we all encounter as humans, acknowledging that resilience isn't something you're good or bad at, and defining what exactly we mean by 'nurturing wellbeing'.

In more practical terms, it might also mean providing more opportunities for whole school mindfulness, creativity, sport, fun and community cohesion. It may involve devising ways of engaging parents as vital players in the school 'tribe', providing more opportunities for students to connect with each other and socialise and spotlighting the power of gratitude – because 'thank yous' go a long, long way.

As teachers, we're tasked with filling in gaps, providing safe spaces, inspiring life-long learning and being a constant source of support for our students. We are held more accountable than ever for students' grades, and the burden of unknowns weighs heavy.

And yet we also have more power than we realise to embed new cultures in education – because learning is nothing without the substructure of fulfilled emotional needs.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Katie Hill is a teacher in Cornwall, the founder of Mindful Magic (mindfulmagic.info) and co-founder of Shine Bright Training CIC (shinebrighttraining.co.uk), providing training for teachers and students on emotional wellbeing

THE NEXT BIG THING

# LEARNING ABOUT FOREST

Use the LEAF programme to learn about ecosystems and help pupils connect with the nature on their doorsteps

[ THE TREND ]

## OUTDOOR LEARNING

Eco-Schools England at Keep Britain Tidy has launched a new outdoor education programme and award – Learning About Forests (LEAF), sponsored by the sustainable children's clothing brand Frugi. The launch of the LEAF scheme in England coincides with renewed national interest in replanting - including the Northern Forest Project, which is aiming to plant 50 million trees.

### WHAT'S HAPPENING?

The focus of the LEAF programme is on forest-based ecosystems, but the skills and knowledge acquired can be applied to any natural environment. Schools located in urban areas are especially welcome to take part in the programme, to help pupils reconnect with nature.

Like Eco-Schools, the LEAF programme must be led by pupils as they work through the 'Forest Cycle' for their chosen theme, from a choice of 'Climate', 'Biodiversity', 'Restoration', 'Water', 'Community' or 'Production'. Through a combination of planning, leading and monitoring, the young people taking part will help change behaviours and raise awareness regarding the importance of native trees and ecosystems.

Schools are invited to use the LEAF programme as a means of 'greening their curriculums', and to help staff who aren't experts in outdoor learning feel more confident delivering lessons outside.

### WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

Now in its 21st year, the LEAF programme operates in 28 countries, including South Africa and Mexico, helping raise awareness of forest ecosystems and their importance. From ancient woodlands to local parks, from school grounds to backyards, and from trees to lichen, the LEAF programme helps young people connect with the nature on their doorstep.

Forests are a vital stabilising force for the climate. They regulate ecosystems, protect biodiversity, play an integral part in the carbon cycle, support livelihoods, and supply goods and services that can drive sustainable growth. Increasing and maintaining forests is therefore an essential component in efforts to tackle climate change. To date, over 84,000 trees have been planted through the LEAF programme!

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Access to the LEAF programme and award is free for schools, youth groups and registered home schoolers. To register, visit the Eco-Schools England website, where you'll also be able to download a LEAF teaching guide containing everything your school will need to get started and apply for the award. The next LEAF Award application window opens on **1st June 2021**, and will run until **30th July 2021**; after that, applications to the LEAF programme will reopen in September 2021 and run until July 2022.

### Discover more...

To find out more about the international LEAF and Eco-Schools programmes managed by Keep Britain Tidy, visit **eco-schools.org.uk** or email **eco-schools@keepbritain.tidy.org**

## GET INVOLVED

- Existing Eco-Schools can work through the LEAF programme and apply for the LEAF Award as a standalone accreditation.

They can also submit their LEAF programme actions as topic evidence when applying for the Eco-Schools Green Flag award, for a doubled-up, international environmental award bonus!

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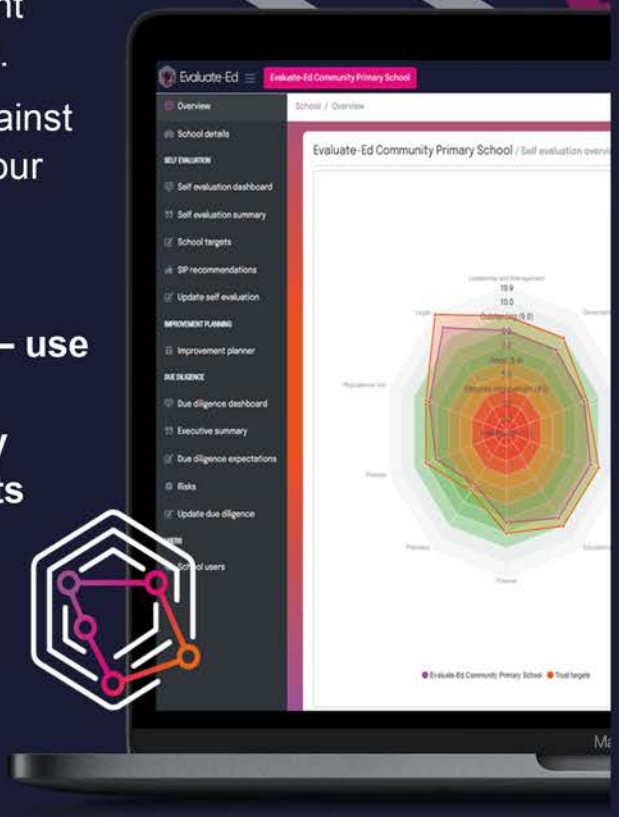


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# Critical Friends

**Emma Bennett** reflects on the approach to school governance adopted by the David Ross Education Trust

As the profession continues to move through and hopefully past the pandemic, one group is playing an invaluable, yet understated role in school and student progress – governors.

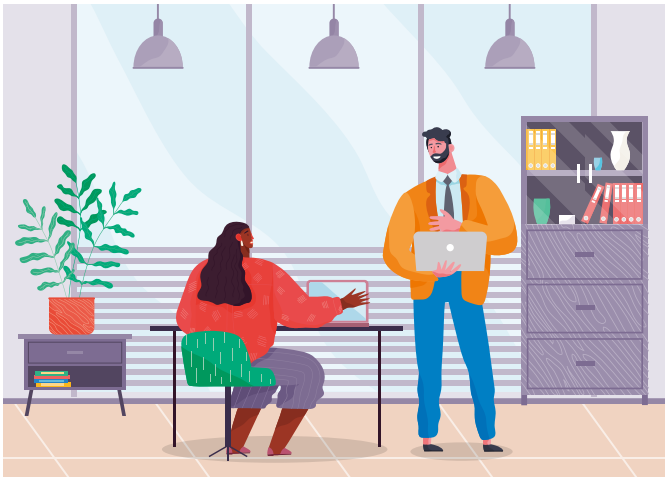
I became a governor for the David Ross Education Trust (DRET) well before the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to champion a school in my local area and be an advocate for its pupils. On a more personal level, the role has also allowed me to learn new skills and work with people from a range of different backgrounds.

The pandemic may have brought new issues to light, but the fundamental aspects of my role as a DRET governor haven't changed. Governors at DRET provide support to principals, SLTs and middle leaders to ensure every child, and each school as a whole, is achieving targets and continually improving.

Our academies are open and transparent with their governors. We're trusted to act as a critical friends – to ask the right questions and systematically monitor school progress alongside targets. We're don't set strategy or policy, or manage financial resources, staff performance, or pay, which lets us focus instead what matters: aspirations, pupil progress and school outcomes.

## Different perspectives

Compared to a traditional school governing body, DRET governors aren't responsible for strategic issues or policies, but we are encouraged to assess their impact, and how they might affect the local community, relate to local families and feed into local issues.



Historically, the Trust would recruit on a skills basis, prioritising those skills typically associated with school governance and often possessed by individuals with professional experience in finance, HR or health and safety.

Following a change to the Trust's governor delegations, there was a shift to recruiting people committed to supporting the Trust's goals; individuals with sufficient time and enthusiasm, and a deep commitment to supporting each academy to be the best it can be.

For us, it's important to maintain a diverse range of opinions, skills, and experience around the table. We strive to ensure our governors represent the demographics of our community, though this can be a challenge. Yet it's only through incorporating a number of different perspectives – spanning current educators, to parents and industry professionals – that we'll be able to make impactful, lasting change.

## The best CPD

Over the past year, as lockdowns and bubble closures prevented many pupils from accessing their learning, DRET placed a particular emphasis on enhancing the curriculum and supporting school communities.

As governors, we've worked with subject leaders on their plans – respecting their knowledge, while asking critical questions. As an assistant principal myself, I'm well attuned to what these conversations can involve from a leadership perspective, but a parent governor will have a range of different, yet equally important concerns as we move forward with making these curriculum changes. Parent governors are also excellent at communicating with other parents, who will often view them as peers and take on board their thoughts and contributions as equals.

DRET's policy of hiring governors who represent the trust's values is of paramount importance, though we do also look for a diversity of experience that can unlock new perspectives and discussions.

At a good trust like DRET, this process isn't a one-way-street, since the Trust will ensure governors retain access to regular, high-quality training, providing a plethora of opportunities for professional development.

Whether you're a current educator or completely new to the field of education, this access to CPD can enhance individuals' confidence, as well as their qualifications. Holding a role in governance is, honestly, the best CPD I've ever had.

We all want our schools to continue to improve as we move out of the pandemic and into the future. Working as a DRET governor has made it possible for myself and others to play a highly practical role in that process of moving forward. At the same time, it's also provided unique insights into everyday school life, and provided multiple opportunities to effect lasting change that will positively impact the lives of young people well into the future.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Emma Bennett is a currently serving DRET governor

# *Compulsory RSE,* SAFEGUARDING AND YOU

Designated safeguarding lead **Ceri Stokes** considers four ways in which the government's statutory RSE requirements could affect schools' safeguarding duties

September 2020 saw the introduction of the government's new statutory guidance for relationships and sex education (RSE). The relevant guidance document (see bit.ly/ts104-dfe-rse) outlines what schools now need to include within their RSE curriculum – which, by the very nature of its content, will have implications for a school's safeguarding duties.

The guidance has been welcomed by many. Schools are in the position of supporting students who are growing up in an increasingly complex world and living their lives both on and offline. It's a world that offers many exciting opportunities, but also many risks and pitfalls for the unwary.

As a topic, RSE can be controversial. It has to be taught sensitively and inclusively, while being respectful of the differing backgrounds and beliefs of your pupils and their families, but always with the ultimate aim of providing pupils with the knowledge they need.

At secondary level, the teaching of RSE now covers risk areas that include drug and alcohol use, as well as introducing knowledge regarding intimate relationships and sex. At some stage, the teaching of such topics are bound to highlight some concerns regarding student disclosures and schools' safeguarding responsibilities – which is why it's vital for schools to consider how they intend approach these issues ahead of time.

## 1. Consider the legal implications

When developing their new scheme of work, schools need to think carefully about what they're going to teach and when. Parents will have the right to withdraw their children from the 'sex' element of the new curriculum, but this is now so interwoven into the topics covered that this could entail students temporarily leaving classes for periods of 10 minutes at a time here and there.

Understanding the law and what we must cover is therefore key. If schools or pupils opt to depart from those parts of the guidance, they will need to have good reasons for doing so. Any discussions conducted as a whole school or with parents should always involve the school's designated safeguarding lead (DSL), who will be sensitive to the wider context.

Many schools are choosing to deliver RSE as part of their PSHE lessons, while others have looked at drop-down days or externally-sourced delivery. However schools choose to meet the legal requirements, it's important that lead teachers work closely alongside the school's DSL, pastoral team and colleagues in related curriculum areas to ensure the RSE provision doesn't duplicate content already covered in other subjects, such as science or PE.

The RSE statutory guidance refers to a multitude of other government documents, many of which are related to safeguarding. There are the obvious ones – 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (KCSiE), the Equality Act 2010, 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' and 'Sexual

**"Certain topics may trigger disclosures to teachers or peers"**

violence and sexual harassment between children in schools' – but also a further 15 documents, all suggested as extra reading. Lead teachers could well feel overwhelmed at the prospect of needing to digest large volumes of material that a DSL will already be familiar with, so good communication is key.

## 2. Adopt a whole-school approach

Part of the RSE guidance deals with equal opportunities, for which a whole school approach will be needed. All schools have to fully comply with the Equality Act 2010, and must therefore not unlawfully discriminate against any pupils for any reason.

As such, it's incumbent upon school leaders and staff to build a culture that firmly rejects everyday sexism, misogyny, homophobia and gender stereotyping. This should be communicated and reaffirmed throughout each and every day through not just the words, but actions of individuals. Staff need to be aware of the differences between bullying and peer-on-peer abuse, and contribute toward fostering a culture in which neither are tolerated, and never seen as an 'inevitable' part of growing up. All of this is included within the remit of DSL role

## 3. Develop staff awareness and training

When a subject like RSE is made compulsory, every teacher will need to be made aware of the topics it will cover. Schools will therefore need to give some thought as to who should provide the necessary training. Could the DSL and lead teacher work together and share the responsibility between them? The DSL may also have some links with external agencies who could help.

One positive I'm hoping to see emerge from this is the production of high quality – and hopefully thoroughly vetted – resources. We've previously seen the development and subsequent use of some questionable written and video resources, which caused some students to be given incorrect and sometimes even harmful information, prompting parents to question the validity of the subject.

Schools know their pupils. You'll know your student body, be aware of the gender and age range of your pupils, and be sensitive to needs of learners with SEND. To that end, your school may need to decide whether it's appropriate or necessary to put in place additional support for pupils with vulnerable characteristics – something we have done ourselves in the past.

When covering loss and grief, for example, a school with good pastoral and safeguarding support will be well aware of those students who may find the topic to be especially challenging. That's not to say that they should be excluded from the relevant lessons – more that careful consideration and communication will be needed.

## 4. Prepare for an increase in referrals

Covering topics such as female genital mutilation and grooming is bound to be upsetting for students, but it may also trigger disclosures to teachers or peers. Staff and pupils will therefore need to know how to get help if that happens and who they should speak to.

It's vital that students feel safe within school and are able to report any concerns or details of specific incidents – be it immediately after the incident in question, following some thought or much later. Students can become victims at any time, before or after they've been taught what do in an RSE lesson. Knowing that there's a place where they can review pertinent advice and find links to specific forms of support is key. Posters, noticeboards and online teaching resources are among the examples I've seen of this at more proactive schools.

Most PSHE lessons include some time where students are allowed to openly discuss their opinions and thoughts, which may lead to some pointed discussion of sensitive issues. PSHE rules of sharing and supporting are useful for students of every age.

It's clearly stated in KCSiE that all staff should know what to do if a pupil discloses a safeguarding concern. However, additional training may be needed on how to deal with filtering conversations and spotting signs of implied or unconscious disclosures within the context of a topical lesson.

The above advice is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the safeguarding implications of compulsory RSE. Many schools have already been doing great work in this area for some time, and will thus see little change to their existing practice. For others, the fact that their schools will now be judged and inspected on their ability to teach the topic may prompt them to reassess the roles of lead teacher and DSL, and recognise just how vital they are for success.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ceri Stokes is assistant head and designated safeguarding lead at Kimbolton School; for more PSHE tips and information, visit tes.com/for-schools/pshe-training

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# Policing the Providers

**Katy Chedzey** explains why a system of quality assurance could be the key to improving standards of teacher CPD

To put it simply, teacher quality really matters. If we want to improve outcomes for pupils in our schools, we need to ensure they receive high quality teaching – which means teachers need access to high quality professional development experiences.

However, a recent report by the Education Policy Institute (see bit.ly/ts104-epi-cpd) tells us that teachers in the UK complete less professional development than their international counterparts, and that much of the professional development that teachers do engage with isn't of sufficiently high quality.

## Robust criteria

So what can we do to improve the quality of professional development that teachers experience? At the Chartered College of Teaching, we've been working with the Teacher Development Trust and Sheffield Institute of Education (part of Sheffield Hallam University) to design and pilot a system for quality assuring teachers' CPD (see bit.ly/ts104-ccot-cpd).

Drawing from the evidence base around effective professional development, the system is underpinned by a set of robust quality assurance criteria, covering key areas such as the intended impact of the CPD; how schools are supported to implement CPD; and whether the CPD is designed in a way which would facilitate long-term changes to practice.

The criteria also consider some of the more practical elements relating to CPD delivery. For example, providers are expected to show how they engage in effective monitoring, evaluation and ongoing improvement to the CPD they offer.

## Self-governing

When completing the quality assurance process as part of the pilot, CPD providers were asked to submit a portfolio of evidence demonstrating how they met each of the quality assurance criteria. These portfolios were then assessed by a trained panel of reviewers made up of teachers, school leaders, CPD providers and other professionals with expertise in quality assurance and CPD.

Panel members were trained and supported through the process, and evaluation suggests they were able to use the criteria effectively to make valid judgements about the quality of CPD provision. Within the pilot, the panel was overseen by staff from the Chartered College of Teaching and Teacher Development Trust; in the long-term, the aim would be for the assessment processes to be overseen by a governance committee or an assessment board.

This board, like the review panel, would include significant representation from teachers and school leaders, alongside CPD providers who had undertaken the process – so that ultimately, the system would be self-governing.

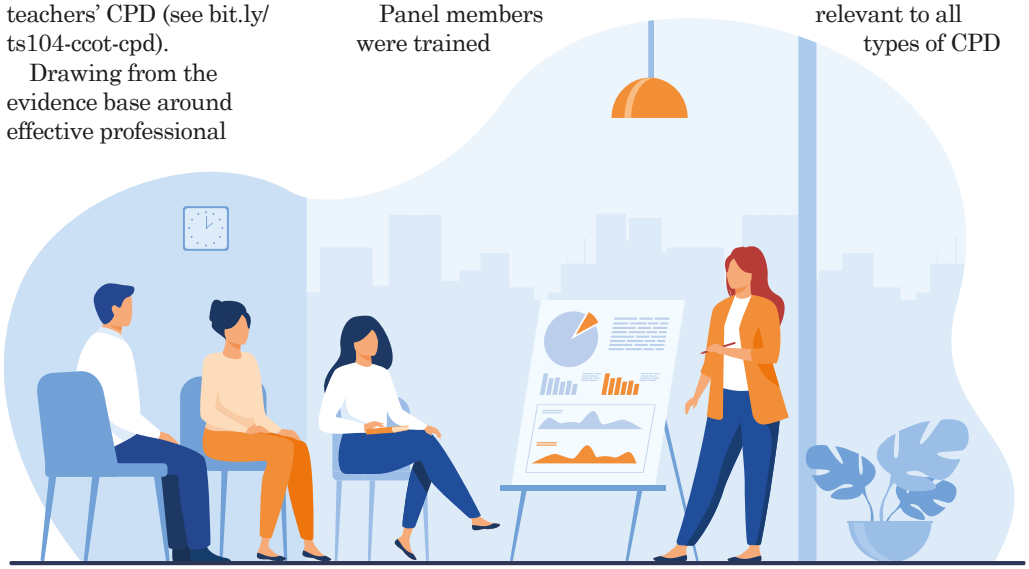
## Value and benefits

Of course, launching a CPD quality assurance system wouldn't be without its challenges. The review panel will need to be highly skilled in evaluating evidence and applying the quality assurance criteria. The quality assurance criteria themselves will need to be applicable and relevant to all types of CPD provider, including schools that are now delivering an increasing amount of CPD in-house.

Most importantly, the quality assurance system will need to be useful and of value to all those engaging with it. An indirect benefit for providers is that the process has the potential to be developmental, offering a clear framework which can be used to support reflection, evaluation and development in a systematic way.

For teachers and school leaders, the criteria offer a framework that can be used to inform decision-making around CPD, saving time and money which might otherwise be wasted on less effective professional development activities.

Evaluation from the pilot indicates that the perceived value and benefits of a CPD quality assurance system is high, and that there's the potential for a system to be rolled out into the sector that can make a real difference to how teachers experience CPD. Such a system would set a high bar for quality, and once established, should drive improvement in the CPD marketplace. School leaders will thus be able to commission CPD that's more likely to meet the needs of their school, individual teachers, and ultimately the needs of pupils.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Katy Chedzey is head of teaching, learning and assessment at the Chartered College of Teaching; for more information, visit chartered.college or follow @CharteredColl

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# FOCUS ON: MFL

As pandemic-induced travel restrictions put the kibosh on holidays abroad and international school exchange trips, we look at the approaches teachers can take to interest students in the prospect of learning another language

**How can students be motivated to apply themselves at MFL – and what languages should they be learning...?**

## THE AGENDA:



# MASTER THE MFL HARD SELL

**Dr Amanda Barton** reflects on why motivating students to learn a new language continues to be a challenge, and suggests some strategies for bringing them round...

A long time ago (pre-pandemic), in a galaxy far, far away (Manchester), I used to tell PGCE students that being a modern languages teacher didn't just involve teaching. You had to be a promoter, actively selling the subject to your hard-to-please clients. Teachers of other subjects would no doubt argue the same come options time, but the recent slump in MFL uptake means that languages teachers are having to do a harder sell than ever.

BBC analysis carried out in 2019, based on the responses of 2,048 secondary schools, revealed that foreign language learning was at its lowest level in UK secondary schools since the turn of the millennium. The worst affected areas in England saw drops of between 30% and 50% since 2013 in the numbers taking language GCSEs.

## Brexit and EBacc

Unsurprisingly, the fallout from Brexit has been harsher on MFL than other subjects. The 2020 British Council Language Trends survey reported that Brexit has 'cast a pall over languages', with 58% of state schools in the survey reporting a drop in pupil motivation to study European languages.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the elephant in the staffroom – otherwise known as EBacc – might have acted as a counterbalance to this. MFL is, after all, one of the five constituent parts of said school performance measure, and the government remains committed to a target of having 75% of pupils be doing EBacc subjects by 2022, and 90% by 2025.

Yet while the DfE claims the proportion of students studying a language has risen since the introduction of the EBacc in 2010 (from 40% to 46% in 2018) the Language Trends survey shows there's still a heck of a long way to go. In 2017, only 38.2% of pupils in the state sector were entered for the EBacc. Among those entering four of the five components, 80.4% were missing the languages component.

So what can we do to stem the tide, and give students' motivation to learn languages a much-needed boost?

## Breadth, not depth

One way to start – though not necessarily a popular one – would be to look at the languages you offer. While we've seen a decline in the number of students opting for German and French, there has been a surge of interest in other languages, including Spanish, Mandarin, Polish, Russian and Arabic.

In 2001, just 2,500 students were taking languages other than French, German, Spanish or Welsh. By 2017, that number had risen to 9,400. French remains the most popular language for now, but it's been predicted that Spanish will overtake it by 2030, or even earlier if current trends continue.

Rather than focusing on one language in-depth during the first three years of secondary school, there are arguments for building students' broader understanding and interest in a range of languages and their cultural context. One school in Derbyshire, Chapel-en-le-Frith High School, has increased take-up by offering KS3 students a taster of French, German and Spanish in a language awareness-style programme that cross-references other languages too.

The Language Trends survey recommends boosting motivation by revamping the KS3 curriculum to focus on those cultural aspects that are all too often neglected.

## *"Why opt to study a language when it's easier to get a good grade in a different subject?"*

### Single-sex classes?

Let's put aside some time to explore with our students that age-old question, '*Why do we have to learn a language?*' Now more than ever, that's a perfectly valid question that demands an answer, especially given post-COVID travel restrictions and parents' doubts regarding the practical value of learning other languages.

Students may be right in saying they'll never use the foreign language they're learning when on holiday – traditionally the main reason given for learning a new language – but they will stand to gain a whole range of transferable skills, especially in communication, that are highly valued in today's post-Brexit economy. The website whystudylanguages.ac.uk highlights some of the many ways in which such skills are useful, with links to films, quizzes, advice on exams and revision, and a list of 700 reasons for studying languages.

A more radical strategy would involve reviewing the setting of your classes based on sex. Numerous research reports have found that GCSE uptake in MFL is much higher in all-boys and all-girls schools, compared to mixed schools. According to the 2020 Languages Trends survey, the average proportion of pupils taking a language at Y10 is 51%, compared with 74% at single sex state schools.

Some schools are currently experimenting with setting up single-sex MFL groups to tackle the demotivation that can set in during Y9. As my own doctoral research has indicated, if classes of this kind are paired with suitable teachers, they can lead to hugely positive outcomes.

Sadly, the main reason for students opting out of languages is something teachers can ultimately do little about – namely tough exams and severe grading. Why would you opt to study a language when it's so much easier to get a good grade in a different subject?

For now, we can only hope that the government's ongoing review into the GCSE system – which aims to reduce content and make the qualification fairer for all – will come to the rescue of a subject currently in peril.

## 4 WAYS TO BOOST TAKE-UP

**1. Engage the family**
Involve parents and carers – who play a huge role in pupils' subject choices – by sending home a languages quiz. Include questions about where different languages are spoken, which are the world's most widely spoken languages, and parents' own experience of using other languages. Tap into people's interest in learning a language during lockdown by inviting parents to taster classes.

**2. Meet students where they are**
Remember that MFL can be scary for self-aware teenagers. Giving the department a Japanese or Norwegian taster lesson, and feeding back on how staff felt during the lesson, can be helpful in devising strategies that are less threatening to pupils.

**3. Think big**
Once travel becomes possible again, organise a visit abroad, even if it's just a day trip. Failing that, an intensive language day in school can be just as effective. This could involve taking a whole year group off timetable to take part in activities conducted in a range of languages, including heritage languages. Recruit some trainee teachers to help out, and ask your canteen to serve dishes from other countries.

**4. Think small**
Tell pupils a joke: One day, a mouse spots a packet of biscuits on the kitchen table. As soon as the cat goes into the garden, he ushers his baby mice into the kitchen. They're half way across the floor when the cat suddenly reappears. Quick as a flash, and in his loudest voice, the mouse yells, 'Woof! Woof!' Terrified, the cat races back outside.

The mouse turns to his babies and says, *'So, children – now you can see why it's always worth speaking a foreign language...'*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Dr. Amanda Barton is an educational consultant and freelance writer; follow her at @amandabook2

# *Should Chinese* BE TAUGHT AT SECONDARY?

The teaching of Chinese remains a fairly niche pursuit within English secondary schools – but given the language's growing popularity and the support now available, there's never been a better time to get involved, say **Katharine Carruthers...**

I never had the chance to learn Chinese at school, but I was able to study the language at the University of Durham, graduating in 1982. I became a teacher of Chinese after working for what was then the Sino British Trade Council (now the China Britain Business Council), and spent the 90s teaching evening classes and in schools around the Cambridge area, and developing accreditation for Chinese.

In the years since, the growing popularity of Chinese language teaching has largely mirrored the opening-up of China itself. The period around the early 2010s saw a number of internationally-minded UK headteachers visit the country, which helped drive significant further interest in schools; however, the number of schools teaching Chinese still remains relatively small.

## Enormity and dynamism

Historically, one of the key barriers to the teaching of Chinese in UK schools has been the lack of a trained teaching force. Developing one means being able to offer a PGCE – something I became involved with at UCL Institute of Education in 2011, when I was still working at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, and from 2012 when I joined the IOE as director of the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools.

Over the past decade, we've been able to develop and build up a Mandarin pathway within PGCE languages, with more than 125 PGCE Mandarin students graduating since the PGCE Mandarin pathway began. My colleagues and I provide a wide range of CPD to practitioners, and are involved in research around the teaching of Chinese as a second language in schools.

Many of the English schools I deal with now are impressive in what they're able to provide – schools that will have a team of Chinese teachers, rather than just one, with provision that's fully embedded and really going places. But there are also a number of schools who are at the beginning of their Mandarin learning journey, and regional provision across the country is variable.

It's been a slow burn. Many schools seem to be unaware that teaching Chinese isn't as difficult now as it used to be. Over the last 15 years we've solved numerous issues with respect to exams, teaching expertise and learning materials, enabling schools to build quality provision in a way that wasn't previously possible.

There's also a lingering perception among students that language GCSEs in general are hard, with too few taking them at KS4 if they're not compulsory. The cultural dimension can be a strong motivator for learning Chinese, however.

Chinese approaches to teaching, as seen in Shanghai Maths, for example, has helped raise awareness and created some demand among school leaders. In most cases, though, a desire to learn Chinese will come from having had first-hand experience of visiting China itself, its sheer enormity and dynamism frequently winning over 'converts.'

## Character education

The actual teaching of Chinese can involve some quick wins. Chinese verbs don't conjugate, and while there are aspect particles, there are no tenses. That means that once students know some Chinese words, they can manipulate them in sentences much more easily than with a language like French. This can also make students potentially more confident with speaking the language at an earlier stage.

It takes a fair amount of time to

**"The differences between Chinese and more traditional MFL languages can be liberating"**

learn how to write Chinese characters, of course, but if taught in the right way, this can be a major motivator. Compared to kids in mainland China, who will grow up surrounded by characters at all times, the experience of learning characters here can be similar to practising and memorising piano scales. The hand/eye co-ordination involved in writing characters needs to be fully absorbed in order for progress to be made, though at the same time, you don't want to drill students excessively.

For some students, the differences between Chinese and more traditional MFL languages can even be liberating. Once you've learnt that 'mountain' is '*shan*' and fire is '*huǒ*', you can put the two together to create the word for volcano. Instead of the lesson focus always being on grammar and structure, students can be tasked with making leaps of imagination in order to learn what certain words and characters might mean.

By the end of a Chinese GCSE course, I'd expect a student's speaking, listening and reading abilities to be equivalent to those of their peers learning French and German. Chinese GCSE papers feature shorter reading passages and don't require students to write quite as much – but otherwise, the same basic principles of KS4 MFL learning are the same.

## Thinking bigger

The Mandarin Excellence Programme, with its requirement for students to complete four taught hours of taught Chinese and four hours of self-study (see panel), shows how well students can fare when learning Chinese, and how self-motivated they can be.

There are now a significant number of Chinese teachers out there, with more emerging each year, and lots of movement. That said, finding a Chinese teacher admittedly remains easier in London and the South East than elsewhere. The rate of growth has also dipped slightly. Lots of Chinese teaching is done by native speaker guest teachers or TAs, many of whom obviously haven't been able to relocate here over the past year.

It's further worth noting the relatively recent development of UK-developed Chinese teaching materials, which we have written. Teaching materials imported from China will often have great content, but be presented in a less approachable way than what schools might be used to from their French, German and Spanish resources.

There can be many benefits to offering Chinese language provision in schools. Plenty of surveys indicate that employers value it as a subject, for example. Teaching Chinese won't necessarily turn all your students into fantastic Chinese speakers, but it may well make them more internationalist in their outlook – taking them out of their immediate surroundings and encouraging them to start thinking bigger. Because above all, learning the language can massively broaden students' horizons.

## THE MANDARIN EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME

*Originally started in 2016, this is an ongoing UK government-funded programme that schools can sign up to, but one that entails a significant commitment.*

- Membership of the programme entitles schools to receive £20,000 in funding per annum, as well as access to online teaching materials and resources, professional development meets and a partnership with a hub school.
- Implementation begins in Y7, and involves students doing four hours of taught Chinese (with the option for some of that to be outside the curriculum – e.g. during lunch or after-school sessions) and four non-taught hours of independent study.
- Once a school has submitted an expression of interest, discussions will be held with the school's headteacher, head of languages, and members of their Chinese department, should they have one. All being well, the DfE will then approve the school's application.
- Approval to join the programme will be contingent on a school's ability to adequately fund its Chinese provision. Schools will require at least one trained teacher on staff to deliver the programme.

**For more information about the Mandarin Excellence Programme and details of how to apply, visit bit.ly/ts104-mep**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Katharine Carruthers is director of the UCL Institute Of Education Confucius Institute for Schools and UCL's Pro-Vice-Provost for East Asia; for more information, visit ci.ioe.ac.uk

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OXFORD

# What's your reticence response?

If you're struggling to develop students' confidence in their speaking and listening skills, a fresh approach may be in order, suggests **Steve Smith...**

One of the main challenges facing MFL teachers is the reluctance exhibited by many KS3 pupils to engage with communicating in a new language. This is partly explained by the prevalent attitudes to other languages and cultures we see in some communities, as well as the dominance of English as a world language.

But a growing number of MFL departments around England have managed to overcome pupils' reticence and improve their attitudes, confidence and skills by experimenting with some innovative teaching methods.

## Comprehensible input

These include the use of sentence builder tables and knowledge organisers (or a combination of both) to develop confidence in listening and speaking from the earliest stages of learning. Following many years in which appearances of English were discouraged in MFL lessons, both tools make a virtue of showing pupils English translations in order to make their learning more meaningful. One of the fundamentals of language learning is that we need to understand messages in order for the brain to process new language. Put another way, comprehensible input is the bedrock of second language acquisition. When a different language is presented to us in phrases or full sentences alongside an English translation, there are no barriers to understanding. Pupils aren't limited to responding with just single words or short phrases – a frustrating experience for those learners who want to speak in sentences.

So, what should a typical MFL lesson look like?

## Noisy but productive

A printed or displayed resource can serve as the basis for tasks such as whole class repetition, paired reading, translation and comprehension.

The stress will initially be on language input, with compositional writing emerging later in the sequence once pupils have recycled the target language on numerous occasions over a number of lessons. The lessons themselves may be quite teacher-led, or feature a good deal of paired practice. MFL lessons can generally end up being noisy, but highly productive, with lots of listening and speaking.

A rigorous focus on accurate pronunciation builds phonics skills, which will in turn help to produce more confident speakers and effective listeners.

When pupils are speaking and listening a great deal, there may be a relative dearth of written evidence to show observers, particularly in the first year. It's therefore incumbent upon MFL teachers to explain that their methodology is underpinned by second language acquisition theory and cognitive science – notably, the importance of comprehensible input, phonological working memory, phonics awareness and chunking language repeatedly to maximise the efficient use of working memory.

## Firm foundations

Could reading aloud and translation of chunked language come at the expense of more meaningful, spontaneous communication? On the contrary, the evidence suggests that early development of phonological, phonics and pronunciation skills provides a firm foundation on which to develop more creative uses of language.

Allowing pupils to frequently work with phrases and full sentences – as opposed to single words put together according to grammatical rules – more closely reflects how we pick up our first languages, while also giving pupils the means to work confidently with a repertoire of useful language. Evidence from many happy classrooms suggests that revised schemes of work and new methodology have been making a real mark.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Steve Smith is an experienced teacher educator and author; for more information, visit frenchteachernet.blogspot.com or follow @spsmith45

# *How to do* DIFFERENTIATION

**Jennifer Wozniak-Rush** breaks down the steps she follows when teaching her MFL lessons to mixed ability classes

At some point in our career, all of us will have heard the words, *'Mixed ability teaching doesn't work!'* – or perhaps that closely related phrase, *'I hate teaching mixed ability classes!'*.

It's my belief that we shouldn't 'label' pupils through setting, and that teaching mixed ability classes doesn't amount to us placing a cap on what pupils might produce. It's common practice in primary, so why shouldn't the same apply at secondary?

In my school, we teach mixed ability classes from Y7 right through to Y11. As a result, I'll spend time carefully examining my seating plan and ensuring that pupils of similar abilities aren't sitting together. Instead, I try where possible to seat a 'high ability' pupil beside a 'middle ability' pupil, and a 'middle ability' pupil next to a 'lower ability' pupil. This can help facilitate some safe coaching and mixed ability group activities, thus encouraging a climate in which pupils feel able to support one another.

In class sizes of 32, however, it can be easy for some pupils to hide and keep their heads down. Our role as teachers is to ensure every pupil has ample opportunity to contribute in class, and to speak as much as possible in the target language.

I'll use a range of routines in my MFL lessons – set greetings, a consistent registration procedure, 'What are we going to learn?…' announcements, pre- and post-pair work routines – and regularly ask random pupils to contribute to the lesson; something they're generally confident in doing, given how frequently I call upon them to do so. Lower ability pupils may give simpler, but accurate answers, while others might offer more complex responses. Over time, the effect of this is to gradually make the language used by all pupils in the room better and more sophisticated.

Naturally, languages are meant to be spoken, but I'm also conscious that some pupils are much more reluctant to put their hands up and have a go. With that in mind, I'll try to incorporate as many pair work activities into lessons as possible, so that everyone can practise the vocabulary, get involved and hopefully build their confidence in speaking another language.

## Teaching to the top

To engage all pupils, it's important to set the big picture and make language learning meaningful. At the start of each academic year, I'll ask my pupils about their interests and what floats their boat, and then use this information when planning lessons. Pupils don't want to learn about 'buying souvenirs', as this isn't something they'll tend to do. Instead, they'll want to be able to talk about topics that are relevant to them.

We don't follow a textbook in KS3, which allows us to be more creative and teach topics of greater relevance and interest to our pupils – the internet, for example, or sport, socialising with friends – things they can relate to. We study a film with all our KS3 classes, and aim to bring in as much culture as possible throughout the year. We try hard to get our pupils demonstrating the skills we've taught them, within the context of topics that interest them.

> **"Teaching mixed ability classes doesn't amount to placing a cap on what pupils might produce"**

One key benefit I've found of mixed ability grouping is that teachers can set the same high expectations and offer the same tasks to all students, regardless of prior attainment. It's an approach based around 'teaching to the top' and having scaffolding in place to help those pupils who need it.

I find it much more effective to 'teach to the top' and regularly check what I need to do to make the lesson content accessible for everyone in the class – such as using writing or speaking frames, giving extra guidance or engaging in further discussion. Scaffolding is key, but let's not forget that at some point that support will need to be removed so that pupils can work independently.

## Questioning and feedback

To me, differentiation in mixed ability settings is best practised via questioning and feedback. Questioning is a hugely powerful tool, particularly in mixed ability MFL settings. I'll call upon a range of strategies, such as 'Cold Calling' and 'No-Opt Out' – both ideas taken from Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion*.

Cold Calling tends to be my default mode for most questions, and operates on the basic principle of *'No hands up!'* I'll ask questions and then select those pupils I want to answer, thus avoiding the pitfalls that come with hands going up and calling out. Who I select to respond will be based on my knowledge of the class, and ultimately ensure that *all* pupils are involved at some point – from those at the front to their peers at the back, alighting on the shy, the confident, the loud, and know-alls as we go.

No Opt-Out is reserved for when a pupil gets an answer wrong, or partially wrong. The teacher turns to another pupil to answer, and then returns to the original pupil to give him or her a chance to offer the correct answer. This is a useful technique in MFL lessons, as it gives pupils another opportunity to repeat the language. It also helps avoid the otherwise common occurrence of Y9 pupils responding with, *'I don't know!'* – not because they genuinely don't know, but because they don't want to speak French – and get away with not giving an answer.

When posing more challenging questions, I'll do a 'Think, Pair, Share' so that all pupils have an opportunity to think about the question and discuss it with a partner, before I ask pupils at random to share their answers with the class. This helps to build confidence, since pupils feel reassured by knowing, before the teacher asks them, that their answer in the target language is the same as the person next to them.

It also works well when looking at grammar, on those occasions when you want pupils to work out a grammar structure for themselves, rather than simply explain it to them.

If I want to engage with a larger number of pupils within a lesson, I'll call upon the ABC technique. This involves a pupil first giving me an answer in French or Spanish. I will then ask the class if they agree with the answer given and the language used, and after that, ask who can build on it by either giving extra details in the target language, or a justification for the opinion given.

Following this, I'll ask if any pupils can challenge, or provide a contrast to the answer that's been given. I might ask for an antonym, or request that they change a masculine word for a feminine one, and work out with the class if other words in the sentence will now need to be changed as a result.

As Dylan Wiliam once observed, *"Everything works somewhere, and nothing works everywhere."* I've found that engaging all pupils depends upon knowing your classes well, and finding those strategies that work best for the pupils you've got in front of you.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Jennifer Wozniak-Rush is an assistant headteacher for teaching and learning, and an SLE in MFL

## THE BEST ENGAGEMENT TOOL

I use mini whiteboards with all of my classes in every lesson. Each pupil at our school brings their own mini-whiteboard and marker pen with them to class, though there are a growing number of online services and solutions that can model the functions of whiteboards electronically (including spiral.ac and whiteboard.fi, among others).

We use mini whiteboards to:
- Check understanding,
- Work on misconceptions
- Check spelling
- Set translation activities
- Write sentences
- Practise grammar
- Illustrate descriptions
- Comment on others' work

As well as ensuring everyone has to take part, the students' use of whiteboards enables me to easily spot see any potential misconceptions that I can address there and then, or in my future planning.

For maximum efficiency, I instruct my pupils to only show me their whiteboards when I say so. That way, everyone is given sufficient time to write their answers, and pupils are prevented from copying their classmates.

# COULD NEGATIVITY BE CONTAGIOUS?

**Adam W. Hunter** finds out whether a recent scientific study examining how teenagers can 'catch' moods from friends may have potential implications for schools...

Even before the pandemic changed everything, schools were already stepping up their efforts at tackling student mental health and wellbeing. But to hear Dr Stephanie Burnett Heyes – lecturer at the University of Birmingham's School of Psychology – tell it, recent events may well have exacerbated a growing problem.

"In a way, it's increasing divides between people who were coping well already and people who are not," she says. "A lot of teenagers are stressed out. It's hard to generalise, but indicators like rates of self-harm have been going up in recent years. Thinking about how we can harness the capacity of young people to support one another, and ensure groups have the emotional resources to cope, is very relevant."

Alongside Dr Per Block – of Oxford's Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science – Burnett Heyes recently co-published a paper that she hopes will lead to an improved understanding of emotional wellbeing in adolescents. In the course of studying two groups of musicians on short residential tours, Block and Burnett Hayes found that mood is contagious; that teenagers can 'catch' moods from friends, and that bad moods are more contagious than good ones.

Neither were that surprised at the findings, and the design of the study itself – which saw students placed in contained groups to exclude external influences – might account for the results. But what might the effects of these 'contagious adolescent moods' be in the mixed environment of a school?

## Tipping points

"Although the study was quite particular, we don't expect that the effect would be absent [in other environments] – it might just be stronger or weaker," Burnett Heyes says. "Mood contagion is something that's been observed [before], and there's good reason to think that it possibly happens in other species."

> **"Bad moods are more contagious than good ones"**

The individuals in the study didn't avoid or seek out peers based on mood. Those feeling low didn't withdraw socially, nor did they abandon a friend when said friend was experiencing a 'bad mood day'.

"Other studies have suggested negative mood might not be contagious, because it makes the person withdraw from social contact," notes Burnett Heyes, "but maybe [withdrawal] was harder because they were all having fun and living together on these amazing music tours. Maybe in a school, people would be able to isolate themselves more easily. On the other hand, you might withdraw socially, but you're still present in the classroom."

With schools now fully returned and teachers looking ahead to the future, could the study's findings help inform their approach to improving student wellbeing? Might there be certain powerful individuals who exert a large impact on collective moods and group dynamics?

"We looked for that and didn't find it," asserts Burnett Heyes. "Different people were happier on average than others, but there were no 'mood influencers'. Though it would be interesting to look at a sadder or more stressed group, because you could look at tipping points. If you get a group where lots of people are sad, that could spiral – it would be great to identify where that point is, because that's where you would want to deliver interventions."

## Subtle influence

Following the dramatic increase of online teaching and social interaction via smartphones, is there anything schools can learn from the student interactions these technologies encourage?

"We're collecting data as we speak, from undergrads in their communal houses, to look at face-to-face and mediated interactions," says Burnett Heyes. "If you're having a rubbish day with your housemates, could a phone call with a family member make up for that? And do you need two online interactions to have the effect of one face-to-face interaction, for example?"

The findings so far suggest that mood goes both ways. Teenagers can bring each other down, but will also support those they see as struggling – and mood doesn't determine popularity in the short-term.

"In a way, we shouldn't see the negative mood contagion as something bad," ventures Burnett Heyes. "If the group is happy enough to absorb that negative mood, it's spread into smaller portions across the network – a potential

mechanism for social support, provided others aren't too emotionally vulnerable. A happy person may get a bit less happy, but a sad person will become a bit less sad as well."

In fact, teenagers want to help each other, and socialising with someone in a low mood is a risk most are prepared to take. "We know there's this high motivation amongst young people to interact with and care for their friends, and they'll often support each other very generously. How do we use this while protecting young people from being harmed in the process?"

Compared to students, teachers are far more aware of the subtle influence they can have on others' feelings and behaviour. If they're feeling well, could their positive mood be 'caught' by others across the school community?

"I don't know whether the effect would be stronger or weaker in a network where people have different roles," says Burnett Heyes, "but it would be fascinating to find out. To what extent can a teacher buffer a group's negative mood? Will it only work for certain types of emotion or relationship? What's the impact on adults likely to be?"

## Emotional wellbeing

If teachers wish to exert this kind of positive influence, they'd be advised not to repeat and reinforce negative opinions and anecdotes concerning the pandemic's effect on young people – though as Burnett Heyes points out, it's not just what we say that counts.

"If we didn't tell them that the pandemic was bad, and didn't communicate any negative emotion, they might not 'catch' it," she says. "But we communicate in many different ways, and we don't know the effects of that on a psychological level – probably a mix of verbal communication, body language and other things, both conscious and unconscious."

Burnett Heyes is flush with further questions that have come out of her work, but for schools now attempting to overcome the lasting effects of isolation among their students, she offers the following advice:

"Giving emotional support is more difficult than giving practical support – the cost is higher. Explicitly talking to students about how to help each other, and about their own emotional wellbeing while supporting each other, could be really relevant."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Adam W Hunter is a former teacher turned writer, journalist and musician; follow him at **@adamwhunter**

## RESEARCH NOTES

Dr Burnett Heyes' and Dr Block's study sample comprised two groups of adolescents – 79 in total, aged 15 to 19, on short residential classical music performance tours. Each day, participants reported the top two to six peers they had interacted with, and rated how much they experienced each of 12 mood words on a standard 1-5 numerical scale. In all, they measured 1,775 interactions and 4,724 mood scores.

The mood contagion effect was large. Individuals were 1.26 times more likely to experience a particular mood state for each interaction partner that reported this mood. Bad moods were more contagious than good, with 'bad mood contagion' accounting for 23% of variance, compared to 14% for 'good mood'.

Connected individuals were more similar in mood, and became reciprocally more similar over time – i.e. participants first formed a tie, after which their moods became more similar.

To model the short-term co-evolution of mood and interaction, control for environmental influences and distinguish mood contagion from social selection, all individuals in the bounded group were sampled daily.

The main limitation was the representativeness of the sample in terms of age, demographics, and setting. However, the authors expect this to limit generalisability in terms of the magnitude of effects, not the presence of mood contagion itself.

As Burnett Heyes explains, "We had quite an optimised design for measuring this kind of thing. What we lose in representativeness of the sample we gain in control of the group and environment."

# "LET'S EMPOWER OUR TEACHERS"

After decades of reforms that have stripped teachers of their agency, the challenges now presented by the pandemic require teachers who are confident, positive and above all, empowered, says **Dr Alex Gardner-McTaggart...**

There are some in the teaching profession – not many, but some – who will have experienced first-hand how different their roles were before the Thatcherite policies of the 1980s.

Prior to then, teachers had enjoyed 'teacher education', rather than 'teacher training'. They were treated as professionals, and given far greater control over both the creative process and the execution of their jobs. Teachers had more autonomy, regularly creating curriculums, syllabi and pedagogies using their skills and intellectualism to facilitate a transferral of knowledge.

Then came a significant shift. Throughout the 1980s and onwards into subsequent decades, there was a marked change in the way teachers were prepared for their jobs, as successive governments restricted debate and discussion between teachers and schools in favour of achieving greater state control over educational affairs.

In short, the governments of the past several decades have increasingly seen teachers more as workers, not professionals. With teachers no longer steering education, it was decided that the market would instead.

## Wresting away control

In 1984, the Conservative Party abolished the Schools Council and established in its place the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, which would exercise much greater control over teacher development.

In 1985, it then abolished the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers, one of the last remaining representative advisory bodies; this was followed in 1986 by the abolition of the Central Advisory Councils for England and Wales.

In 1987 these efforts went even further. One month before that year's General Election, Thatcher – then eight years into her reign as Prime Minister – told the *Daily Mail*, "We are going much further with education than we ever thought of doing before. When we've spent all that money per pupil, and with more teachers, there is still so much wrong, so we are going to do something determined about it."

The Conservative manifesto for that year's election, which it would go on to win, stated that the party would establish a National Core Curriculum, with a clear focus on reducing the powers of local education authorities. This came to pass in the form of the Education Reform Act 1988.

In reflecting on these changes, I'm not attempting to declare them all as negative or without merit. Creating structures for overseeing national education systems, and ensuring that particular standards are upheld, is, of course, important. So why do it? Why fixate on reforms implemented some 30 or 40 years ago?

Because it's important that we acknowledge the various ways in which these changes significantly affected the roles of teaching professionals in this country. It's a history we ought to understand and learn from, since the roots of many issues that have emerged during the pandemic can be traced back to these dramatic policy upheavals – this 'proletarianisation' of teachers, if you will – which took place the 1980s.

Our understanding of that period

can then hopefully inform more positive change and practice as we emerge from the shadow of COVID-19.

## Resetting the balance

The pandemic has shown us that the indomitable spirit of teachers is fundamental to the success of any education programme. Throughout, it's been teachers who have kept the proverbial show on the road – demonstrating bravery and resilience in the face of an increased exposure to infection where schools are still open; demonstrating initiative through implementing new forms of online teaching; and generating a sense of community through their continued interactions with children.

To that end, COVID-19 has served as an important and timely reminder that without access to impassioned educators, students won't receive the high-quality tutelage they need to excel.

Yet however impassioned they are, these teachers aren't empowered in the ways they need to be. As per the timeline outlined above, teachers have been gradually stripped of their agency and creative control over recent decades, with much of what they do now dictated to them by the National Curriculum and teacher leaders.

Now is an opportune moment to reflect on this balance (or rather, imbalance) between managerialism and teacher control. Indeed, the impact of COVID-19 has reinforced previous research findings that show how educational leadership only impacts student achievement when it's teacher-focussed. As we emerge from the pandemic, it's therefore essential that the state and teacher leaders remember that the true value of schools administration lies in helping teachers.

## Sharper focus

If COVID-19 has shown that teachers are the ones who ultimately make schools run successfully, then that marks a powerful and notable ideological shift away from notions that the sector – and indeed wider society – has been drip-fed since the 1980s. It's a shift away from an ideology that says '*The market is everything,*' which maintains that '*Privatisation delivers more efficiency*' and which concludes that '*Teachers don't need a say, because we have people who can tell them what to do.*'

The pandemic has really brought home that it's teachers who stand in front of students, who understand and deal with the children, and who foster and develop their abilities. It's a point one would hope was already obvious – but having seen the role and value of teachers brought into much sharper focus over the past year, if we fail to engage with the de-professionalising of teaching and discuss its impact in greater depth, then nothing will change.

> **"The true value of schools administration lies in helping teachers"**

As schools reopen and social distancing measures are slowly relaxed, we risk a return to traditional classroom-based learning, wherein teachers are stripped of their agency. Instead, institutions, educational leaders, communities and public bodies should recognise – just as they do in Finland and Singapore – that teachers are rounded professionals, and warrant the creative freedom to demonstrate the professionalism and expertise they possess.

## A catalyst for change

Across many areas of society, the pandemic has already acted as a catalyst for positive change. It's brought communities together, encouraged consumers to support their local businesses and high streets, inspired people to protect the most vulnerable in society and forced organisations to forge new, more efficient processes.

Alongside all of this, it must now also trigger a deeper conversation around the role of teachers in education. In the months ahead, educational leaders and teachers ought to engage in discussions around how to best harness the latter's passion and expertise for the best possible educational outcomes, while giving them greater control and support in the process.

Teachers deserve better. They work in frequently challenging social environments, often with great empathy, skill, and compassion. They work harder in areas other professionals barely even touch upon, and regularly carry out work that demands high levels of intellectualism, reflection, stamina, and most of all, recognition and empowerment.

The pandemic has shown everyone just how hard teachers work. The time has come for society to show just how much they're valued – as educated professionals, not trained knowledge workers. It's a process that begins by returning to higher education for teachers, and by shifting influence over the profession back from the market to education.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# JUST LIKE BEING THERE

With school trips more logistically complex than ever thanks to COVID, there's never been a better time for teachers to explore the learning possibilities of virtual reality, says **Simon Luxford-Moore**...

With schools across the UK finally open again, it's more vital than ever that the learning they provide is engaging, enjoyable and memorable.

That's not necessarily a big ask. After all, we're surrounded by an incredible, complex world, and every subject will have something unique to offer that can engage the relentlessly curious, growing minds of our students.

However, textbooks and photocopied exercise sheets alone can't provide the type of rich experience that many students will really benefit from. That's why field trips to, say, Roman ruins in Italy will be utilised to make teaching around history much more tangible, and hopefully engender a greater love of the subject among students. Trips like these aren't always practical, though, for various reasons – not least the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Technology has long been able to offer a middle ground between the pragmatism and prudence of classroom teaching, and the immersion and inspiration that educational experiences can offer. Video technologies, starting with film projectors and later evolving through VCRs and interactive whiteboards, have traditionally given teachers a way of transporting students beyond the classroom walls and closer to the heart of the subject being studied. The emergence of the internet has aided this progression yet further, resulting in experiences that are grander and more varied than previous generations could have ever dreamed of.

So what's next? I believe the answer is virtual reality. I'm fortunate enough to have been an early adopter of VR technology in the classroom, and remain convinced of its value as a tool for engaging students and enriching their education. Here, I'd like to discuss some of the experiences I've had with the technology, and the lessons I've learned about its applications within a teaching context.

**"VR is most effective when it takes up around 15 minutes of a one-hour session, ideally one broken down into bite-sized, five-minute chunks"**

## Getting started

Using VR for the first time can be an exhilarating, but often disorienting experience, which is why it's generally best to begin with simple settings that will allow students to find their feet. That said, VR is extremely intuitive, and you'll likely find within minutes that your students are ready to visit new places and start using the technology to learn in entirely new ways.

VR systems that are specifically designed with classroom use in mind – such as the one we use, ClassVR – will typically allow teachers to create custom lesson plans, launch them on all headsets simultaneously, lock headsets away when they're not in use and dynamically highlight any 'points of interest' within the virtual space students find themselves in. Teachers should invest time in learning about these features before starting out for the first time, as they'll prove invaluable.

## Integrating VR

For teachers considering making use of VR in their classroom, I'd offer one key piece of advice. Remember that it's just a resource – albeit a fantastic one – and should therefore not be the focus of the lesson. Students should leave your classroom thinking, *'That was a wonderful history / geography / English lesson'* – not *'That was a great VR lesson!'*

I've found that VR is most effective when it takes up around 15 minutes of a one-hour session, ideally one broken down into bite-sized, five-minute chunks. This will ensure that students can remain focused on the content of the lesson, rather than the hardware. It also gives pupils the chance to incorporate other learning styles and skills.

Students will spend a significant amount of their time in the classroom learning through seeing, hearing, and doing things, often in isolation. VR can help to combine these different experiences and cater to students' preferences for mixed learning styles.

## Classroom field trips

My experience of using VR for virtual excursions has been phenomenal. Even before the COVID crisis, we had been using VR to overcome barriers of geography, faith and logistics. For example, we were able to virtually visit Culloden Battlefield and The Soldier's Leap at Killiecrankie as part of our P6 Jacobites topic. A field trip taking in both sites would have entailed sitting on a bus for most of the day, but in VR we could remain focused on investigating the sites themselves.

In a similar vein, we also undertook a virtual tour of the island castle on Loch Leven where Mary Queen of Scots was imprisoned. This offered many of the same benefits students would have had from a physical visit – an engaging experience of the location that could provide them with important context – without any of the drawbacks.

Looking further afield, the holy sites within Mecca are not accessible to non-Muslims – yet VR enables students to tour them irrespective of their faith, and follow in the virtual footsteps of the millions of pilgrims who have participated in the traditions and rituals they're currently studying.

## SAFETY FIRST

Staying safe in VR is straightforward, and most students can use it without any ill effects. Some, however, may well experience nausea or symptoms of motion sickness. To minimise these risks, I would offer the following advice to those trying VR for the first time:

- **Use the VR headset sitting down, either on the floor or on a chair**
- **Place both hands on a tabletop or clasp them together in your lap to remain grounded**
- **Take frequent breaks**

I would advise against using video content that involves camera movement, which may make some users feel unwell. It's also important to be aware of any students with epilepsy, and to provide them with suitable and comfortable ways of using the technology – such as using an interactive display to share another user's view of the VR setting in real time.

When the lesson is over, simply wipe down the headsets with antibacterial wipes, charge them up and you'll be ready to go again.

### VR in practice

At ESMS, we've looked to integrate VR across all areas, from Primary 1 upwards. Enhancing empathy, building respect for other cultures, providing access to the otherwise inaccessible, visualising work that students have created themselves – VR has enabled us to do all of this, while offering new experiences, new ways of exploring topics and new forms of learning. Imagine the value there could be in visiting sites such as the CERN laboratory, or the trenches of WWI.

That is why I'm convinced that VR should have a place in almost every classroom.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Simon Luxford-Moore is head of eLearning at Erskine Stewart's Melville Schools

CLASSROOM VOICES

# "It feels like we're in a pedagogical minefield"

Pedagogical research can be hugely valuable, writes **Bhamika Bhudia** – but given the speed at which it moves, we should be wary of going all-in on the latest fad...

Teaching is an ever-changing discipline. Accepting that, and evolving your practice accordingly is a necessity – but when the latest research becomes outdated as quickly the latest student dance craze, how can you be expected to keep up? Should you even try?

I spent hours of my training and early years in teaching frantically cutting up pieces of card. How else would my kinaesthetic students ever meet the learning objectives if I didn't cater to their individual learning styles?

These days, the notion of learning styles is met with derision throughout the teaching community, despite numerous teachers having previously been trained in it, and the acronym 'VAK' once being a common sight on lesson observation forms. It feels that all that time I spent enslaved to those tiny pieces of paper was wasted, but it's not just VAK that's taken a hit. Bloom's taxonomy, Thinking Hats, even the way we measure progress – all have similarly come into the firing line.

## OUT WITH THE OLD...

As time moves on and we reflect upon the impact of such approaches, the logical thing to do is move forward. Thus, we may conclude that it's best for our students to put down the scissors, forget the triangles and for the *love of God*, take off those hats…

However, problems can arise if the focus of an entire school shifts according to newly published research findings; when limited CPD opportunities are focused solely on 'the next big thing', or precious time is spent on creating new schemes of learning in line with the latest 'Correct way to teach' – only to soon find that these too are redundant.

Currently, retrieval practice is all the rage, as are dual coding and knowledge organisers, but how to implement them is already being hotly debated within the teaching hive. If you're not planning lessons in accordance with cognitive load theory, how will your students ever build learning over time? How can you ensure they're building schema and making links if you haven't simplified the intrinsic load enough?

Is the latest 'correct way' direct instruction, or is it discovery learning? No, wait, it's instructional coaching – right? It feels like we're in a pedagogical minefield.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Ultimately, there is no 'correct way', silver bullet or perfect formula that will withstand the test of time, because teaching isn't, and never has been stagnant. It reflects our students, who change as society changes. Pedagogical science is fascinating, and while I can't pretend to understand all of it, it certainly can't and shouldn't be ignored. Its results and research findings warrant our attention.

However, that's not to say that every time something new is published, or even postulated, we should to go back to the drawing board, scrap everything and start again. Even under now defunct methodologies, children still learnt, exams were still passed and objectives were met. Teachers have been successfully doing their jobs for millennia, but if a well-informed study comes along and tells us that there's a more efficient way of doing things, let's see that as an opportunity to try something new.

Overhauls aren't the answer, but 'micro changes' could be. Experiment, switch things up, refine your practice. Put new ideologies and methods to the test in your classroom before any full-scale rollouts or scrapping of existing resources. This needn't entail hours of work, blindly following the latest crazes; it means doing some research of your own by seeing how things work, in your school, with your subject and, most importantly, with your students.

Sure, what you're doing now may well be contradicted, and perhaps even scoffed at in years to come. But whatever you're doing in your classroom, it should be because you can see it has merit; because it's working in practice, and is giving your students the best possible chance at success.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Bhamika Bhudia is a teacher of English and lead teacher in a mixed comprehensive secondary school in London; follow her at **@MissMika_Eng**

# LAST CHANCE TO WIN IT BY


**WIN £500 FOR YOUR SCHOOL**

For 2021 we are offering schools the chance to win £500 with our *Bin It! Media Competition* for 14-16 year olds

## The deadline is the Friday 28 May 2021

Check out **biniteducation.com/resources** and click on 14-16 to find our competition details and entry form before time runs out.

## *Bin It!* is here to support teachers

Whether it's through home-learning or in class *Bin It!* has all you need to teach about litter behaviour and the environmental impact.

The competition is quick to enter, fun to do and inspires the creative side in your students!

**Good luck!**

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# LEARNING LAB

## IN THIS ISSUE



## CONTRIBUTORS


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*Talk to your students about...*

# GHOST TOWN

'Ghost Town' is a haunting, eerie song that echoes through images of a very broken Britain. Which should make 'Ghost Town' a depressing song to listen to, but it really isn't. The reason for this has a lot to do with something called Two Tone.

The Two Tone movement was all about black and white people coming together to make music and share culture. It was influenced heavily by ska, a traditional type of reggae music that young white musicians in places like Coventry grew up listening to in the 1960s. Two Tone took ska and combined it with modern genres to make a whole new sound that was West Indian, British, up-to-date and traditional all at the same time.

The Specials were one of the first big Two Tone bands. They were from Coventry but made music that sounded like it came from Jamaica. They helped bring ska music into the mainstream and had a bunch of top ten hits between 1979 and 1981. They had band members who were black and band members who were white, and they were most popular during some really rough times for Britain.

When 'Ghost Town' was released the UK was suffering from a series of riots in its major towns and cities, brought on by 1) the aforementioned economic difficulties and 2) tensions between the police and minority communities, especially the black community.

1981 was the year that Brixton's local police force's 'Operation Swamp 81' led to more than a thousand people being stopped in six days using the 'sus law'. The aim was to tackle Brixton's street crime, but in reality it made tensions boil over. Rumours of police brutality and an arrest were the final straw. Around 5,000 people were involved in rioting, during which 279 police officers and 45 members of the public were injured.

1981 was also the year that a house fire in New Cross, London, killed 13 young people aged between 14 and 22. They were at a party, and they were black. At the time, many believed the fire might have been started deliberately by racist groups. Tensions grew when the police failed to investigate further, leading many to believe the deaths weren't being taken seriously. Two months later, thousands marched through London, demanding justice on what was called the Black People's Day of Action.

'Ghost Town' highlighted how bad things were getting, while also celebrating black and white people coming together musically. In this way, it almost feels like a solution to the problems it is describing, delivered with Caribbean rhythms and a bit of patois.

Illustration by Ngadi Smart


**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Jeffrey Boakye is a teacher, author, broadcaster, commentator, and journalist; this item is an edited extract from his upcoming book *Musical Truth: A Musical History of Modern Black Britain in 28 Songs*, due out in June 2021 (Faber, £12.99); find out more at jeffreyboakye.com or follow @jeffreykboakye

## HUMAN ACTIVITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE


*This issue, the Science Museum Group shares some ideas for educating pupils on the importance of climate change, and the relationship between humans and the natural environment*

Through education, we can empower young people to champion positive change and take asseertive action in their everyday lives and beyond. Here, we want to highlight three ways in which to encourage discussion among your students concerning the natural world, climate and sustainability.

### 1. EXPLORE YOUR ENVIRONMENT WITH AN OBJECT HUNT (KS3)

Allow your students to follow their curiosity by asking them to explore the classroom or the school's outdoor spaces. You could set challenges that encourage them to observe the environment surrounding them. For example, why not ask them to find something that's been thrown away and then write down three ways of reusing the item?

You can find further object hunt ideas and suggestions for other classroom activities at learning.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/learning-resources.

### 2. GET INFORMED BY JOINING A CLIMATE TALK EVENT (KS3/4)

Students can learn a great deal by hearing leading experts, activists and campaigners discuss how to tackle the problems facing our communities due to climate change. You could view one of our Climate Talks with your class, which deal with a variety of topics ranging from greenhouse gas removal to the clean energy revolution, and organise a class discussion how climate change might affect our future. For more details, visit sciencemuseum.org/see-and-do/climate-talks.

### 3. VISIT THE 'OUR FUTURE PLANET' EXHIBITION (KS3/4)

Discover the technologies that are being developed to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in the Science Museum's latest free exhibition, Our Future Planet. Visitors will get to investigate what can be done with the excess carbon dioxide currently being produced, and what the associated challenges involve.

Having reopened on 19th May, The Science Museum is now able to host school trips – you can plan your visit via sciencemuseum.org/learning.

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

**THE SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP OPERATES FIVE MUSEUMS ACROSS THE UK, INCLUDING SCIENCE MUSEUM IN LONDON, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY MUSEUM IN MANCHESTER, NATIONAL MEDIA MUSEUM IN BRADFORD, RAILWAY MUSEUM IN YORK AND LOCOMOTION IN SHILDON**

## TRY THIS

### 'SEATING PLANS'

***EXERCISE BETTER CLASS CONTROL WITH THESE TIPS FROM ROBIN LAUNDER...***

• Sit girls next to boys. If you're a single sex-school, sit students according to the register. If you know the students, factor in any relationships that are likely to cause behavioural issues.

• Be sure to display your seating plan (on flipchart paper or the whiteboard), particularly in the early part of term, so that students can take their seats quickly and without fuss.

• Make sure you stick to your seating plan throughout the year. If you have to change it, this should only be in order to serve specific teaching and learning needs. Don't feel pressured to change things up because of friendship requests, because a particular student happens to be nice, or as a bargaining chip for good behaviour. Once the students know that you won't be changing it, they'll soon stop asking.

• The other great thing about using a seating plan is that it will help you get to know the names of your students – a prerequisite when it comes to effective behaviour management.

If you don't have a seating plan, make sure you get one ASAP. If you already have one, but don't stick to it as much as you could, then vow to up your game. Never underestimate the power of a well thought-out and closely adhered-to seating plan.

**Robin Launder is a behaviour management consultant and speaker; find more tips in his weekly Better Behaviour online course – see behaviourbuddy.co.uk for more details**

# 48%

**of secondary school teachers believe their school's careers provision has become worse since the onset of the pandemic**

Source: Nationwide survey of 500 secondary school teachers carried out by Launch Your Career (launchyourcareer.com)

## Celebrating British and Irish authors of African and Caribbean heritage

GCSEPod has collaborated with North East poet Degna Stone to develop a suite of free resources intended to celebrate and help students investigate the works of British and Irish authors of African and Caribbean heritage.

A total of 25 diverse authors, poets and playwrights were chosen as the subjects for a series of specialist Pods – 3- to 5-minute videos of condensed GCSE learning, ready for viewing via a range of devices – which will introduce students to the work of these brilliant, and too often overlooked writers.

The Pods cover works by the likes of Zadie Smith, Bernadine Evaristo and Raymond Antrebus, to name but a few. The hope is that students and educators will be able to use these free Pods as a springboard to further independent exploration.

**To find out more, visit gcsepod.com or follow @GCSEPod**

## YOUR GUIDE TO ...

# RECRUITING THE RIGHT TEACHERS

Recruiting teachers is a craft plagued with archaic traditions. This can result in processes that are often clumpy, not hugely insightful, and which can present major barriers to finding the right candidate. Getting your recruitment process right is key to school improvement and students being able to progress.

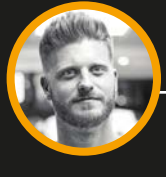
From the moment you advertise the job, be specific about what you're looking for. A generic job advert for your school won't necessarily reel in the big fish – it's all about standing out and pricking up the right ears.

Don't be afraid to point out when candidates aren't suited to the role. Be ruthless when shortlisting so that you don't waste any time at the interview stage. Some individuals may impress more at interviews, and every school will have its own contextual needs, but don't be afraid to say when nobody meets the threshold. It's far better to cast your net again than appoint the wrong candidate.

Ongoing COVID restrictions mean that teaching classes is more of a challenge, but there's still plenty of scope for simulation. Presenting real-life scenarios, and different problems to solve in line with the role candidates are applying for, can be an effective way of seeing how they might cope in your context. You can gain lots of insight about a person from how they react to situations outside of the classroom – more often than not, I've found it's these tasks that really show who will fit best into the school.

Leaders will likely be overseeing the process, but they're not always best placed to see the true fabric of an individual. Don't underestimate how much those informal moments during the day can reveal about candidates.

Similarly, considering the opinions of students is a great way of getting some alternative insight – though don't pick your students at random. If trained first and deployed effectively, they can be shrewd judges of character...



ADAM RICHES IS A SENIOR LEADER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING; FOLLOW HIM AT @TEACHMRRICHES

**35%**

**of 14- to 17-year-olds believe that they're being taught a representative version of history**

Source: Facing History and Ourselves

# *Need to know*

The cause of evidence-based education was dealt a blow in December 2020, following the closure of the Institute of Effective Education – an organisation that sought to encourage the growth of research schools and disseminate the findings of education research across the wider profession.

This month has seen the publication of its final report, titled 'The Open Door: How to be a Research-Sensitive School'. The report draws on interviews with two sets of teachers – one set based at schools hosting a research school, and a second set engaged in small-scale evaluation projects – and proceeds to examine how research schools operate, before suggesting ways in which a school can become 'research sensitive' and the impact that this might have across the education system a whole.

The report observes that research schools are whole-school enterprises that incorporate a number of distinct approaches – including offering evidence for all school priorities, treating traditional boundaries between classrooms and departments as permeable and fostering communities of practice in which routine, casual discussion of teaching and learning can flourish.

**Download the full report at the-iee.org.uk/the-open-door**

# HOW TO TEACH...
## CRITICAL THINKING

Young people's worlds are awash with claims of dubious knowledge. From fake news to lying politicians, seductive invitations, adverts for cosmetics, the list goes on. If they're to successfully navigate their way through it all, they'll need both the skill and inclination to question what they read and hear.

Test-focused teaching can have the effect of encouraging students to accept a 'voice of authority' without demur, or to only question the world around them in the kind of narrow, prescribed ways that are likely to earn them good marks. Some teachers even labour under the misapprehension that there are no such things as 'generic skills' – which would include critical thinking – and that training students in these is therefore a non-starter.

But we now know differently. Even cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham eventually changed his mind about that. Critical thinking in science is going to involve some different strategies from critical thinking as applied to religious education, of course – but there is also considerable overlap between the two, as well as with numerous other subjects.

The best way of teaching critical thinking is to give students material they can think critically about, time to do that, and opportunities to share and interrogate each other's strategies. Here, then, are some things you can try out in the classroom to help build healthily sceptical dispositions among your cohort:

### 1. Start with yourself
Encourage students to question *your* knowledge claims (politely and intelligently, of course). Respond with appreciation when someone says, 'But how do we know that's true, Miss?' Say, "Good question. How could we check?"

### 2. Critique the media
Discuss common flaws in reasoning – such as claiming a causality from a correlation – and give students articles to critique, both solo and collaboratively, that illustrate these flaws.

### 3. Scrutinise the class itself
Give students guided practice in reading and critiquing each other's draft essays or reports. Discuss criteria and rubrics with them, and sharpen their ability to give incisive, practical and respectful feedback – and to accept it as helpful, rather than hurtful.

### 4. Take it online
Provide focused advice on how students can check information online. For example, don't just check the features of a website – search for other websites that might critique the one you're interested in.

**GUY CLAXTON IS VISITING PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AT KING'S COLLEGE LONDON; HIS NEW BOOK, THE FUTURE OF TEACHING, AND THE MYTHS THAT HOLD IT BACK IS AVAILABLE NOW, PUBLISHED BY ROUTLEDGE – SAVE 20% WHEN ORDERING FROM ROUTLEDGE.COM WITH DISCOUNT CODE FOT20**

# Press 'X' to begin

The non-profit organisation Into Games has launched a scheme aimed at helping secondary students forge careers within the video games industry. Its Games For Schools initiative is due to roll out in September 2021, and will see state schools across the country receive free licences for game development software Game Maker Studio 2, along with access to training and virtual talks from representatives of the UK game studio Creative Assembly, makers of the *Football Manager* and *Total War* series.

Students at participating schools will be encouraged to develop games of their own in lunchtime or after-school sessions, while developing their STEM knowledge and ability to work as part of a team. The campaign will initially be targeted at schools with a 20% or higher proportion of students receiving free school meals, as well as SEN schools.

According to Into Games CEO, Declan Cassidy (pictured), "Developing a video game is all about teamwork and good communication skills. It's a discipline that's applicable to many different areas. There are a growing number of employment sectors that are using games, or concepts derived from games, to support the services they deliver. It's a massive growth area.

"The UK is one of the top places in the world for video game development, but we need to ensure there's a clear and diverse talent pipeline."

**FOR MORE DETAILS, VISIT INTOGAMES.ORG OR FOLLOW @INTOGAMESHQ**

## TRENDING

**Our pick of the recent resources and launches teachers might find useful...**

**ON THE BALL**
Southampton FC and Virgin Media have teamed up to launch the Virgin Media Football Academy – a series of PE lesson plans and training videos that cover football skills, as well as advice on nutrition and mental wellbeing.
**bit.ly/ts104-vmfa**

**SUDDEN LOSS**
The bereavement charity Sudden has produced a bereavement policy document intended to help schools support students and their families in the event of a loved one dying unexpectedly.
**sudden.org/schoolpolicy**

**STAY SAFE**
The National Cyber Security Centre is offering free cyber security training to school staff, available as either a scripted presentation pack for group delivery, or a self-learn video hosted at YouTube.
**bit.ly/ts104-ncsc**

## STUDENT WALKTHROUGH

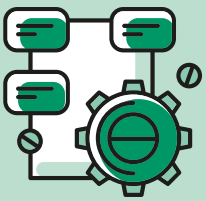
### HOW WE REMEMBER

*HELP YOUR STUDENTS BECOME BETTER LEARNERS WITH ZEPH BENNETT'S VISUAL EXPLAINERS...*

**CONCRETE EXAMPLES**

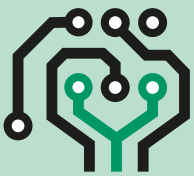
Take a difficult topic or concept and try to find examples that make understanding it easier

**ELABORATION**



Ask 'How?' and 'Why?' when revising a key topic; come up with different ways of asking the question – then make sure you know the answer!

**INTERLEAVING**



When revising, switch between topics, subjects or even problems you're solving, so that you can cover a range of material

**Taken from 'Understanding How we learn' by Sumeracki, Caviglioli, and Weinstein**

**SPACING**

Plan your learning, organise your work and revise work over time in small chunks – record your learning as you go

**RETRIEVAL**

Revise and learn key concepts by questioning, bringing back information and connections without using your notes

**DUAL CODING**

Use verbal and visual notes to learn and recall subject matter; use sketch notes and mind maps with notes

**ZEPH BENNETT IS A PE TEACHER AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT LEADER WITH 25 YEARS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE; YOU CAN FIND MORE OF HIS EDUCATIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY FOLLOWING @PEGEEKSCORNER**

Got a great learning idea? Email editor@teachsecondary.com or tweet us at @teachsecondary

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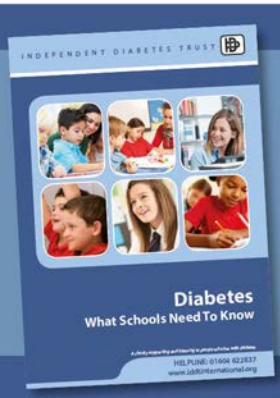


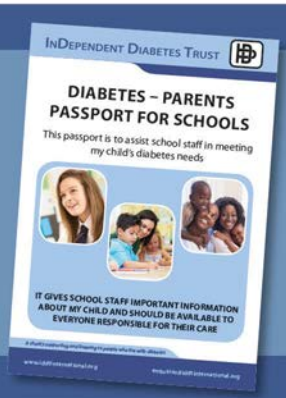


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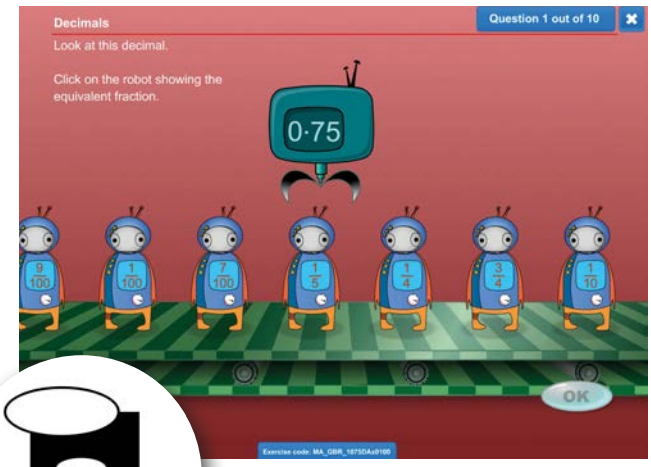
MATHS

# Maths-Whizz

An online maths tutoring platform that can be used to support and supplement students' learning in the classroom




## AT A GLANCE

- **A platform that provides supplementary maths tutoring**
- **Fully online, allowing for easy access at all times**
- **Provides relevant content based on students' educational needs**
- **Motivates students through immediate feedback and guided instruction**
- **Bridges learning gaps between school and home**

REVIEW BY ADAM RICHES

Maths-Whizz is an online platform aimed at students aged 5 to 13, which provides teachers, learners and parents with extra support when it comes to the study of maths. At its centre is the 'Maths-Whizz Suite', made up of three core elements that work together to drive maths progress – the award-winning AI driven tutor, a set of in-depth assessment and reporting tools, and a bank of high-quality resources.

The platform's content is designed by expert educators and educationalists, which is immediately apparent when you examine what students are provided with in terms of content and exercises. The courses and activities cover 98% of the school curriculum, so that children can learn material at home that will help them to thrive when at school. That's what makes Maths-Whizz so valuable – it isn't trying to replace what's taught in schools, but rather supplement it.

What sets Maths-Whizz apart is its tutor-based activities and the interactive nature of its online lessons. The included educational maths games feature numerous customisation options that students unlock by making progress in their learning. The games guide users through an interactive world of learning built just for them, and therein lies the key – *just for them*.

Maths-Whizz's activities, games and knowledge content are all well laid out and easily accessed. The instructions for maths lessons and assessment elements are set out in a clear and concise way; coupled with a series of informative illustrations and a neutral colour palette, the content generally keeps cognitive load low and ensures that the difficulty remains desirable.

Maths-Whizz operates on the premise that every child's learning plan should be as unique as they are. To that end, Maths-Whizz uses AI to build its personalised plans, and then continues to tailor these as children complete their lessons. This is no rigid, pre-set algorithm, but true AI that adapts the content each child is given, depending on what it learns of the child's abilities. It's like having a teacher who can constantly check for understanding with no other distractions, before tailoring the learning as a one-to-one tutor would.

Teachers are assisted by a simple, yet sophisticated interface that presents clear information about each child's individual progress and offers an easy way to supplement what's happening in the classroom. Reports can be run and printed in a convenient, straightforward way that lets teachers give feedback on progress quickly and efficiently.

The platform empowers parents too. Maths-Whizz Parent Accounts let users instantly understand their child's true ability level, monitor their progress and give encouragement via virtual messages, certificates and rewards – a level of functionality and reassurance that any real-world tutor would struggle to match.

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## VERDICT

- ✓ **Offers engaging and interesting maths content for students**
- ✓ **Works brilliantly as a supplementary resource outside of lessons**
- ✓ **Exceptionally functional and usable interface**
- ✓ **Well-designed content that keeps cognitive load low**
- ✓ **Intuitive tracking and monitoring to ensure learners are making good progress**

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a platform that helps learners fill gaps in knowledge via individualised activity setting. Worth considering for students with gaps in their knowledge following school closures, or those who have missed chunks of learning.

**For more information, visit whizz.com or follow @MathsWhizzTutor**

ADMINISTRATION

# Evaluate-Ed

An information and evaluation system that can help leaders make more effective use of their school's data

## AT A GLANCE

- **A school improvement data analytics solution for schools and academies**
- **Collates, updates and reports data**
- **Facilitates self-evaluation, SIP recommendations, improvement planning and due diligence**
- **Can help to direct and course-correct school improvement plans**

REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL

Senior leaders have to be able to glean from their data which students, learning environments, staff and programmes are succeeding and which are not – but organising, analysing and interpreting the data in question is too often a skill in itself.

Evaluate-Ed provides the tools needed to probe for possible causes of underperformance, analyse those factors contributing to overall school outcomes and implement improvement strategies accordingly.

Just as teachers need to accurately gauge their students' performance if they're to understand which areas of their teaching are making the most impact, the information highlighted by Evaluate-Ed can be used to hone in on certain aspects of a school's provision and implement new forms of support in order to address them .

Evaluate-Ed'a scope extends to all those operational areas of a school that can be the hardest to get a handle on – everything from finance and governance, to premises management and staff wellbeing – giving leaders a way of instantly reacting to emerging risks and shortfalls.

It does this by asking intuitive questions, which are used to generate an action plan for monitoring progress towards agreed goals. These data-led school improvement recommendations can then be fed into your SDP, SIP and annual SEF.

Reports for feeding back to stakeholders can also be easily generated, along with some brilliant ways of displaying data graphically, so that everyone can be kept in the picture and given the context they need to better understand your school's performance.

Real-time, active monitoring of school improvement opportunities based on verifiable evidence shouldn't be a pipe dream, but a given – and that's precisely what Evaluate-Ed provides. It helps school leaders become skilled and confident users of data, better able to distinguish between sound and unsound figures, and recognise how different data can be useful for different situations and put to various purposes.

> ***"It helps leaders become skilled and confident users of data"***

Schools that can use data to drive change are more effective and improve more rapidly than ones that can't – and thanks to Evaluate-Ed, to leading a school through the data maze is now much easier than before.

Evaluate-Ed can provide a detailed overview of a school, in a way that illuminates valuable insights into previously concealed areas, turning nebulous data into concrete steps for action.

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## VERDICT

- ✓ **Makes measuring, tracking and reporting a simple, joined-up exercise**
- ✓ **Can turn complex data into invaluable information**
- ✓ **Helps staff become more data literate**
- ✓ **Offers powerful analytics**
- ✓ **Can contribute to better decision-making**

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a school data system that will help deliver effortless monitoring and accelerated progress towards your school improvement goals.

**For more information, or to arrange a free 15-minute tour, email info@evaluate-ed.com, contact the team on 01625 467 530 or visit evaluate-ed.com**

EDTECH

# eduu.school

A versatile learning environment that can support a school's curriculum, learning enrichment and pastoral support provision


## AT A GLANCE

- **A flexible online learning platform for pupils, parents and teachers spanning KS1-4**
- **Self-directed online and offline activities**
- **Ready-made teaching plans and activities that can save on lesson prep time**
- **Allows for full curriculum integration of mental health and wellbeing**
- **CPD videos and webinars to support curriculum delivery and hybrid learning**

REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL

Home learning in lockdown made a star of edtech platforms in a way no one could have predicted. Overnight, schools had to quickly pivot from bricks-and-mortar education to offering a more versatile form of pedagogy by adopting digital learning. Yet while some virtual platforms have shone, others have merely flickered.

One platform that has really stood out, however, is eduu.school which can provide schools with a combination of curriculum, enrichment and pastoral support, delivered via a thematic, project-based approach to learning that's suitable for all ages.

With a one-year KS3 subscription comes a complete curriculum programme for foundation subjects, with links to English, science and maths and access to learning resources for Y7 to Y9, complete with overviews and teacher notes for every theme and customisable curriculum maps.

At KS4, eduu.school can provide schools with thematic units consisting of independent, guided activities that link to different GCSE subjects, with supporting links and information on related careers, virtual tours, videos, podcasts, suggested fiction and competitions.

Said themes cover an impressive range of topics, from a study of the Indian subcontinent to an exercise where students take on the role of an architect bidding for a new project in their local area. These are richly supported with detailed, teacher-authored lesson plans that link to cultural capital, family learning opportunities, essential knowledge, people, place and time.

Student wellbeing is central to the eduu.school offer, and as such you'll find themes that link to information, advice, encouragement and suggestions sourced from the online mental wellbeing community Kooth. All resources are automatically assigned to student accounts, potentially giving your school's ongoing health and wellness initiatives an active and high profile place in students' daily lives.

Also on the eduu.school platform you'll find knowledge quizzes with instant feedback, along with the option to generate reports that measure gap analysis, progress over time and task completion. These are incredibly useful for assessment and feedback purposes, and could save staff considerable administrative time.

The teacher and student dashboards are easy to navigate, with intuitive interfaces that keep everything clear. Teachers can also access a user management system that will support their use of the platform itself, with a host of tips, helpful guides, FAQs and free webinars.

COVID-19 has brought about a fundamental shift in how schools teach and students learn. This top quality edtech platform can play a central role in enabling schools to offer the kind of post-lockdown blended learning that will result in positive outcomes all round. eduu.school is an excellent example of best practice when it comes to edtech platforms that can engage and hold students' interest.

teach SECONDARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ **Can increase learners' engagement and give them a sense of purpose**
- ✓ **Includes vital support for maintaining wellbeing and mental health**
- ✓ **Enhances learning for students with specific needs**
- ✓ **Relieves some administrative burden from teachers**
- ✓ **Features an array of powerful professional development tools**
- ✓ **Facilitates better parental engagement**

## UPGRADE IF...

You're in need of a stellar learning platform that can deliver high quality, powerful online learning experiences capable of reaching and engaging every student

**Find out more at hoddereducation.co.uk/eduuschool**

MFL

# Echt 11-14 German

A German language course supported by online and physical resources, as well as a range of review and assessment options


## AT A GLANCE

- **Builds key German language skills at KS3, ready for GCSE**
- **Flexible structure that can be taught over two or three years**
- **Logical grammar progression, vocabulary acquisition and language-learning strategies**
- **Fully integrated differentiated activities**
- **Accompanying digital resources delivered via Kerboodle**

REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL

MFL resources have to be authentic, real and genuine – so it's fitting that OUP's latest offering for supporting secondary German teachers and students is named 'Echt'. The Echt series is well-furnished, consisting of two Student Books, two collections of Kerboodle-developed digital resources and assessments, two Kerboodle books, two teacher's handbooks, two workbooks and a pair of audio CDs.

Echt encompasses two stages, both divided into six well-structured written units. Each unit consists of an introduction, followed by core lessons, aspects of culture, grammar and pronunciation practice, vocabulary and tests, along with a series of bronze, silver and gold activities that can be used to reinforce or extend students' learning. There's also a shorter consolidation unit that allows students to develop their skills in specific contexts.

The student books are colourful, exciting and inviting, with plenty of appealing graphics and engaging text that combine beautifully to enthuse students in the process of absorbing a new language. Students build and develop their grammar and vocabulary skills by navigating a cleverly designed mix of print and interactive online materials – the latter of which are delivered via the superb Kerboodle platform, and include phonics videos, plus record-and-playback speaking activities.

There are opportunities galore for students to develop spontaneous speech and learn how to communicate in German, thanks to the inclusion of a wealth of top-notch listening and reading material.

The Teacher's Handbook – included here in both print and digital versions – amounts a quality toolkit in itself, featuring as it does clear and concise plans that detail step-by-step lesson plans for every unit that are easy to follow, while still allowing room to adapt and customise. These contain salutary suggestions and all relevant notes, roles, transcripts and answers, alongside signposting of activities that can help build GCSE skills.

The Kerboodle digital resources add a great deal of value to the course, comprising editable schemes of work, grammar presentations, assessments, worksheets and a number of interactive activities. Also included are digital student books that are ideal for front-of-class use, and which add accompanying audio to the included activities.

The resources that make up the Echt series facilitate distributed practice. Since the content builds in plenty of differentiated review and assessment opportunities, students can expect to encounter key learning on multiple occasions. This means that language and strategies are built on, repeated and recycled to nudge and embed deeper learning.

Finally, a series of diagnostic tests, as well as online grammar and vocabulary quizzes, provide teachers with targeted feedback. This can be mixed with end of unit assessments and GCSE-style assessments at both stages to help teachers and students identify those areas needing more work. All told, Echt is the real deal.

teach SECONDARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ **Inspiring content that allows students to immerse themselves in the learning of German**
- ✓ **Supports a planned approach to teaching vocabulary, grammar and phonics**
- ✓ **Can increase students' confidence, competence and ambition**
- ✓ **Expertly develops students' language skills and cultural understanding**

## UPGRADE IF...

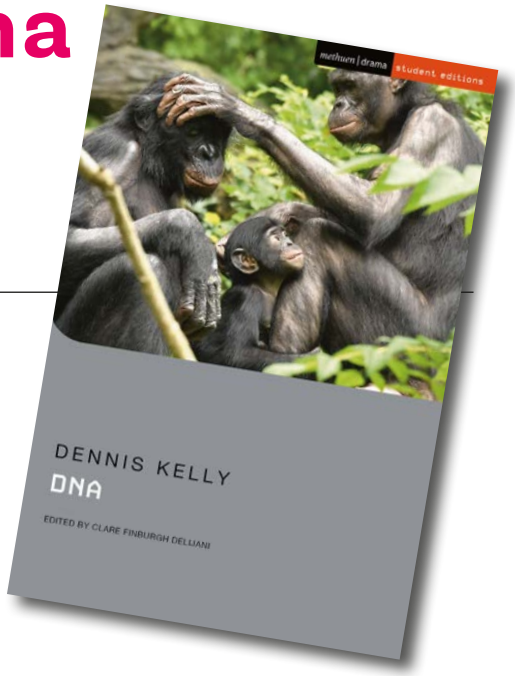
You're looking for a collection of German learning materials that can help you deliver high impact lessons

**Find out more at oxfordsecondary.com/echt**

ENGLISH

# DNA (Methuen Drama Student Edition)

A richly informative edition of a striking play that addresses a range of challenging issues




## AT A GLANCE

- **A student book focused on the work of an acclaimed writer for stage and screen with a talent for disturbing audiences**
- **A play about a nihilistic group of teenagers who do something very wrong and attempt to cover it up**
- **Engages with a host of contemporary issues**
- **Compelling notes for students that encourage rigorous analysis**

REVIEW BY JOHN DABELL

If you're looking for a play that will jar and jolt, then share Dennis Kelly's guilt-ridden *DNA* with your students and brace for impact. It's brutal and shocking, and yet also chillingly beautiful in its madness.

*DNA* was originally developed as part of the National Theatre's ongoing Connections programme back in 2007, through which playwrights are commissioned to write plays for young performers aged 14 to 18, and has since become a set text for GCSE drama and English literature.

The story centres on a group of teenagers who are subjecting a student to bullying. When things go too far, the group is left with an unplanned death on their conscience – the aftermath of which simultaneously brings the characters closer together and pulls them apart.

These flawed and failing characters initially try to make the best of a bad situation, but soon find themselves spinning a dark, desperate web of deception, inadvertently implicating an innocent man in the process.

This is an incredibly powerful play that will wrong-foot students, while prompting them to ponder what they might do in a similar situation. The central question at the heart of the play centres on group dynamics, and weighing up of individual versus collective sacrifice.

Throughout its tense twists and turns, *DNA* skilfully explores the nature of gangs, bullying, power, violence, friendship, trust and leadership. Those are some of the core themes picked up on in this Methuen Drama Student Edition, which includes superb commentary and notes by Professor Clare Finburgh Delijani of Goldsmiths' Theatre and Performance department, who adroitly delves into the play's context, characters, dramatic devices and production history.

Key characters and the roles they play are studied in detail, as part of an analysis focused around bullying, abuse, victimisation/survival and feminist non-violence. Delijani's contributions will help students better appreciate the play's arresting use of language and commentary on Western foreign policy and terrorism.

This edition will also resonate with students all the more for its close examination of teenage group mentality and for posing the question, *At what point does our morality make us turn the other way?* The notes prompt readers to consider their own feelings around cruelty, empathy, pack mentality, self-interest and self-preservation, pushing them to ask whether such behaviours are learned or inhereted.

There's little doubt that this book will help students develop their comprehension skills and express their own ideas concerning aspects of the play's plot, characterisation, events and settings. It will also leave them asking further questions – not least around Kelly's open-ended conclusion to the play. All told, this is a compelling tale of adolescent cruelty, chronicled with an anthropologist's eye.

teach SECONDARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ **A chilling study in pack behaviour and the psychology of decision-making in a world of disorder and chaos**
- ✓ **An edition of *DNA* that does much to develop critical reading skills and encourage personal engagement with the text**
- ✓ **Has the potential to inspire some intense classroom discussion**
- ✓ **A masterclass study book packed with sharp, reflective analysis that doesn't patronise**

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a *DNA* student resource that will capture students' attention and bring the play's warped relationship dynamics to the fore

**Readers can receive a 20% discount when ordering *DNA* from bloomsbury.com/drama before 17th June by quoting code 20PREDNADTM**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
Dr. Paul Heery is CEO at The White Hills Park Trust; for more information, visit whptrust.org or follow **@whptrust**

THE LAST WORD

# Make time to think big

**Dr. Paul Heery** explains why school leaders should feel able to lose their heads (in the clouds) when all about them are keeping theirs...

As exercises in futility and blind optimism go, it's hard to beat that of a headteacher setting out a detailed plan of their day at any point over the past year.

Even the modest task of clearing a few emails would be scuppered by a colleague calling in to say their 7-year-old had been sent home from school with a persistent cough, and that they wouldn't be back for a fortnight. If not that, it would have been the issue of how to get laptops out to self-isolating disadvantaged pupils, or – god forbid – a phone call from the HSE, demanding you explain your plan to maintain social distancing in classrooms filled with 30 10-year-olds...

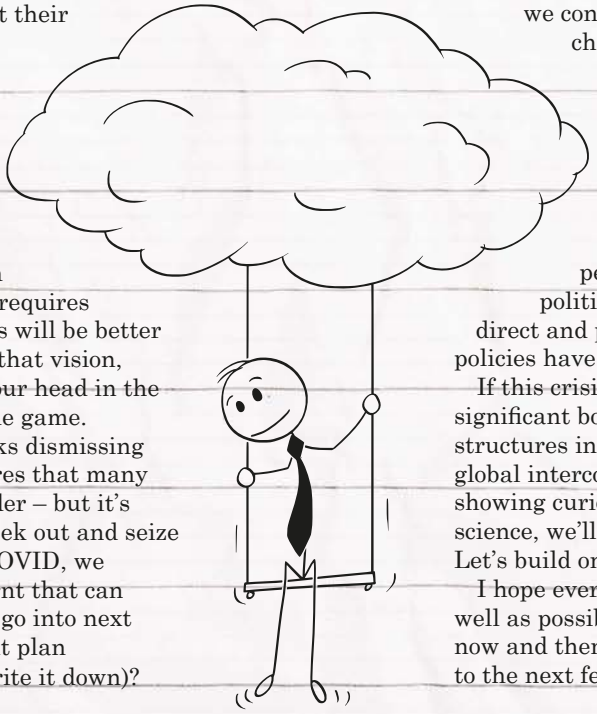
Headteachers were arguably better off simply scrawling 'DEAL WITH STUFF' in large letters on every page of their diaries. This crisis management was exhausting; at the end of each day, we'd often feel no further forward than when we started.

## Setting a course

My hat is therefore off to everyone who experienced this and succeeded in rising to the challenge. School staff running low on physical and emotional energy might understandably prefer not to consider the bigger picture right now – but unfortunately, we know from experience that neglecting the bigger picture doesn't cause us to stay still, but rather go backwards.

The agency schools have to set their own trajectory will be lost if it's not used. The ability to stand aside from the fray, scan the horizon and set a course is one of the most important aspects of school leadership, and one we can't afford to lose sight of. Motivating and inspiring our teams to deal with challenges in the here and now requires us to have a vision of how things will be better in future – but in order to craft that vision, every so often we need to have our head in the clouds, rather than always in the game.

I concede that saying that risks dismissing the very real day-to-day pressures that many school leaders are currently under – but it's ultimately down to leaders to seek out and seize upon new opportunities. Post-COVID, we should examine what we've learnt that can make us stronger. What should go into next year's hypothetical improvement plan (assuming we get the time to write it down)?



## Values and vision

The first thing I'd suggest is building your team. The generosity and selflessness of our colleagues has been humbling, but it mustn't be lost. What strengths have we identified in our people? Which colleagues have demonstrated talents we've never suspected? Who's ready for greater leadership responsibility? Is there an opportunity to study structures and systems, and possibly consider more collaborative leadership approaches?

Next, redesigning the curriculum. This has happened in almost every school, at staggering pace and scale. Given the hours many have already spent developing an online or blended curriculum model, there's now scope to consider what we've learnt and what to keep. Evaluate what's worked, and embed this in your curriculum and instructional techniques.

Then there's building of communities. Schools have arranged home food deliveries, offered advice and counselling, and provided places of comparative calmness and safety. Having learnt more about those crucial parts of our local communities that often slip beneath the radar – food banks, care homes, delivery services – how should we redefine our values and vision in recognition of these community links? How can we continue working with community champions and teaching our children to give something back?

Finally, we need to develop an understanding of the wider world. Over the past year, children's senses of curiosity have been working overtime. We have a generation of young people who are highly engaged with political issues, not least because of the direct and profound impact that government policies have had on their lives.

If this crisis doesn't therefore lead to a significant boost in students studying power structures in social sciences, learning about global interconnectedness in geography or showing curiosity in the spread of infections in science, we'll have missed a huge opportunity. Let's build on that natural interest.

I hope everyone's return to normality goes as well as possible – but I also hope that every now and then, you allow your attention to drift to the next few years ahead...

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