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TABLES  
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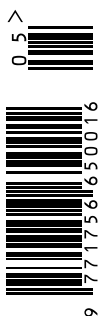
## BEYOND STORY MOUNTAIN

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of snacks  
Teach nutrition  
with a twist

*"I've been  
INSPIRED!"*

The library building lifelong readers

 artichoke



ISSUE: 20.5  
PRICE: £4.99

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# Hello!



**W**elcome to summer! The weather might be vacillating wildly between tropical and Baltic, but the calendar tells us it's almost time for a break.

However, before we swap the lanyards for leis (or at least for a biscuit and a sit down), there are a few weeks of teaching left. Whether you're already winding down and looking for some ready-made resources to carry you through, or keen to keep innovating right until the very end, we have something for you.

Talking of vastly differing climates, our medium-term plan this issue is an exploration of biomes across the Americas, complete with six weeks of lesson ideas and a fully downloadable pack of accompanying resources. Check it out on page 22.

Elsewhere, our health and wellbeing special focuses on practical ways to support both the physical and mental health of you and your pupils. Teach children about what's really on their plate with Dr Jo's breakdown of nutrition (with a twist!) on page 44; look beyond the finish line for sports day skills that will last a lifetime on page 47; and get some ideas for reconnecting with nature to bolster your own wellbeing as well as your pupils', on page 52.

Of course, we also have a range of free resources for you, including a WAGOLL on *Zo and the Forest of Secrets* by Alake Pilgrim, and an engaging French lesson, leveraging excitement for the World Cup to teach children how to share opinions.

Thanks for supporting *Teach Primary* this year, and I hope you have a wonderful, restful break.

See you in September!

*Charley*

Charley Rogers, editor

[X @TeachPrimaryEd1](#) [@charleytp.bsky.social](#)

*Don't miss our next issue, available from 1st September*

## POWERED BY...



**DARIO FERRARI**

on how a structured approach to times tables revolutionised his son's maths knowledge

*"Times tables aren't stored in the brain's memory as a list, but as a network"*

p28



**LOUISE WILDE**

shares her experience of setting up The Nest to improve SEND outcomes, and general wellbeing

*"One of our children lay flat on their back in The Nest, and everything else just stopped"*

p42



**SARAH FARRELL**

on what Viking etymology can teach us about the UK today, and its geographical history

*"Place names in the UK can tell us a lot about the area they describe"*

p76





# edding Return Box Programme:

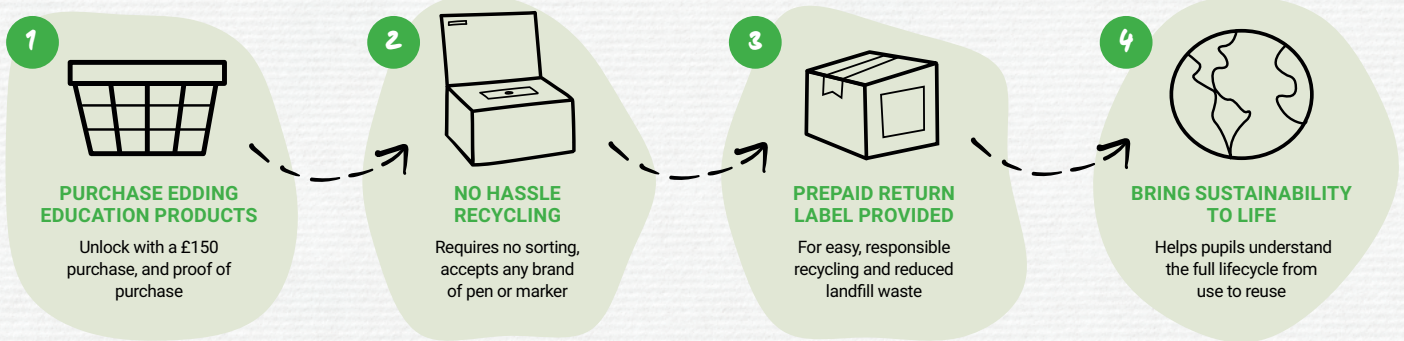
Making Recycling Simple for Schools



At edding, we believe sustainability should be easy, accessible and genuinely impactful, especially in the places where young people learn. That's why we've introduced the new edding Return Box programme: a free, simple and effective way for schools to recycle used pens and markers while helping pupils understand the importance of recycling.

## How it works

Designed for ease, the return box is available to any school purchasing edding products across edding's full education assortment, including whiteboard markers, colouring pens, handwriters, mini whiteboards and more.



## In the classroom: Clarendon Primary School

At Clarendon Primary School, the edding Return Box programme has been successfully integrated into **early-years learning**, helping bring sustainability to life in the classroom. A Reception teacher highlighted the value of the initiative in supporting hands-on learning:

“The return box is really good. We have been learning about recycling and it is nice to be able to show the children a hands-on experience of recycling and not just throwing the pens in the bin.”

Sustainability is a key part of the school's curriculum, with recycling introduced from an early age. The Return Box reinforces this by making the process visible and meaningful:

“We have a whole topic on recycling in Reception and why it is so important to recycle to save our planet.”

With high pen usage in classrooms, the return box offers a simple, practical way to reduce waste while supporting sustainability goals and real-world learning. By choosing edding, schools gain durable, high-quality products and an easy route to sustainability. The edding Return Box programme simplifies recycling and helps make it part of everyday school life.



Scan to see the programme in action

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ISSUE 20.5



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We cannot teach resilience when we're removing every opportunity to practise it

**We're all ears!**

We want to make sure our magazine is a brilliant resource for teachers and are always striving to improve. We love hearing from real teachers about what they liked and what they would change. Got feedback about this issue? Contact us via the details in the yellow box below – we'd love to hear from you!



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**teach  
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**We want to hear from you!**

Get in touch with your rants, comments, photos and ideas.



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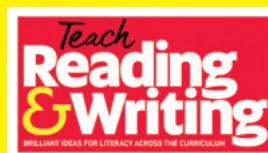
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†AI - Image modified with AI assistance



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Renaissance  
Accelerated Reader

# Where practice meets progress

Every primary school wants pupils who read widely, read often and read with confidence – yet time, motivation and widening literacy gaps make this harder than ever.

For 40 years, Accelerated Reader has been helping pupils foster a lifelong love of reading by encouraging them to choose books that match their interests and reading level. Through personalised goals and instant feedback, it cultivates a regular and rewarding reading experience for pupils of all ability levels.

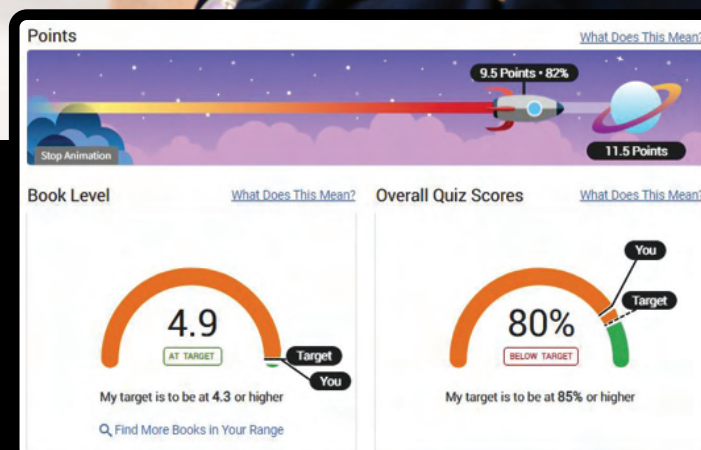
## Proven. Trusted. Loved by schools.

Over 13,800 schools trust Renaissance for literacy support, with decades of evidence behind our tools. Our mission remains simple: empower educators, inspire learners, and unlock the potential in every child.

Discover how our solutions can transform reading across your school:

[uk.renaissance.com](http://uk.renaissance.com)

Renaissance  
See Every Student.



Accelerated Reader (AR) motivates pupils to read more – and read better – by:

- ✓ **Personalising book choices** so every child reads at the right level
- ✓ **Embedding regular reading habits** across the school day
- ✓ **Building fluency, stamina and comprehension** through engaging quizzes
- ✓ **Saving teachers time** with instant insights and clear next steps
- ✓ **Celebrating success**, which boosts confidence and keeps pupils reading

Research shows pupils using AR make significantly more progress than those who don't. It's the reading culture-builder that sticks.

Let's build a reading culture your pupils will love.

# Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research



## Schools get £12.9m media literacy funding

Schools across the UK are set to benefit from over £12m worth of funding from educational charity Into Film. The funding, provided by BFI National Lottery, will be available over the next three years to expand film and moving image education, media literacy and screen careers support. This investment comes as schools are adapting to rapid changes in how AI and digital tools are used in classrooms, and the renewed focus on children's digital wellbeing and the role of medial literacy and critical thinking. Into Film will work alongside schools to expand support for teachers, increase access to creative learning opportunities, and help more young people from underrepresented and underserved backgrounds to build confidence, creativity and future career skills through storytelling, film and digital media. This will include three programmes for 5–18-year-olds between 2026 and 2029. Find out more at [intofilm.org](https://intofilm.org)

## 3 INSTANT LESSONS... (You're welcome)



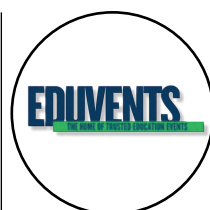
### HAHAKEYS

A new, free typing app is using jokes to help primary-age children learn to type. HaHaKeys challenges players to type the feed line for a joke, and they are rewarded with the punchline. They also see their typing speed in characters and words per minute, as well as their accuracy score. Try it at [hahakeys.com](https://hahakeys.com)



### ALL IN

The British Council and the Youth Sport Trust have produced a new resource, celebrating this year's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Pupils will be introduced to the Games' values of humanity, destiny and equality through sessions exploring connection, fairness and inclusion: [tinyurl.com/tp-CGames26](https://tinyurl.com/tp-CGames26)



### EDUVENTS

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## →→→ TODAY'S **TOP** **RESOURCES**

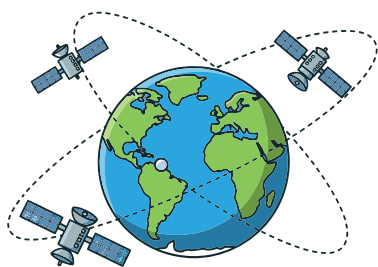
### Decoding Stonehenge with STEM

Are your pupils smarter than a Stone Age engineer? In new podcast *Teachwire Talks*, experts reveal the secrets behind Stonehenge's

construction and solar alignment – and explore how it can inspire lessons on measurement, materials, problem-solving and systems thinking. Listen for practical ways to bring prehistoric maths and STEM into lessons.

Listen now at [tinyurl.com/tp-TWtalks1](https://tinyurl.com/tp-TWtalks1)





## World-first school space transmission

Pupils at St Mary Magdalen’s primary school in Seaham, County Durham, have sent messages into space using new laser technology

developed in the North East, as part of Durham University’s Light Years programme. The demonstration was part of the Space Research Centre (SPARC)’s Summit Late, a one-night public event bringing together scientists, artists and the public to explore the future of space. The programme illustrates how written messages or drawings can be turned into data and transmitted using an innovative laser system called free space optics, which has been designed for future space communication, and is being pioneered by organisations such as SPARC. Messages created by pupils and members of the public were digitised and transmitted towards specific points in space, from near-Earth targets such as the Moon to deeper space locations including Mars. Find out more about SPARC at [tinyurl.com/tp-SPARC](http://tinyurl.com/tp-SPARC)

## Free music classes

English National Opera (ENO) is inviting applications for its free Finish This... music programme, aimed at KS2, KS3 and SEND pupils. The programme encourages participants to take on the role of ENO composer, creating their own musical response to a specially commissioned, purposefully unfinished operatic work. Co-created with teachers, it aligns with the national curriculum and is suitable for all levels of experience and musical ability.



According to post-project surveys, after completing Finish This... 89 per cent of teachers said they felt more confident teaching composition, and 93 per cent felt that their pupils had developed skills in composition.

One Key Stage 2 teacher said: “Finish This... has completely raised the profile of composing in our school... It was the most exciting project, broke down so many barriers and was completely inclusive.”

The deadline for applications is 10th July. Sign up now at [tinyurl.com/tp-FinishThis](http://tinyurl.com/tp-FinishThis)

**65%** of parents support introducing restrictions on under 16s using AI chatbots\*

\*Opinium

## Look ahead | Book ahead



### ALICE'S DAY

This one-day festival from the Story Museum sees Oxford transformed into a Wonderland with talks, street theatre, storytelling,

workshops and more inspired by Lewis Carroll’s classic. Visit [tinyurl.com/tp-AlicesDay26](http://tinyurl.com/tp-AlicesDay26)

### SCIENCE CPD The Primary Science



Teaching Trust (PSTT) is running free CPD webinars for primary teachers on 15 & 17 September. Find out more and sign up at [pstt.org.uk/events](http://pstt.org.uk/events)

## Q & A

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## Dr Ranj Singh

Doctor, presenter, musical theatre star and author

### What was primary school like for you?

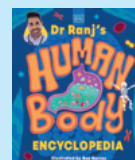
I was a curious kid who was equally fascinated by science, stories and performing. Primary school gave me a chance to exercise my creativity in things like art and music, but I struggled with the academic stuff. It was books – particularly encyclopedias – that helped develop my interests and knowledge in science and the world around us. I wouldn’t be where I am without them!

### When did you decide you wanted to be a doctor?

Probably at around 11 or 12. However, I wasn’t always sure I’d be able to achieve it. I came from a working-class background with no other health professionals in the family, so it was a big dream. That said, I knew I had to focus and apply myself if I wanted to achieve my goals. So, I knuckled down, got learning, and here I am!

### What’s your favourite fact about the human body, that surprises and delights primary-age pupils?

Two things... First, that so much of your body actually runs on electricity – from your brain to your gut. And those electrical messages travel at super-fast speeds, which was only really discovered through experiments on squid. The second is that the biggest muscle in the body is in your bum... kids love shouting that word out, much to adults’ dismay!



**Dr Ranj’s Human Body Encyclopedia** by Dr Ranj and illustrated by Bea Barros (£20HB, DK Children’s), is out now.

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# 6 ways to introduce ancient Greece

Take pupils on a journey through magical myths and historic heroes to bring this vibrant period to life...

## 1 | READ THE STORIES ALOUD

Ancient Greece was a storytelling culture, with texts like *The Odyssey* kept alive for many centuries through oral tradition before they were written down. Begin by telling your class some of the wonderful stories! Collections like *The Usborne Book of Greek Myths* are a great place to start. Every child ought to know tales like those of Narcissus, Pandora or Icarus, as they are all part of our shared frame of cultural reference.

## 2 | WHAT IS A HERO?

The concept of the hero has come down to us from ancient Greece. But what is a 'hero'? What do we think when we hear the word? What did ancient Greeks think? Heroes were often demigods with special powers, which may be where our conception of a superhero comes from. They were also always men. But often, Greek heroes don't actually behave very well – take Theseus abandoning Ariadne on an island, for example. Is his behaviour 'heroic'? Looking at the concept of the hero is a great way to think about protagonists in stories, and ask questions about who gets to be the main character.

## 3 | EPIC QUESTS

At the most basic level, all stories require someone who wants something, and a series of obstacles that get in their way. Ancient Greek quests reveal this structure really clearly – a hero wants something (a golden fleece, Medusa's head, to get home to Ithaca), and then a series of gods and monsters serve as obstacles (lightning bolts, hydras, sirens, etc) before they attain their goal. Get pupils' creative writing skills going by asking them to think up their own ancient Greek quest. Who is their hero or heroine? What do they want? What might get in the way?



© Sophie Davidson

**CLARE POLLARD**  
*The Othernavts*, by Clare Pollard, illustrated by Macha Yao (£7.99, Bonnier Books), is out now.

## 4 | OFF TO THE THEATRE

'Theatre' is an ancient Greek word – and this topic is the perfect chance to introduce some drama to the classroom! Children can learn about the theatres themselves: how actors wore masks (making their own is a great craft activity); the Greek chorus; the first special effects like the trapdoors and cranes; the competitions; the theatre at Epidaurus where the acoustics are so perfect you can drop a pin in the centre and hear it at the back. It's also a great chance to talk about the difference between comedy and tragedy (everybody dies! But Aristotle says we feel 'catharsis'.)

## 5 | TRACK DOWN ANCIENT GREEK WORDS

The English language is so rich because so many of our words have different sources. It's fun to ask Years 5 or 6 to research which words have ancient Greek roots. For example, 'politics'. Or 'anatomy'. These words might lead to a conversation about how democracy or medicine as we know them started in ancient Greece. Meanwhile, words like 'echo' have whole incredible myths behind them...

## 6 | ORACLES AND SEERS

Phoebe in *The Othernavts* wants to be an oracle when she grows up. So many ancient Greek stories involve prophets or seers. Pupils will be fascinated to learn about Tiresias (who changed gender), Cassandra (the prophetess cursed so that no one believes her), and the Oracle of Delphi herself, whose temple was considered to be at the centre of the ancient world. They can learn about some of the methods of divination, from looking at an animal's guts (ugh), to observing birds. You might think of ways humans still try to predict the future now, from reading horoscopes to scientific modelling of climate change, and make your own fortune-tellers.

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# ARE YOU SMARTER THAN A **STONE AGE ENGINEER?**

**A new podcast exploring  
the maths and engineering  
behind Stonehenge.**

**Turn big historical  
questions into  
practical STEM learning.**





# What is making ECTs leave schools in droves?

Schools across the country are haemorrhaging valuable teachers. To truly stem the tide, we need to find out why...

**W**e've all seen it at one time or another: that bright-eyed ECT who is gone without a trace by Christmas, those empty chairs in the staffroom, or the frustration of seeing a talented colleague leave without a word. We've all heard the shocking reality: that one in three ECTs leave the state-funded sector within their first five years. When a third of your new intake leaves, it isn't just a statistical shame, it's a nightmare for schools. It leaves headteachers in a perpetual cycle of emergency recruitment, calling on supply agencies and with pupils' education disrupted by different faces and teaching styles. Moreover, it leaves remaining staff picking up the pieces with extra mentoring and cover.

We also keep hearing that the DfE 'expects' things to get better, and it occasionally throws a recruitment bursary at the wall to see if it sticks. But are we actually looking at the root of the rot? Do we know *why* ECTs leave? You could argue that teaching is an incredibly important job, and an incredibly busy job, and a not a brilliantly well-funded job – but there are many other public service positions of which you could say the same, such as nursing.

So, what can we learn from other publicly-funded sectors, and how they deal with their newly qualified professionals? On the face of it, ECTs and nurses' retention is similar, with one in three leaving in the first five years. Yet, promotion through nursing pay scales is more challenging, with a third of nurses remaining at Band 5 (which

is the starting point for nurses) for up to seven years, reducing their pay progression. Whereas ECTs often move up the pay scales more quickly, in order to retain and reward them. So, ECTs are paid better, and yet they leave at the same rate as nurses. To add further confusion, even though ECTs put more time into getting qualified and earn up to £4k more than police constables after five years, ECTs are more likely to leave teaching than the police. So, here is the mystery: if the pay is better, and the training is longer, why is the exit door swinging open so much faster in

schools? Look at the raw numbers. An early career teacher spends four years qualifying for a starting salary scale that spans £33k to £42k. Compare that to nursing, where a three-year degree leads to a £32k–£39k band. Or policing, where a two-year track yields £31k–£37k.

Teachers train longer and are paid up to £4,000 more after five years than our blue-light colleagues – yet teachers are still nearly twice as likely to quit than a police officer.

And we simply don't know why. Not because ECTs aren't willing to talk, but because nobody is officially asking them. If a police officer hands in their badge, there's an exit interview. If a nurse hangs up the scrubs, then there's a paper trail. But in teaching? Zip, it seems. The last major DfE deep-dive into this pervasive issue was in 2018, and even then, the 'survey' only included about 100 people. So, it's been nearly 10 years since we've methodically looked into why we're losing so many valuable, qualified teachers. Nursing registers track 'Band 5 stagnation' and burnout; police forces catalogue the physical toll of front-line duty. Even across the pond, the US knows it loses 44 per cent of new teachers to class sizes and zero autonomy. But in the UK? We're flying completely blind, relying on decade-old research while our ECTs leave the profession.

I know this gap firsthand. I was one of those bright-eyed ECTs who didn't make it to the Christmas holidays. I didn't leave because of the kids, or the marking, or a lack of passion. I left because of chaotic management. Yet, when I walked out the door, nobody officially asked me why. My story was lost. Just another silent statistic in the DfE's retention black hole.

The DfE needs to stop guessing and start tracking. Mandate ECT bodies to record reasons for departure within the first two years and standardise DfE-recorded exit interviews for all relocating or resigning teachers.

Without understanding why ECTs leave, we cannot hope to improve. **TP**

*Sanjeev Chaddha is a PhD student at Bath Spa University, researching educational outcomes for young people.*



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## Safety messaging has become wallpaper

Generic posters and vague warnings do nothing to deter children from dangerous behaviour – let's give them some credit and introduce context

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

**T**here is a problem with how we teach safety in schools, and it usually starts with a poster.

Not necessarily a bad poster – in fact, often it's a well-meaning one, with a message everyone can agree on: 'Stay safe'. 'Be careful'. 'Think before you act'. Then it gets stuck up on a wall and quietly becomes invisible. Pupils and teachers walk past it every day, and eventually, nobody really notices it at all. Everyone agrees that the message is important, but it has become so vague, sanitised and abstract that it has lost its grip on real behaviour.

Rail safety shows this problem particularly clearly. From September 2026, how to keep safe around railways will become a compulsory PSHE topic. It will also expose an uncomfortable truth: generic warnings do not work.

We often confuse *telling* pupils something with *teaching it*. Saying "stay safe" sounds sensible, but it gives no guidance in a real

moment, with real friends, making a real choice. A rule without context is just a sentence; pupils can repeat it, but applying it is another matter entirely.

Most school safety messaging falls into three similar traps. The first is the fog warning, lacking clarity: "be careful". Careful when? Where? Of what? How? The second is the magic shield: "stay safe", as if safety is a personal preference, like choosing a healthy lunch. The third is the vague threat: "something could happen". Possibly, possibly not. This isn't instruction – it's fortune-telling.

None of these approaches helps when a child is weighing up a decision in the real world. Schools are understandably nervous about showing consequences. We don't want to frighten children or stray into the territory of shock tactics. But in trying to protect pupils from discomfort, we often instead shield them from understanding.

Responsible realism isn't the same as scaremongering. Calm, factual

cause and effect can be taught without sensationalism, and credibility depends on it. Older pupils in particular are highly alert to adult messages that feel sanitised or evasive. When they sense that we're watering down risk, they stop trusting the message – and once credibility is lost, behaviour tends to follow it out of the door. If we want our pupils to develop judgement, we have to show them what that judgement is for.

This is where story matters.

Humans learn through narrative, and decision points make sense when they're embedded in a scenario, not floating in abstraction. Context turns rules into reasoning, but without it, safety education becomes compliance-based: do this because an adult said so.

This approach is fragile; it only works when an adult is present.

PSHE works when it becomes a conversation, but fails when it becomes a checklist. And the stakes are not theoretical. Around 4,000 rail trespass incidents each year involve under 18s, with more than half occurring between April and August – precisely the period when pupils have more freedom, longer daylight hours and greater opportunity to misjudge risk. These are moments where generic slogans simply do not compete with real-world pressures.

If rail safety is going to be compulsory, the approach should be clear: stop leading with slogans, and start leading with stories. If we give pupils realistic scenarios they can think with, and show decision points and consequences in age-appropriate ways, we'll have much more luck engaging them with what we want them to understand.

We need materials that reduce workload rather than add to it. And above all, we need to make safety education credible enough that pupils don't laugh it out of the room. Parents want their children to be safe. Teachers want to teach this properly. Pupils deserve messages that treat them as thinkers, not parrots. Generic safety warnings look official, but they rarely change behaviour. They are the educational equivalent of a damp paper sign: noticed once, ignored forever. Find free rail safety teaching materials at [switchedonrailsafety.co.uk](https://switchedonrailsafety.co.uk) **TP**

*Henna Karim-Sayer is head of PSHE and RE and a classroom teacher in Lincolnshire. She supports PSHE and safeguarding delivery and is involved in the rollout of Network Rail's free rail safety teaching films.*

## Rebuilding confidence and connection in the classroom

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*Each issue we ask a contributor to pen a note they would love to send*

# A letter to... the UK government

Stop the primary assessment tyranny and empower schools to put creativity back on the table for all pupils, says **Ed Harlow**



Primary education should give children space to explore, imagine and express themselves. Yet for years, schools have been trying to sustain arts provision in a system that makes it increasingly difficult. The government has promised to restore the value of arts education by scrapping the EBacc, but promises alone will not change what happens in classrooms. Packed timetables, burdensome statutory assessments and shrinking budgets continue to squeeze creative subjects out of the school day.

The message is clear: schools need proper funding, children need access to creativity, and teachers need the time and support to provide it. Creative education cannot remain something available only to those who can afford tuition outside school.

Recent research from Teacher Tapp and the Arts and Minds Campaign shows how little movement there has been. Only seven per cent of school leaders say they expect to increase time spent on creative subjects over the next two years, while just five per cent plan to expand extra-curricular arts activities. More than half expect their current offer simply to stay as it is. School leaders are working within tight constraints. Fifty-six per cent say an overloaded curriculum limits what they can offer in the arts, while almost a quarter point directly to SATs and other statutory tests as a major pressure. In many schools, the focus narrows quickly towards literacy and maths, because those are the measures schools are judged on. Visits to galleries and concert halls matter enormously. For many pupils, a school

trip to a gallery, theatre or concert hall can be memorable and inspiring. But there is also a risk that arts provision becomes reduced to occasional enrichment. When budgets are stretched, a single visit can start to stand in for regular creative learning. It becomes easy for schools to think they have 'done' the arts before returning to the pressures of those 'core subjects'. A visit to a gallery or an orchestral performance should complement arts education, not replace it. Children need regular opportunities to make music, draw, perform and create as part of everyday school life.

High-stakes testing continues to shape what happens in primary classrooms. Nearly half of primary leaders surveyed said reducing SATs and other statutory assessments would immediately create more room for arts subjects. That is why many teachers were disappointed that the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review left primary assessment arrangements untouched. As long as schools remain under intense pressure to prioritise test outcomes, creative subjects will struggle for time and status.

Access to the arts is also an issue of equality. Families with greater financial means can pay for music tuition, drama clubs and other opportunities outside school. Many children do not have that option and rely entirely on what their school can provide. When arts provision shrinks, those pupils lose out first. If we are serious about equal opportunity, creative subjects cannot be treated as an optional extra or enrichment for a fortunate few.

Schools cannot deliver high-quality arts education without proper investment. Years of funding cuts have taken their toll and arts subjects were often the first to suffer.



Many primary schools simply cannot afford instruments, equipment or specialist support on current budgets.

Policy announcements alone are not enough. Without sustained investment, many children will continue to miss out on meaningful access to the arts. Teachers also need support. Expanding subject-specific professional development would help primary staff feel more confident teaching music, drama and art across the curriculum.

The Arts and Minds Campaign has proposed five practical commitments to place creativity back at the centre of education:


- Guarantee every child access to creative education, regardless of background.
- Give schools greater flexibility over how they teach the curriculum.
- End the dominance of high-stakes primary assessment.
- Expand teacher training and subject-specific CPD in the arts.
- Restore school funding and strengthen links between education and the creative industries.

As NEU president, I see the effects of a narrowed curriculum. Teachers want children to experience a broader education than the current system often allows. Ministers need to listen to those working in classrooms and recognise that creativity is not an optional extra. It is a central part of how children learn, communicate and develop confidence in themselves and the world around them.

From,

*Ed*

*Ed Harlow is a music teacher, and president of the NEU.*

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



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## UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

We cannot teach resilience when we're removing every opportunity to practise it: children need more risk and less rescue

**A**s school leaders and teachers, we are seeing a noticeable shift in childhood. Children today are often described as less resilient, less independent, and less able to cope with disappointment than generations gone by. Some of that may be true. But increasingly, schools are finding themselves managing not only children's discomfort, but adults' discomfort too.

We've all experienced it; a child does not get the main part in the school play, and the next thing you know, you get an email from their parent. They didn't make the team – a complaint follows. Yet when you speak directly to many of the children involved, they are often far less affected than the adults around them.

That is not to dismiss disappointment. Disappointment matters. It hurts to feel left out, unsuccessful or frustrated. But somewhere along the line, we have started to treat ordinary childhood setbacks as problems that must immediately be removed rather than experiences that children can learn to navigate. In doing so, we may unintentionally be limiting the very resilience we say we want children to develop.

Resilience is not something we can simply tell children to have. It is something they build through repeated experiences of coping, recovering and trying again. And the uncomfortable truth is that children cannot become resilient if adults remove every opportunity for them to practise. Schools are increasingly working with pupils who struggle to cope with manageable difficulty because too much of modern childhood has become built around comfort, immediacy and intervention. If a child forgets their homework, it is rushed into school. If they have difficulties socially, adults step in. If they find something tricky, support often arrives before struggle has had chance to become thinking.

Of course children need support. Good schools should care deeply about wellbeing and emotional safety. But there is a significant difference between supporting pupils and rescuing them from every uncomfortable experience. Children need emotional validation, but not emotional escalation. That distinction matters enormously.

A child saying, "I'm upset I didn't get the lead role," does not require adults to immediately challenge the decision or frame the situation as unfair.

Sometimes the most powerful response is, "I understand why you feel disappointed. How can you manage that?" That response acknowledges emotion while also building perspective, reflection and resilience.

We live in a culture that increasingly avoids inconvenience, uncertainty and failure, so schools are simply reflecting the society around them. But real life

will not entirely remove challenge for our children. At some point they will not get the job, the promotion, the place on the team or the opportunity they hoped for. They will experience setbacks, criticism and rejection. If we want our pupils to thrive in the real world, schools and parents must explicitly teach them how to manage those experiences rather than constantly trying to prevent them or, more

simply, fix them. That starts with allowing children to experience manageable risk and productive struggle.

In education, we often talk about 'stretch zones' – the space between comfort and panic where growth happens. Pupils need opportunities to step into those spaces regularly. These moments develop far more than resilience. They strengthen executive functioning skills such as emotional regulation, problem solving, adaptability and self-management – the very skills children will rely on throughout adulthood.

Importantly, adults need to model these behaviours, too. Perhaps it's parents who need to pause and ask themselves the uncomfortable question, "Is my child truly disappointed or am I?" Children notice when adults catastrophise small setbacks, avoid challenge or become overwhelmed by minor inconvenience. Equally, they notice adults who stay calm, reflect, persevere and recover. Resilience is contagious.

Confidence does not come from everything going well, but from learning that you can cope when things do not. If we want resilient children, we must first be willing to let them discover that disappointment isn't damage – it's part of growing up. **TP**



*The writer is a teacher in England*

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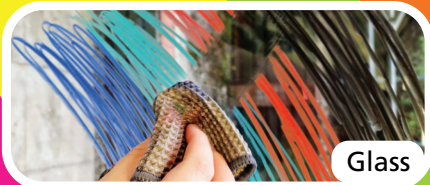
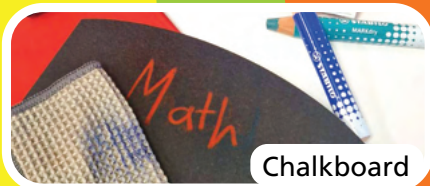
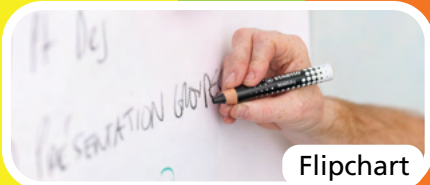
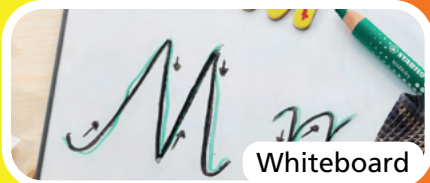
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**THE NEXT BIG THING**

# “NATURE, OUTDOORS AND ADVENTURE”

Why the time has come for schools to start viewing outdoor learning as an essential part of their education offering...

**[ THE TREND ]**

In our education system, outdoor learning has traditionally been seen as the icing on cake, rather than part of the cake itself – a reward or treat, or perhaps a short-term intervention aimed at encouraging bonding or specific curriculum outcomes. Up until now, it's not typically been seen as a consistent, vital and integral part of the education process.

**WHAT'S HAPPENING?**

As we move further into 2026, however, it appears that there has been a fundamental shift in how outdoor learning is now being perceived by the Department for Education. *'Nature, Outdoors and Adventure'* has been officially identified as one of five core categories that schools will be expected to offer as part of a new Core Enrichment Entitlement, as detailed in the government's 2026 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' Schools White Paper.

This is in response to a growing body of evidence which recognises that time spent outdoors results in higher academic achievements, more engaged pupils, improved mental and physical wellbeing, and a raft of crucial 'Skills for life'. The expectation is for schools to have this new offer fully embedded by 2028.

**WHAT'S THE IMPACT?**

The weight of the data regarding the academic benefits to be had from spending time learning outdoors is becoming overwhelming. Pursuits previously often seen as 'fun' additions to school-based learning are increasingly gaining recognition as tools that lead to significant improvements in traditional academic contexts.

The American Institute of Research identified that children who attended outdoor classes saw their attainment increase by 27%, with those increases being maintained for several weeks. Likewise, researchers at the University of Illinois identified a 48% increase in engagement when lessons were conducted outdoors.

**Contact:**

[ross.kelly@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:ross.kelly@coventry.gov.uk)  
[coventry.gov.uk/coventryoutdoors](https://coventry.gov.uk/coventryoutdoors)

In a 2026 study, the Forest School Association further found that outdoor education has a direct impact on attendance, with a documented correlation between outdoor learning and lower rates of absenteeism.

**WHAT'S NEXT?**

Quality outdoor learning provision requires trained staff who are well-versed in a variety of approaches, and who possess thorough subject knowledge and understanding. We're committed to raising standards across the sector, and ensuring that high quality training is available to schools across the country.

For the past three years, we've been the only organisation to offer the 'Level 5 Outdoor Learning Specialist' qualification with a focus on schools-based learning. With that programme now in the process of being retired, we're moving towards delivering 'Outdoor Learning Specialist' qualifications for TAs and subject leads at levels 4 and 5 respectively, thus ensuring that the Core Enrichment Entitlement provides the highest quality outdoor learning possible, and that outdoor learning professionals are recognised as being an essential part of any Outstanding school.

## GET INVOLVED

Coventry Outdoors is a traded service of Coventry City Council, specialising in providing high quality outdoor learning to pupils nationally, with a focus on the academic impact of learning outside the classroom.

We offer a full suite of qualifications and resources that enable schools to provide sustainable, impactful and inspiring outdoor learning programmes. Our nationally available CPD programmes include 'Outdoor Learning Specialist' apprenticeships for teaching assistants and Level 5 qualifications for outdoor learning subject leads, alongside a range of programme delivery specialisms that include the WILD Passport, Wilderness Therapeutic Interventions and Forest School qualifications.

Within the Coventry area, we can also offer a host of curriculum-linked outdoor learning opportunities and alternative provision pathways.

MEDIUM TERM PLAN

KS2  
GEOGRAPHY

# BIOMES OF THE AMERICAS

AIDAN SEVERS



Have you ever noticed that photos of different places in the Americas can look almost worlds apart? Some are covered by dense tropical rainforest, while others are dry deserts, wide grasslands, or frozen tundra. This unit explores why such a huge range of environments exists across North and South America.

Using maps, photographs and geographical enquiry, pupils will investigate the relationship between biomes, latitude, climate and physical geography. By the end of the unit, pupils will be able to explain how location and physical features influence climate, and how climate shapes the landscapes, plants, animals and human activities found across the Americas.



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Download your FREE accompanying resources for this unit at [tinyurl.com/tp-Americas](http://tinyurl.com/tp-Americas)

continents. Encourage discussion about which features are found in or near each biome.

On a blank map of the Americas (such as this one from Wikipedia: [tinyurl.com/tp-WikiAmericasMap](http://tinyurl.com/tp-WikiAmericasMap)), have children mark where each of the six biomes occur, and physical features such as mountains, oceans and rivers.

Finish with a class discussion exploring the question "Why do some places have forests while others have deserts or tundra?" Explain that the following lessons will investigate specific biomes to help answer this question.



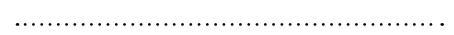
## Assessment

Which children can identify and name the three regions that make up the Americas?

Which children can name six different biomes found across the Americas?

Which children can explain how the same biome can be found in both North America and South America?

Which children can explain that the latitude of a place helps determine which biome is found there?



## WEEK 2

### Learning objective

- Why are deserts found on the west side of both North and South America?



Locate the Mojave Desert in North America and the Atacama Desert in South America. Using photographs and maps, ask pupils to compare the appearance of both regions.



## WEEK 1

### Learning objective

- Which biomes do we find in the Americas?



Begin by showing pictures of each of the following biomes in the Americas: desert, grassland, tundra, tropical rainforest, temperate rainforest and temperate broadleaf (slides 1-6 in the resources linked above). Ask children to describe what they see in each picture, and encourage any discussion about the differences that can be seen. Ask them where in the world they think the pictures are. Continue by displaying the biome map of the Americas (slide 7). Ask pupils to identify the equator, North America, South America, the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere.

Introduce the concept of a biome and discuss how climate influences the plants and animals that live there. Find key vocab and fact sheets for this unit in the downloadable resources.

Using the map key, ask pupils to identify each biome and locate examples across the Americas. Encourage them to observe the colours and discuss any patterns they notice. Guide children to identify similarities and differences between North and South America, focusing in on the six different biomes outlined above.

Show the same photographs from the start of the lesson, explain that each one is of a different biome in the Americas (slide 8) and ask pupils to match them to locations on the map.

Cross reference the biomes map with a physical map in an atlas. Focus on physical features such as oceans, mountain ranges and the shape of the



Give children a completed HOTCLUB fact file (see **Week 2 resources** in the download) about both deserts.

Pupils should investigate:  
What is it like? Where is it?

Why is it like that?

Discuss physical features, climate, vegetation, wildlife and human activity.

Explicitly teach children the role of prevailing winds and mountain ranges in the occurrence of deserts (see the **key facts sheet**).

Give children the key facts alongside the relevant diagrams (**slide 19**), and show them a video explaining why deserts form (such as this one from the BBC, about Death Valley: [tinyurl.com/tp-BBCDeathValley](http://tinyurl.com/tp-BBCDeathValley)).

Working in pairs, pupils can work to prepare a short presentation comparing the Mojave and Atacama, identifying both similarities and differences and explaining why deserts occur in similar positions on both continents despite being thousands of kilometres apart.

Conclude by revisiting the biome map and highlighting the pattern of desert distribution and answering the lesson's learning objective question.



### Assessment

Which children remember that the Mojave Desert is in North America and the Atacama Desert is in South America?

Which children can explain what happens to moisture in the air when winds travel west to east and are forced over mountains?

Which children can explain why deserts are found to the east of mountain ranges in North America?



## WEEK 3 Learning objective

● Why do vast grasslands develop in both North and South America?

Locate the Prairies of North America and the Pampas of South America. Compare photographs and maps to identify common characteristics and surrounding geography (**slides 24-30**).

Explain in simple terms why the North America grasslands are found to the east of mountains and deserts (**slide 31**). Introduce the idea of a temperate climate. Ask children to use their existing



knowledge to say why they think these regions are suitable for agriculture and livestock farming.

Give children a blank HOTCLUB fact file and all the relevant information they need to fill it in about the prairies and the pampas (find these in the **Week 3 resources** download).

Conclude by revisiting the lesson's LO question. Discuss how climate conditions in grassland differ from those in deserts and how this contributes to grassland formation.



### Assessment

Which children remember that the Prairies are in North America and the Pampas are in South America and are both examples of grassland biomes?

Which children can explain that grasslands receive enough rainfall for grasses to grow but not enough for dense forests to develop?

Which children can describe the temperate climate of grasslands and explain what this means for temperatures throughout the year?



## WEEK 4 Learning objective

● Why is tundra found in the far north of the Americas?

Using the biome map from the **Week 1 resources**, locate tundra regions in Alaska and northern Canada. Discuss their position relative to the Arctic Circle, Northern Hemisphere and equator.

Explore photographs showing tundra landscapes, wildlife and settlements. Compare these places with locations studied previously. Teach how latitude affects temperature. Demonstrate that sunlight loses more energy, and therefore heat, before it reaches areas close to the poles. Introduce permafrost and explain how frozen ground limits plant growth.

Using the list of useful websites (**Week 4 resources** download), have children research the example of tundra biome in order to complete the blank HOTCLUB fact file.

Finish by comparing tundra with desert biomes. Although very different, both have conditions that limit plant growth.



### Assessment

Which children remember that Baffin Island in North America is an example of a tundra biome?

Which children can explain that tundra biomes are found at high latitudes and that they are among the coldest places on Earth?

Which children can explain that permanently frozen ground limits plant growth in tundra biomes?



## WEEK 5 Learning objective

● Why do different types of forests grow in different parts of the Americas?

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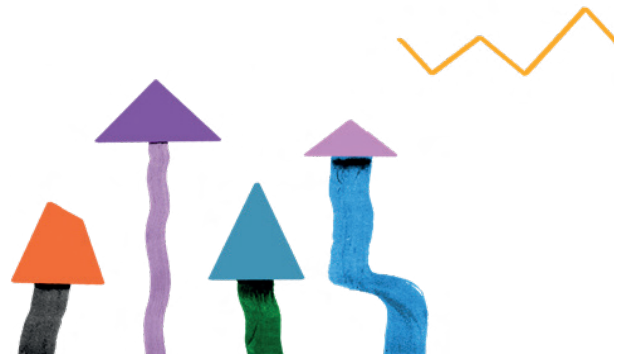
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Locate three key forest examples on the biome map: the Amazon Rainforest, Great Bear Rainforest (British Columbia, in the Pacific Northwest Temperate Rainforest) and the Appalachian–Blue Ridge forests (in the Eastern North American Temperate Broadleaf Forest). Identify the geographical patterns associated with each forest biome.

Use photographs and climate data to compare the three forest types. Based on their prior knowledge from the preceding lessons, challenge children to explain how latitude, temperature, rainfall and proximity to oceans might influence forest growth. Discuss why the Amazon lies close to the equator, why temperate rainforests occur on wet western coasts and why broadleaf forests are common in eastern temperate regions.

Ask pupils to create a three-column comparison chart (find a template in the **Week 5 resources**). Using research sources, ask children to identify differences in climate, vegetation, wildlife and seasonal changes (there is also information on **slides 48-59**). Encourage them to use geographical vocabulary accurately.

Finish with a class discussion evaluating which factors are most important in determining forest type.



### Assessment

Which children can explain that tropical rainforests are found near the equator, where strong sunlight heats the air and causes the moisture in it to rise, cool, and fall as heavy rain?

Which children can describe that temperate rainforests receive a lot of rainfall because they are close to the sea, but are cooler because they are further away from the equator?

Which children can identify that temperate broadleaf forests are found in mid-latitude areas in the northern hemisphere and experience different seasons, including warm summers and cool winters?



## WEEK 6

### Learning objective

- Why do different parts of the Americas look so different?

Begin by revisiting the original enquiry question. Display the biome map and ask pupils to recall the major biomes studied



## “Pupils will investigate the relationship between biomes, latitude, climate, and physical geography”

during the unit. Discuss the meanings of the words ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ (**slides 63-64**) before working collaboratively to create a large cause-and-effect diagram linking latitude, oceans, mountains and weather systems to climate and biome formation. Encourage them to draw upon examples from each lesson.

Pupils should then complete a synthesis task. Using six representative locations – Amazon Rainforest, Pacific Northwest Temperate Rainforest, Eastern Broadleaf Forest, Prairies, Atacama Desert and Arctic Tundra – they should explain why each biome exists where it does. Provide those who need it with sentence stems (in the **Week 6 resources**) to help them verbalise their understanding. Provide opportunities for discussion, debate and peer explanation. Pupils should support their ideas with evidence from maps, photographs and climate information.

As an optional final outcome, pupils can answer the enquiry question in an extended written explanation, poster or presentation. Encourage them to use key geographical vocabulary and refer to examples from across North and South America (**slide 66**).

Conclude with reflection on the patterns visible across the biome map. Pupils should recognise that different places in the Americas look different because climate varies from place to place, and climate is shaped by

geographical factors including latitude, mountains, oceans and atmospheric processes.



### Assessment

Which children can explain that biomes are shaped by climate and that climate is influenced by physical geography, such as latitude, mountains, oceans, and weather systems?

Which children can describe how the different biomes across the Americas support different plants and animals, making these places look very different from one another? What examples can they give of this?

Which children can explain that different parts of the Americas look different because their locations and physical geography vary, even though they are all found within the Americas? What examples can they give of this? **TP**



*Aidan Severs is an experienced educator, consultant and writer who supports schools in improving teaching and learning through creative,*

*research-informed classroom practice.*

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

# Ditch the **GLITCH**

Make cumbersome, bolt-on tools a thing of the past by using a pedagogy-first approach – and let your teaching soar

DANIEL TERRY

**F**or many schools, the challenge is no longer *whether* to use technology, but *how* to use it well. Laptops, tablets and digital platforms are now common in classrooms, but their real value only emerges when they are embedded purposefully within teaching and curriculum design.

When used well, technology can help pupils explore ideas, practise skills, collaborate with others or demonstrate their understanding in creative ways. But the challenge for schools is moving beyond simply introducing devices, to embedding them meaningfully. So, how can we ensure technology enhances learning, rather than becoming another layer of complexity in the classroom? The answer is to put pedagogy first, resulting in what we at the Cygnus Academies Trust call a *pedtech* approach.

## Start with the curriculum

The first step is curriculum mapping. Before introducing new technology, schools should review their existing curriculum and identify where digital tools can genuinely support learning and align with broader structures already in place.

Our Trust's curriculum mapping phase began with evaluating where technology would enhance our existing pedagogy

rather than replace it. For instance, our Year 5 history pupils now use interactive timelines to sequence events visually (it's a lot easier than cutting and sticking, and is more suited to iteration), and our science pupils use data logging tools during investigations to collect and analyse results in real-time. Starting with intentional mapping ensured that the technology we included in these subjects was purposefully aligned to learning outcomes, and how we do things, rather than used as an add-on or a generic tick-box.

## Implement a pilot scheme

Once you have identified where technology could be most useful, it's sensible to start small. Running a pilot scheme in one school, or across a small number of year groups, allows class teachers to test new approaches in a manageable way. During this phase, you can gather evidence on what works and what doesn't through collecting feedback from staff, pupils and parents. Reviewing the results carefully ensures that any wider rollout is based on real classroom experience rather than assumptions.

After evaluating the pilot, schools can revisit their curriculum maps and refine their approach where needed before wider rollout of the scheme across a whole school. This phasing helps ensure that teachers feel confident using the technology properly and that consistency can be achieved across classrooms.

## Pinpoint engagement

A pedagogy-first approach can help pupils access learning in ways that suit them best. Some pupils may learn or respond best to written text, while

**tp-Mentimeter**), where they were shown an image and had to submit phrases that could be used to describe the image. The children were then able to use this collective word bank to create sentences to describe the image. This had a positive impact on all children, but particularly those who sometimes struggle to generate ideas, as they were presented with a variety of phrases that they could use and adapt together.

At Cygnus, we also encourage pupils to capture their learning through photos, video and audio as they explore ideas, collaborate with peers and move between different activities and learning spaces. We find that for our pupils, this supports exploration, creativity and discussion, while ensuring the children remain active, curious and engaged learners rather than passive users of devices.

An example of this within our Cygnus curriculum is that pupils are using digital maps and short video clips to explore rivers around the world. The ability to 'zoom in' on real locations and annotate features is leading to higher engagement, with pupils asking more questions and demonstrating deeper understanding.

We have also been trialling Padlet and

*“The challenge is moving beyond introducing devices, to embedding them meaningfully”*

others benefit from images, diagrams or visual explanations. Technology can also support how pupils develop their ideas. For example, you might encourage children to discuss their thinking with a partner or record a short oral response before starting a writing task, recognising the role of oracy in organising ideas. Digital modelling tools can then demonstrate sentence construction, while collaborative platforms allow pupils to edit and improve their work together.

For example, our Year 4s used Mentimeter's word cloud tool ([tinyurl.com/](http://tinyurl.com/)

Microsoft Forms to help provide whole-class feedback. Teachers can see the results and adjust lessons accordingly. For example, using Mentimeter's 'pin on image', Year 6 can be shown a world map and asked to put a pin where they think Alaska is, enabling teachers to assess retention of knowledge.

This all stems from the teaching we were already doing without the tech – we kept the pedagogy the same, and just updated it with digital resources where they genuinely make life easier or more engaging for pupils and teachers; nothing is a bolt-on or chasing a trend.

### Don't forget accessibility

Accessibility is another key benefit of educational technology. By designing lessons that offer multiple ways to access content, engage with ideas and demonstrate understanding, schools can ensure that every pupil can participate fully in the classroom.

A key part of our approach is our commitment to Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

For example, in English, our pupils may record their ideas orally, or use visual aids to

support them in evidencing their learning. We have seen that this approach has particularly benefited our pupils with SEND, with their participation increasing significantly.

Similarly, research consistently shows that inclusive-by-design platforms help to reduce stigma, support independence and enable flexible assessment pathways in schools. So, in our Trust, iPads play an important role, as they have multiple accessibility features already embedded, including Speak Screen, VoiceOver, Live Captions and head and eye tracking. This means that teachers don't have to download additional software to support their pupils, and access can be personalised quickly and discreetly.



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### Prepare for life

Technology can also support pupil independence. When used carefully, it encourages children to take greater ownership of their learning while developing skills they will need in the future. Early exposure to technology helps pupils build capabilities such as collaboration, creativity and problem-solving, complementing the core curriculum and preparing pupils not only for the next stage in their education but also for life beyond.

Ultimately, a pedtech approach ensures that technology serves learning, not the other way around. By aligning pedagogy, curriculum and digital tools purposefully, schools can create inclusive, playful and creative while helping pupils develop the skills they need for future learning, life and work. **TP**



*Daniel Terry is deputy CEO at Cygnus Academies Trust.*

[cygnusacademiestrust.org.uk](https://www.cygnusacademiestrust.org.uk)

# Multiplying CONFIDENCE

Times tables were a nightmare for my son, until this structured approach changed everything, says **Dario Ferrari**...

A few months ago, my wife and I were going over the times tables with our son, when we realised that the way we were testing him wasn't working. Asking them in order was no problem, but asking them in random order made the gaps obvious. Long revision sessions weren't helping either – if anything, they created stress, and our son did everything he could to avoid them, insisting: "Enough, I already know them all!"

We had noticed a few patterns, though. Some times tables took longer because he was working them out. For others, he was trying to remember the song he'd heard in class. Others he confused with similar ones. So, we decided to look into the research, and found a much better way of doing things...

## A matter of words

The maths behind multiplication is fundamental, but fluency with times tables involves a different area: language. When a child answers, "what's  $8 \times 8$ ?" straight away, they haven't learned to calculate 64 quickly. They've simply recalled a fact from their long-term memory.

Practising aloud means training on the natural working channel. One thing my wife and I noticed is that, when shown a flashcard with the question, our son's first reaction was often to repeat

the question itself. A way to buy time, certainly, but perhaps also to reactivate memory and retrieve the right answer.

Typing the answer on a keypad, on the other hand, requires extra cognitive effort that has nothing to do with fluency. It's a separate skill, and one that risks interfering with learning if introduced at the same time. The best order to learn what's needed for the MTC seems to be: theoretical foundations, language fluency, response technique.

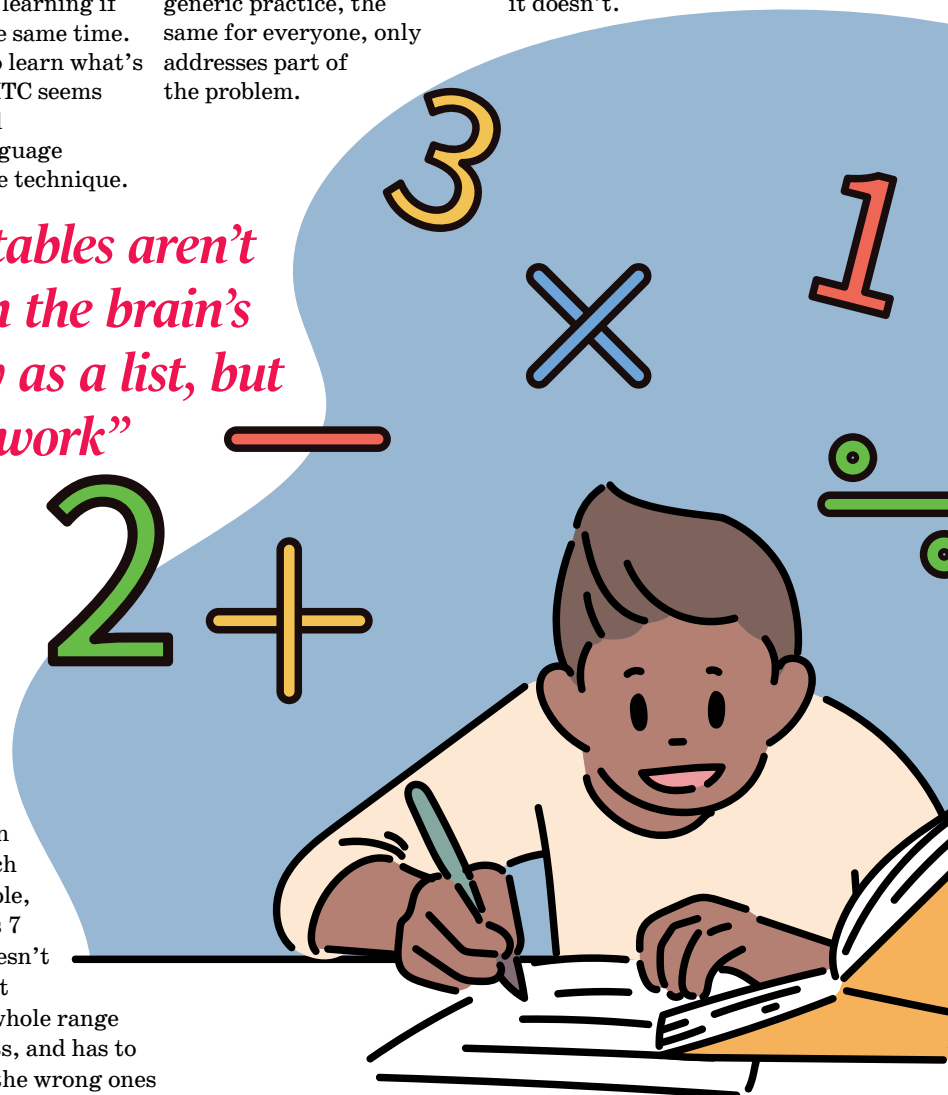
*"Times tables aren't stored in the brain's memory as a list, but as a network"*

## Complex networks

Times tables are also stored in the brain in a specific way – they don't live in memory as a list, but as a network, and the answers often compete with each other. For example, when a child sees  $7 \times 8$ , the brain doesn't only retrieve that operation but a whole range of possible results, and has to learn to discard the wrong ones to pick 56 in time.

This network forms spontaneously and depends on how the child has learned the operations, on the mistakes they've made along the way, and on the associations they've built. Two children in the same class can have entirely different networks. This is why generic practice, the same for everyone, only addresses part of the problem.

Recent research from Loughborough and Nottingham universities has shown that these interferences appear from the very early stages of learning and persist even when the child becomes fluent. For some pupils, suppressing the wrong answers comes automatically; for others, it doesn't.



In that second case, adding a timer only makes things harder.

## Careful timing

Meta-analyses place retrieval practice using flashcards as among the most effective techniques for learning times tables. What makes it valuable is that it forces the pupil to retrieve the answer before seeing it, and that process sometimes takes time. A timer risks breaking the very mechanism that makes it useful, so it's safer to build confidence first and introduce timing gradually, though there's no direct scientific evidence on the matter.

Taking the right amount of time to practise also allows for immediate feedback. Knowing right away whether a result is

correct and, in case of error, seeing the right one, is what turns retrieval into learning. A card discarded because it was wrong teaches nothing; a card turned over and, if needed, corrected aloud — “6 times 8 is 48” — is what consolidates memory and prevents new interferences.

Of all the techniques the research has looked at, distributed practice — short sessions, just a few minutes, so as not to tire the child — is the one that works best. A few minutes every day beats half-hour sessions once a week. But of course, for time-strapped teachers, the question becomes: what to practise in those few minutes? Testing all the times tables is impossible, and probably less efficient than focusing on a few specific facts.

The most relevant ones are the facts the child can't yet answer quickly: what I call fragile facts. Identifying them takes more than checking right or wrong: it takes watching the response time, too. A good strategy is to practise fragile facts every day until they become automatic; and then review those automatic facts at growing intervals, so they don't slip back.

One thing to keep in mind: if there are many fragile facts, or you're in the early stages and need to introduce new ones, the number of questions you put in front of the child should still be kept small. A session made up only of new facts, where they keep getting things wrong, becomes frustrating and produces refusal; it's best to mix new facts in with something the child is already consolidating. The aim is desirable difficulty — challenging enough to push them, but within reach enough not to discourage. This isn't the easiest balance to calibrate, but as with the children's own practice, the key is to aim for this kind of approach, rather than trying to get it perfect right away.

My son is now confident with his times tables, and visibly proud of it. He doesn't let us forget it. **TP**



**Dario Ferrari is an Italian UX designer and a parent. Together**

**with his wife, a teacher, he developed TabTabTab, a voice-based times tables app, while studying how children memorise multiplication facts.**

 [tabtabtab.it](http://tabtabtab.it)

## A protocol for struggling pupils

**Are some children having a really hard time with times tables? Try this approach:**

- Start with a flashcard assessment, sorting cards into three piles: automatic answers, correct but slow answers, wrong or confused answers.
- If errors start piling up, stop: continuing only consolidates wrong answers.
- Correct every error immediately by showing the result and repeating the whole fact — “6 times 8 is 48” — not just the answer.
- Don't set automatic cards aside for good: review them at growing intervals — after one day, then three, then a week — to consolidate memory over time.
- Practise slow or wrong cards for five to 10 minutes a day. As they become automatic, they move into the relevant pile.
- If the child loses focus, stop: the cards not yet seen will open tomorrow's session.
- Once most cards are automatic, move practice to the keypad — the DfE has an MTC ‘try it out’ page at [tinyurl.com/tp-DfEMTC](http://tinyurl.com/tp-DfEMTC) that reproduces the exact format.
- The timer comes last: introduce it only when the child can answer a randomised mix accurately and well within the six-second limit.



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Primary school suspensions have risen by six per cent this year, with many young pupils struggling with anxiety, attendance issues, or emotional regulation that require immediate classroom support. Academy21, the UK's leading DfE-accredited online alternative provision, provides early intervention solutions before these challenges become persistent disruptive behaviour. Schools are increasingly partnering with online provision to maintain



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2

The NEU risk assessment tool appeared like a gift from heaven at a time when my school were anxiously awaiting the call. I knew it would make a huge difference.



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4

## Recycling made easy

The edding Return Box programme makes it easy for schools to recycle used pens and markers while supporting hands-on sustainability learning. By purchasing £150 worth of edding & UHU's educational supplies, schools can unlock their free Return Box. The no hassle system accepts any brand of pen or marker, requires no sorting, and includes a prepaid return label for responsible recycling.

Already in use at Clarendon Primary School, the programme brings sustainability to life in the classroom—helping pupils understand the full recycling cycle while reducing everyday waste. To learn more and get started, visit [tinyurl.com/tp-edding26](https://tinyurl.com/tp-edding26)



3

## Want pupils to read more? Try this...

Pageticker is the UK's top-rated digital reading diary for primary schools, encouraging children to read more.

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5



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# How I do it

Walk in Galileo's footsteps and build your own telescope using everyday household objects...

GEORGINA MAW

# 1

Together to bend and focus light.

To begin this exciting astronomy lesson, you need to gather your essential materials. Collect one kitchen roll tube, a sheet of A4 cardstock, tape, a 38mm double concave lens, and a 38mm double convex lens per child (lenses are quite easy to find online). Before assembling, take a moment to carefully examine the two different lenses, noticing how their unique physical curvatures will soon work



**E**ver wondered how we first peered into the stars? In 1608, the Netherlands introduced the first telescopes for observation on Earth. By 1609, Galileo revolutionised science by turning this version toward the stars, amplifying images 30-fold. This hands-on lesson explores the fundamentals of optics. By encouraging pupils to build a DIY telescope, it demonstrates how lenses manipulate light to magnify distant objects; pupils will gather and focus light through two distinct curves, thereby replicating Galileo's historic achievement, and see an upright image. In just fifteen minutes, your class will transform everyday household items into a functional scientific instrument, connecting history directly with practical physics.

Now, grab the remaining double convex lens. Carefully place this lens at the exposed outer end of your newly created A4 cardboard tube. Just like you did in the previous step, use the tape to secure the lens to the rim. Ensure the connection is stable and airtight, creating a solid housing unit for your secondary lens.

# 2

Next, take the double concave lens and carefully position it onto the very edge of the kitchen roll tube. It is crucial that the lens sits squarely on top of the opening rather than slipping inside. Secure it firmly in place using your tape. As you wrap the tape around the tube, be mindful not to cover up too much of the glass, preserving maximum visibility, as this will be the end you look through!

# 3

Now, take your sheet of A4 cardstock and roll it tightly from one short side to the other to form a second tube. While holding this newly formed paper cylinder securely so it does not unroll, slide it gently inside the original kitchen roll tube. Slowly adjust the thickness of your paper roll until it fits snugly inside the cardboard structure, allowing it to slide smoothly back and forth.

# 4



Finally, it is time to test your creation by looking directly through the concave lens at the kitchen roll end. Point your telescope toward a distant object across the room or outside. If the view appears blurry, slowly slide the inner A4 tube in or out to find the perfect focus. If the image unexpectedly looks smaller instead of larger, simply flip the entire device around and look through the opposite end!

# 5



*Georgina Maw is a former primary geography specialist and deputy headteacher, and is now head of operations for the Final Straw Foundation. Her book, Beach School (£17.99, Guild of Master Craftsmen Publications Ltd), packed with over 100 creative and engaging activities for children of all ages, is out now.*



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Singing Hands





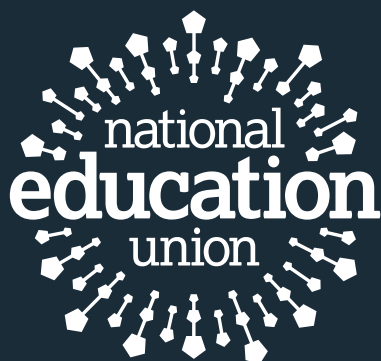
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## PLAN, UPDATE, REVIEW: *preparing your school for the NCA*

Across the country, primary school rolls are falling, and the sustained drop in birth rates will see primary school pupil numbers continue to reduce by around 300,000 between 2025 and 2030. Whilst not all schools will be impacted, the financial implications for many trusts and their schools are being carefully considered. With this in mind, it's no surprise that the DfE is evaluating how it captures accurate data on pupil numbers and school capacity.

Net Capacity Assessments (NCA) have existed since 2002, but the UK government has recently updated the process so that there is a single

standard measure for capacity across all mainstream and special schools (excluding nursery schools and alternative provision). The updated NCA doesn't only look at room size in metres, it addresses both the size and use of the spaces to determine capacity. This data will then be shared with Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), local authorities and diocese, where applicable.

This will not only potentially support improved strategic decisions by MATs and local authorities on mergers, estate planning and published admission number changes, by identifying genuine capacity (especially

for SEND provision or early years and wraparound care). It will also bring new intelligence that will help us to support our schools with admissions challenges due to falling pupil numbers.

Given these wider implications, schools should be clear about what the assessment process will involve in practice. Every state-funded primary school should expect to be visited by Valuation Office (VO) agency staff, who will measure rooms, classify spaces and analyse capacity using the NCA tool. Visits have already begun and will continue until 2029. So, if your school hasn't been visited yet, how can you prepare?

## Plan timelines

Interestingly, the visits coincide with several other government initiatives, such as the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (or RAAC, as you may know it) remedial works. In our MAT, two of our primary schools have been assigned NCA visits, despite undergoing remediation works or planning them within the next 18 months. For one school, which is using temporary modular buildings until September 2027, not only does this risk skewing the data, it also raises the question: is this an effective use of an assessor's time? Schools that

are already grappling with large-scale construction work, or other projects that impact the use of their space, should raise this with the VO: one of our primary schools' visits has been successfully postponed.

## Update records

While the assessors conduct the NCA visits and are exclusively responsible for measurements, schools must prepare and provide as much context as possible. After all, nobody knows your school as well as you do. In smaller schools, such as some of our village primary schools, where staffing

is under pressure, central support from your MAT estates team can be invaluable. For many of our schools, capacity isn't the same as usability, especially where older buildings have been reconfigured and adapted many times over the years. These spaces often need to be flexible: used for interventions, for parent meetings, and for working.

If your school is in an area with high demand or where there is significant housebuilding planned – we are seeing plans for huge numbers of new houses where our Trust is based in Essex – you should expect a visit sooner rather than

## Under pressure

Back in 2025, the National Education Union (NEU) reported that, in a survey of over 14,000 teachers, a third said they felt stressed 80 per cent of the time or more, with teachers in primary schools or nurseries most likely to feel the load ([tinyurl.com/tp-NEU25](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-NEU25)). One year on, where are we now?

Schools are still under immense pressure, we know that. However, ahead of new reforms coming into effect, detailed in the government's schools white paper *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, our survey results may help provide a better understanding of the challenges, and where the pressures are being felt.

Our own survey of more than 500 teaching leaders across primary, secondary and specialist schools found that their biggest challenges are pupil behaviour, attendance, workload and staff wellbeing. Rising SEND needs are also a concern for more than two-fifths (43 per cent) of those surveyed.

To make matters even more challenging, most schools have cut spending in the past year, which has compounded pressures, affecting staffing, resources and the learning environment that children rely on.

### PREVENTION OVER CURE

Over two-fifths (41 per cent) of teaching leaders surveyed told us

that workload and wellbeing are significant burdens, while three quarters say current pressures are having at least a moderate impact on wellbeing. Safeguarding teachers should be a priority, not just to protect their own mental health, but to keep our schools running effectively.

In primary schools, over a fifth (21 per cent) of teachers now say their school is inadequately staffed with suitably qualified people – up from 16 per cent in the two previous years. The answer could be a recruitment drive; however, our survey respondents are divided over whether the government's target to recruit 6,500 additional teachers is achievable, with over two-fifths (43 per cent) remaining unconvinced. However, when asked, greater pay flexibility (76 per cent), flexible working (75 per cent) and professional development (72 per cent) were among

the top attractive reasons teaching staff would stay in their roles.

SEND demand is a major challenge, and 70 per cent believe the new reforms will put more responsibility and risk on schools – but fewer than 40 per cent think the funding will be enough. That's why it's important that schools work together to create joint SEND strategies and practical toolkits, and offer time for staff to talk about what's working and where more support is needed before pressures build up.

### SUPPORT NEEDS TO MATCH THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGES

Schools are absorbing pressure behind the scenes, juggling competing and increasing demands with little flexibility or funding.

However, the educators we work with have told us that structured wellbeing support, such as access to counselling services, occupational health referrals, or regular staff pulse surveys, helps them to identify pain points before they escalate.

The value isn't just pastoral; early intervention has a measurable impact on staffing stability and absence costs.

With the right frameworks, putting in place retention drivers and budget support, schools stand a real chance of meeting these pressures and overcoming them, without the people who hold it all together bearing the brunt.



Gill Nye is managing director of HR Connect, a Commercial Services Group brand.

[commercialservicesgroup.com](https://www.commercialservicesgroup.com)





## Optimise your space for SEND

As SEND reform continues to reshape mainstream education, school leaders are increasingly being asked to deliver more inclusive provision within estates that were never designed for the complexity and change of need that is now being seen. Preparing for the next phase of SEND requirements will depend on how strategically schools assess and adapt their environments.

One of the biggest challenges is that many schools are already responding reactively. Spaces are often repurposed quickly to meet immediate pressures, without considering how this inclusion can be sustained over the long term. Whilst short-term adjustments may help manage demand, they can often create operational difficulties later if there is no wider plan behind them.

A more effective approach begins with understanding how pupils move through the school day and where barriers to learning currently exist. For some schools, this may mean creating quieter breakout areas, improving access to sensory support spaces, or introducing smaller-group teaching environments. For others, it could involve reviewing circulation routes, dining areas or outdoor spaces to help support regulation, wellbeing and independence.

Importantly, SEND provision should not sit separately from wider estate planning. Inclusion needs to be considered alongside capacity, safeguarding, condition and staffing pressures. School leaders should also recognise that demand is continuing to evolve. The schools that will be best placed to respond are those building adaptable environments that can be flexible, rather than relying on fixed models of provision.

Ultimately, effective inclusion is not just about adding specialist spaces. It is also about creating school environments that allow safety, confidence and consistency. Strategic planning helps schools meet these rising expectations in practical, sustainable and supportive ways.

*Lewis Barr is a founding director at AEC.*

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



*“The NCA addresses both the size and use of the spaces to determine capacity”*

later. Preparing for a visit requires reviewing floor plans, clarifying room usage and aligning internal records so that descriptions and labels reflect how you want the assessor to record each space. You should also annotate plans with any recent building alterations. It is helpful to appoint a senior member of staff, or free up another key point of contact, to accompany the assessor during their visit and explain the rationale of flexible spaces if needed. If your school will struggle with staffing during a visit, consider requesting that this take place outside of school hours so that staff can remain focused on teaching.

### Review information

The implications of the special educational needs and disability (SEND) reforms – including the need for clearer inclusion strategies and how mainstream inclusion funding will be used – present both challenges and opportunities for the use of additional space in our schools. As the entire sector manages an increasingly complex range of needs within existing resources, many staff I speak to are concerned that the capacity assessment may be used to pressure or influence professional judgements about class organisation or curriculum-led space use. Now is the time to consider those

grey areas, or flexible spaces, and detail not only how they are currently being used but how they might be used in the next two years.

Following the visit, expect a relatively short two-week window to review the data on the draft plans, which will be shared with your school, and review the data for accuracy. After all the preparation for your visit, it is equally important to allow time to read, scrutinise and respond to the report in good time afterwards.

Ultimately, the outcome of the NCA visits could have lasting implications for your school’s future planning, admissions and funding. By building capacity ahead of the visit, ensuring spaces are clearly labelled and accurately described, and coordinating visits alongside any ongoing building works, you place your school in the strongest possible position to shape the narrative around its provision, ensuring decisions are informed not just by data, but by the reality of how your spaces are used and experienced.



*Ross McTaggart is director of education – primary at Chelmsford Learning Partnership.*

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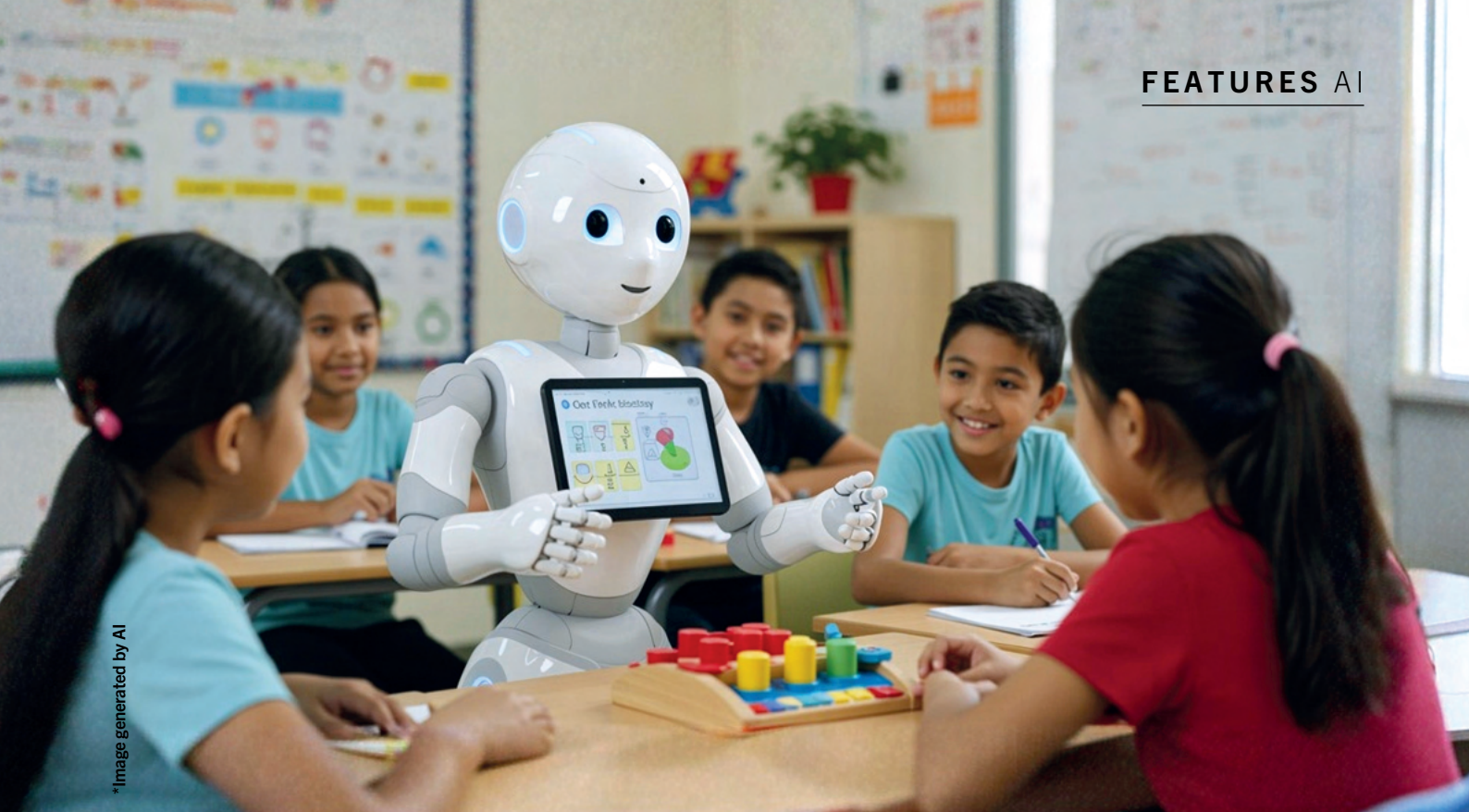
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# If you can't **BEAT 'EM...**

There's no getting away from technological advancement. So how can we best harness AI to help our teaching, rather than hinder it?

LAURA WARD

**W**hether you think of it as a well-loved life saver or a technological headache, we simply can't escape AI. The world our children are growing up in is one where AI is impossible to avoid – so why not teach them the best ways to use it instead?

## Words and pictures

Until very recently, using AI tools meant purposefully engaging with specific sites. However, even mainstream search engines now show an AI-generated answer to the question asked, above the usual hyperlinks to sites that have been ranked. It's important to discuss this addition with pupils – do they think it is a useful feature? It certainly makes searching

for answers a lot quicker, as AI has done all the work for us! However, it's also key to share that we shouldn't take this answer for granted: AI can make mistakes. Children can learn to double- or triple-check that the answer they have been given is to be trusted, by looking at the links that AI has given to where it obtained the answer, or by looking at the websites that have been hyperlinked further down the results page. Though the national curriculum doesn't currently take into consideration the use of AI, it does stipulate

that pupils should learn to *'use search technologies effectively, appreciate how results are selected and ranked, and be discerning in evaluating digital content'*, so this skill is relevant for general critical literacy, too.

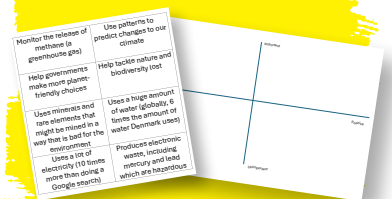
Children may well be aware, particularly further up in KS2, that photos online may be AI-generated. Photo manipulation has been in place since photography was invented, but AI-generated photos are different: they do not rely on an image that already exists, which is then altered. This is

*“Even mainstream search engines now show an AI-generated answer”*

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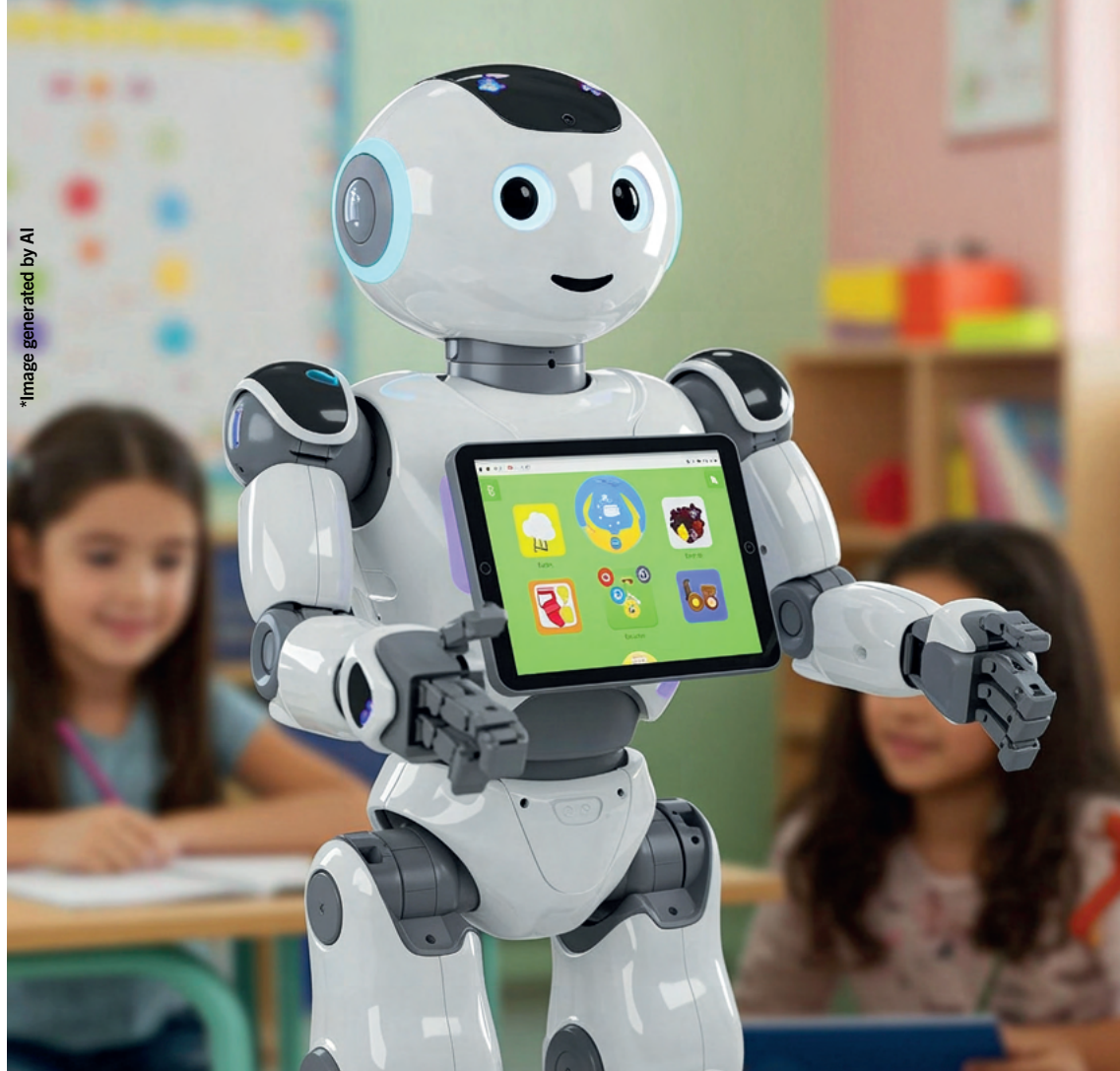


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something that is important for children to know, as seeing a photograph online does not mean that that object or person really exists. In later KS2, this can be an interesting topic for discussion: should we believe everything we see? Is it ever OK to make an AI picture of someone? Does it make a difference if that person is ourselves, someone we know, or someone famous? In KS1 and lower KS2, you could present the children with a selection of images to see if they can spot the AI 'fakes'. You can also use AI-generated images to play 'spot the mistake'. AI can make errors that humans would not, for instance, fingers missing or duplicated, incorrect letters, or issues with continuity across the picture.

## Garbage in, garbage out

Using AI is a skill in itself. For example, what content AI generates relies heavily on the prompt it is given. One way for pupils to understand the need for precise detail is by carrying out a drawing activity. Begin by asking children to draw a picture of a child at a park. After a set amount of time, ask the children to share their pictures with the class. Are any of them identical? Can the children explain why they aren't? Continue by giving more detail: *Draw a picture of a girl at a park with trees in the background.* Are the drawings becoming more similar? Finally, give a detailed description of the picture you want them to draw: *Draw a picture of a girl at a park. There are trees in the background and she is riding a scooter. She is wearing a purple jumper and black leggings.* None of the pictures that the children draw will be identical to each other, but they will have a lot more similarities now. Explain that AI is similar to



## *“The debate over AI's impact on the environment can be a great discussion point”*

this – you could give the same prompt to a different AI system and it will produce a different image, but if you have a specific idea of what needs to be included in your image, then it will be able to produce something similar to what you require. It is also much quicker than having to start a brand-new drawing from scratch.

On a digital device, children could then give a detailed prompt to produce an image, to be saved onto a document. Ask them to refine the image further – AI often gives suggestions of what it could be asked in order to improve the picture, but it is more personal if it comes from the child. Their new image can then be added

underneath the previous picture in their document, along with a comment on how they edited it. They can repeat this process several times so that they can see the relationship between their prompts and what has been produced.

### Real-world impact

With the new focus on sustainability in education, the debate over whether AI is a help or hindrance to our environment can also be a great discussion point. Negative impacts, such as its prolific use of water, use of electricity and reliance on minerals and rare elements are important to discuss. However, the use of AI to help the environment, such as

charting methane emissions and monitoring destructive sand dredging is also of global importance.

To bring this debate into the classroom, split pupils into two groups to research positive or negative impacts of AI, and then come back together for a class debate (you can chair, or the class can elect a chair), followed by a vote on how the children feel about its impact. Alternatively, they could use a ranking system to try to balance out the different arguments and come to their own conclusions. Find supporting resources for this task in the panel on the previous page. **TP**



*Laura Ward has been a teacher for 21 years and is a computing lead at her school.*

# HEALTH & WELLBEING SPECIAL

## Making a difference



YPO is here to make a difference – giving schools the tools they need to support pupils

and teachers. Wellbeing shapes how children learn, grow and thrive, and the smallest change can spark confidence, happiness and a sense of belonging. Whether it's encouraging active play, spending time outdoors, or building positive daily habits, the right environment helps children feel settled and ready to learn.

From inspiring outdoor learning spaces to resources supporting movement and connection, every choice can help shape meaningful experiences.

Explore a range of resources available to support your pupils' journey at [ypo.co.uk](http://ypo.co.uk)



### FREE RESOURCES

Find more expert health & wellbeing advice and resources, including book topics, lesson plans, posters and more at [teachwire.net/primary/health-wellbeing/](http://teachwire.net/primary/health-wellbeing/)

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# Build it and they WILL COME

**Louise Wilde's** school didn't have a field. But instead of focusing on what was missing, she and her team created an outside space that was better than anyone ever expected...

**W**e didn't have a field. What we had was blue safety surfacing, a space that wasn't really being used for anything meaningful, and children who needed more than it was giving them.

The first time one of our Nursery children lay flat on their back in The Nest, quietly looking up at the sky, everything else just stopped. No calling out, no fidgeting, no adult prompting.

Just stillness. This was a child who usually found it hard to regulate, suddenly completely calm in a space that didn't even exist a few months earlier.

This amazing moment didn't come from a big budget or a perfectly designed outdoor area. It came from doing something different with what we already had.

## From forgotten corner to The Nest

Like a lot of inner-city schools, our outdoor space wasn't awful – but it wasn't doing much either. At the same time, many of our children didn't have access to outdoor space beyond school; no gardens, limited trips to parks and very little chance to just be in nature. You could see it in how some children struggled to engage, regulate or sustain interaction. The Nest came from a simple question: what do our children actually need more of? It wasn't more equipment. It was something different. And so The Nest was born.

It includes a raised wildlife pond, bug hotel, wormery, bird feeders and a bird box with a solar camera so children can observe nature closely. The space also features a sensory reading nook, mud kitchen, role-play Ranger Station and investigation resources such as magnifiers, identification guides and weather-monitoring equipment to encourage hands-on science and communication. Natural materials, reclaimed wood, planting and communication boards have been used throughout to create a calm, nature-rich environment that supports curiosity, wellbeing and child-led exploration.

## Making it happen

Creating The Nest wasn't about a big transformation overnight. It was built bit by bit, and it's still changing now.

We used reclaimed materials wherever we could – logs, pallets and natural elements – and focused on building the space up gradually rather than trying to get it done all at once. A small amount of funding helped us add key features, like a pond, but some of the simplest things have had the biggest impact. If I'm honest, some of the most expensive



*“The first time one of our Nursery children lay flat on their back in The Nest, quietly looking up at the sky, everything else just stopped”*

equipment we've had over the years hasn't had half the impact. The biggest challenge wasn't budget – it was mindset.

Shifting thinking from our space as an 'outdoor play area' to something that actually supports wellbeing and learning took time. We also had to be really clear with children about caring for the space: no picking

plants, respecting resources, and understanding that this is something we look after together.

## What it looks like in practice

The Nest is now part of our daily provision in Nursery and Reception, and we're opening it up for more across the school, too. In Early Years, it's where some of the



most meaningful moments happen, but not because we've planned them that way. You might see children building a den together, figuring things out without adult input. Another child might be lying quietly, watching the sky, taking a moment to regulate. Others return to the same spot every day, building familiarity and confidence. One child who rarely spoke during whole-class sessions started returning to the same area each day, just watching at first. Over time, that turned into single words, then short phrases, then conversations with other children completely on their terms.



For some of our quieter children, this is where their voice comes out. There's less pressure and more reason to talk. Because children are sharing a focus – whether that's a bug, a plant or a space they've built together – conversation happens more naturally, without the pressure of a whole-class setting.

We've also built in simple scientific enquiry. That might look like bug hunting, watering plants at the Ranger Station, or noticing what's changed since yesterday. It's not formal; it just happens as part of being out there. Older children now use the space, too, whether that's for science, wellbeing or just a different way of learning. For them, this might include using the space to observe habitats, track weather patterns or ask simple questions about what they notice, rather than completing the same learning indoors.

### Why it matters

The impact has been hard to ignore. We're seeing children more engaged, more curious and more willing to explore. Communication, especially for quieter children, has improved in a way that feels natural rather than pushed. For some pupils, this space has become essential for regulation. Instead of trying to manage everything in a busy classroom, they have somewhere to go that genuinely helps them reset. This isn't just something we're seeing in our setting. In places like Finland, where concrete outdoor areas have been transformed into more natural environments, there have been clear benefits for children's wellbeing, engagement and even physical health.

But you don't need a huge project to see that kind of impact. For many of our children, this is their only consistent access to this

## 5 SIMPLE WAYS TO CREATE YOUR OWN NEST

- 1 Start small.** A single corner can become something powerful with the right intention.
- 2 Think natural, not expensive.** Logs, plants and loose materials often have more impact than fixed equipment.
- 3 Build it into your routine.** Regular access matters more than occasional use.
- 4 Keep it purposeful.** Link it to communication, wellbeing and enquiry not just 'being outside'.
- 5 Let children lead.** Some of the best moments will be the ones you didn't plan.

type of environment. That makes it more than just an outdoor space; it's part of how they experience school.

### Start small, think differently

You don't need acres of land or a big budget to create something meaningful. Start with the space you already have, even if it's small. Think about what your children need more of, not what's missing. Build it slowly. Let it change. Let the children shape it with you. Because sometimes the most powerful thing we can give children isn't more structure or more resources.

It's space to just... be. **TP**



*Louise Wilde is an Early Years teacher and Forest School Lead in an*

*inner-city primary school in Birmingham.*

# What's really in YOUR LUNCH?

Open up pupils' eyes to what they're putting in their bodies, and create a class of nutrition detectives, says **Dr Jo Montgomery**

**U**nderstanding nutrition isn't just about learning food groups; it's about making sense of the complex choices pupils face every day. In KS2, this sits within the 'Animals, including humans' units: Year 3 focuses on what we need to stay healthy, while Year 6 explores how diet affects how our bodies function.

We can create powerful learning opportunities at all stages by teaching children to become nutrition detectives. Here are some practical ways to engage children with what's on their plate:

## 1. Start with a mystery

Ask pupils: "If two foods look similar, are they equally good for your body?"

Show two everyday snacks (e.g. a cereal bar and a chocolate bar). Avoid judging – just observe. This sets up the idea that we can't always trust appearances.

You could link discussions to Joe Wicks' *killer bar* ([killerbar.co.uk](http://killerbar.co.uk)) – he created the most dangerous 'health' bar in Britain to raise awareness – and discuss the benefits and pitfalls of different types of food and marketing. It might also be useful to use the Great Science Share for Schools toolkit resources, including the Reliability Checker ([tinyurl.com/tp-ReliabilityChecker](http://tinyurl.com/tp-ReliabilityChecker)) and talk prompts ([tinyurl.com/tp-GSStalk](http://tinyurl.com/tp-GSStalk)) to help children in their discussion roles.

## 2. Become a label detective

Provide real food packaging and challenge pupils to investigate the following ingredients using secondary sources:

- sugar
- fat
- protein
- salt

They can use resources like encyclopaedias, and sites such as BBC Bitesize ([tinyurl.com/tp-BBCNutrients](http://tinyurl.com/tp-BBCNutrients)) and Britannica Kids ([tinyurl.com/tp-BritannicaNutrients](http://tinyurl.com/tp-BritannicaNutrients)) for their research.

Key questions include:

- Which would give a quick burst of energy?
- Which might keep you full for longer?
- Which would be a better everyday choice?

Encourage the children to justify their answers using evidence from the labels and their knowledge of different food groups – not just opinion.

This develops:

- **Year 3:** recognising different nutritional needs
- **Year 6:** interpreting data and linking diet to body function

**What the science says**  
Link findings to simple scientific ideas:



- The body breaks food down into nutrients that travel in the blood
- Different nutrients do different jobs (energy, growth, repair)
- The body is highly efficient – but not all foods affect it in the same way

In the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures 2024, popular *Operation Ouch* host, Dr Chris van Tulleken, shows how the body processes food in complex ways far beyond a

simple ‘fuel in, energy out’ model. This helps pupils move beyond oversimplified ideas about diet. See the lectures at [tinyurl.com/tp-XmasLectures](https://tinyurl.com/tp-XmasLectures)

### 3. What’s really in processed food?

Many packaged foods contain combinations of sugar, fat and salt designed to be appealing. The 2024 lectures explore how modern food systems create products that

are convenient and tasty, but sometimes difficult to evaluate nutritionally.

Rather than judging, ask:

- Why might this food have so many ingredients?
- Could you make it at home?
- What clues does the label give you?

This keeps the focus on scientific thinking, not judgement. It is particularly important to be supportive and inclusive of different cultures, family practices and socio-economic situations.

### Tackle misconceptions

- “All sugar is bad” → the body needs energy, but amounts matter
- “Healthy food is obvious” → labels often reveal surprises
- “Food works instantly” → digestion and absorption take time

### 4. Redesign a snack

Ask pupils to improve a snack using what they’ve learned:

- What would they change?
- What would they keep?
- How do they know what are the best ingredients to use?

The key is justification using evidence. The Great Science Share for Schools resources can help to scaffold children expressing their findings and ideas ([tinyurl.com/tp-GSScreators](https://tinyurl.com/tp-GSScreators)).

Nutrition is personal, real-world, everyday, and often confusing. By focusing on evidence, labels and scientific reasoning, we can help pupils make sense of what they eat without reducing it to ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

Food is not just fuel – it’s chemistry, biology and behaviour combined. Helping pupils see that complexity is a powerful step towards scientific literacy and making informed, relevant, meaningful and real-world decisions. **TP**



**Dr Jo Montgomery** is an award-winning science teacher delivering

fun and engaging, hands-on science and supporting teacher professional development as an educational consultant.

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

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*“We can create powerful learning opportunities by teaching pupils to become nutrition detectives”*

# Join us for Snack-tember!

Encourage young people in your school to enjoy healthier, more sustainable snacks



Last year, nearly one million children and young people took part in our first ever Snack-tember! Registration for 2026 is now open and we would love your school to get involved. Register now and to receive the latest updates about Snack-tember, and access to all the resources. We'll have a range of free resources for schools including activity ideas, recipes, posters and lots more.

Snacking plays a central role in the everyday routines of many children. Studies show that most have two to three snacks per day, whether this is before or after school, during breaks, or while spending time with friends. The challenge is that many commonly chosen snacks, such as chocolate, biscuits and crisps are less healthy options. As children go through periods of rapid growth and development, the overall balance and nutritional quality of

their food and drink choices are crucial. Healthier snacks can help provide essential nutrients that support their growth.

We recognise that schools play an important role in helping children and young people develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to make informed food choices. Providing opportunities to build practical cooking skills and learn about healthy eating is essential if healthier habits are to be sustained beyond the school gates.

Snack-tember is an initiative designed to help schools begin that journey by encouraging healthier snacking habits and supporting children and young people to make positive food choices that can last a lifetime.

"Snacks are a key part of young people's diets and can contribute important nutrients," says Claire Theobald, education

**Contact:**

For more information, visit [nutrition.org.uk/snack-tember-2026/](https://nutrition.org.uk/snack-tember-2026/) or email [education@nutrition.org.uk](mailto:education@nutrition.org.uk)

services manager at the British Nutrition Foundation. "Schools can play a vital role in supporting healthier snack choices, and Snack-tember is here to help with practical guidance and activities to bring healthier, more sustainable snacking to life"



This year we're aiming to double the reach of Snack-tember so get involved to make an impact on your students' health!

Join the British Nutrition Foundation for Snack-tember this year to improve young people's knowledge, skills and confidence, to help them have healthier, more sustainable snacks.

## ASK THE EXPERT

# Navigating painful conversations



**Adi Steiner**, psychodynamic psychotherapist and consultant social worker, reflects on relational approaches to difficult conversations with young people



**1 BUILDING TRUST**  
One of the key foundations to facilitating and navigating painful conversations with adolescents is building trust. People often confuse this, by assuming you need a long history and working relations to achieve it – but in our work, we've found that it's openness and commitment that really matters.

**2 ROBUST PRESENCE**  
Children and adolescents thrive on clear and predictable boundaries. Those who have had adverse childhood experiences will work very hard at times to test these, often making you feel rejected

and pushed away, yet the opposite is true, as these will often be the times when they need that connection the most.

**3 STOP BEATING AROUND THE BUSH**  
Children and adolescents – especially those who might have seen hardship or had painful experiences – can become hyper-vigilant regarding their surroundings, their survival often dependent on being able to predict what's coming their way. This can make them highly attuned to your state of mind, so be direct, honest and clear.

**4 BRACE YOURSELF**  
Adolescence is an often troublesome development phase involving hormonal shifts, brain restructuring and identity forming. Remembering that this phase can sometimes be like being in a boat amid stormy waters will help you adjust your expectations while weathering the storm – not for them, but alongside them.

## Key features

- Connection is key
- Come with an open mind
- Be creative, playful and willing

Contact: [training@tavi-port.ac.uk](mailto:training@tavi-port.ac.uk) | visit: [tavi-port.ac.uk](https://tavi-port.ac.uk)

# Beyond the FINISH LINE

When done right, sports day can impact pupils' skills development long after the event is over

DR JOHN ALLAN

**W**ithin the educational calendar, sports day is one of the few occasions dedicated to a range of skills developed outside of the classroom. It's a day that highlights the importance of taking part, collaborating, engaging in friendly competition and fair play. All while providing children with a crucial break from academic pressures.

Sport plays an important role in a young person's long-term development. In addition to building health and fitness, physical exposure to changeable, multi-sensory environments enables us to perform effectively across a range of physical and cognitive tasks, compared to more predictable, uni-sensory environments, such as classrooms. This includes connecting better with others and our surroundings, broader motor skill acquisition, and enhanced creative thinking and problem-solving capabilities. Due to the intensity and meaningfulness of these experiences, this learning can be long-lasting and transferable to other everyday settings.

Nonetheless, for such novel experiences to be truly effective, we need to optimise the balance between purpose and structure. When approached intentionally, sports day can be used to actively develop the skills that



*“For the experience to be truly effective, we need to optimise the balance between purpose and structure”*

underpin leadership, confidence and long-term success among children. By thinking carefully about how we support and reflect on activities, we can turn everyday moments into valuable learning opportunities. Here are four ways to do just that:

## 1. Opportunities for leadership

Sports day activities provide an opportunity for pupils to learn to work well with others and effectively contribute to a group. This sense of support and belonging plays an integral

role in building healthy relationships with both peers and adults.

Effective teamwork requires pupils to learn to balance the needs of the group with their own – whether that's through supporting a nervous teammate, organising relay teams, or taking on informal captaincy roles. These moments can be the first time children experience leadership.

To support this, teachers can assign roles beyond simple participation. Rotating team captains for each event or introducing

student coaches, responsible for encouragement and strategy, ensures every pupil has a clear purpose. Peer mentoring can also be effective, with older children supporting younger groups – providing role models for younger children, while giving older pupils a real sense of responsibility.

## 2. Building confidence

Children are strongly influenced by the behaviours of those surrounding them, particularly if they are meaningful to them. They develop focus, self-belief and motivation through observing others and receiving feedback on their own efforts.

That's why visible encouragement and participation from teachers, or older pupils, can be powerful – whether that's joining them in warm-ups, running alongside other children, or offering general support across events. Providing feedback during activities, rather than waiting until it's over, helps pupils take on board guidance in the moment and apply it to their next challenge.

At the same time, physical challenges play a key role in building confidence. Events that help children understand what their bodies are capable of, and how movement connects to health and wellbeing, can have a lasting impact. Activities such as middle-distance races encourage pupils to push themselves, building a sense of achievement that often carries into everyday life as well as ordinary PE lessons.

## 3. Social bonds

Sports day can help children build friendships with peers they may not usually engage with in their daily school life. Shared challenges – such as egg-and-spoon races or team relays – create chances



for pupils to develop encouragement and teamwork.

To maximise this, why not try and organise mixed-ability teams rather than grouping by friendship? This encourages pupils to work with a wider range of peers and develop empathy, patience and communication skills. Introducing problem-solving elements, such as obstacle or coordination-based races, can further strengthen this collaboration.

Relay formats, where each role is equally important, can also help pupils understand the value of contribution. Alongside celebrating winners, it's important to recognise behaviours such as encouragement and support. Shared challenge often builds connections that aren't so easily gained through passive interaction, helping children feel part of a wider community.

## 4. Organic feedback

Activity days offer immediate, authentic feedback, which is a powerful way for students to learn effectively while improving performance. Pupils can quickly see the impact of their actions and adjust their approach in real time.

For example, in a beanbag balance race, a child who runs too quickly and drops the beanbag will naturally adapt their pace in the next attempt. These tiny moments of feedback help children understand cause and effect, while encouraging self-correction.

To connect these experiences to everyday life, we must teach sport with transfer in mind – applying skills, strategies, and mental habits learned in one context to another. By emphasising how these lessons extend beyond sport, we can reinforce their real-world relevance.

## Beyond one day

Sports day has potential benefits far beyond an afternoon of physical activity. Indeed, it offers a natural opportunity to nurture key skills outside the classroom, particularly around leadership, confidence and resilience.

Its impact lies in how we use the moments before, during and after each event to encourage pupils to reflect, recognise their progress and celebrate perseverance. Whether it's considering how they approached a challenge or how they responded to success or disappointment, these reflections help embed learning.

With thoughtful guidance, pupils can see challenges not as failures but as important steps towards growth, developing skills that will support them for years to come. **TP**



*Dr John Allan is head of impact and breakthrough learning at PGL Beyond.*

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# Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

Improve your pupils' wellbeing – and your own – with these expert resources



## 1 Creating space for every learner

YPO is here to make a difference – supporting pupils to learn, engage and feel comfortable in ways that work for them. Every child experiences the school day in their own way, and for those with individual needs, the right environment can make a real difference. Small adjustments can support calm, focus and communication, helping

pupils feel more confident, comfortable and able to take part. Whether it's creating space for self-regulation, encouraging sensory engagement, or building inclusive routines, these everyday choices help make learning more accessible for every pupil. Explore a range of resources available to support your pupils' journey at [ypo.co.uk/send](https://ypo.co.uk/send)



## 3

### Hands-on gardening kits

Broccoli and Bees offers beautifully designed gardening kits like the Cress Train and Microgreen Animal sets, created to make growing food engaging and educational for children. Each product blends aesthetic appeal with hands-on learning, encouraging kids to explore nature, develop patience, and understand where their food comes from. Gardening with these kits supports mental and physical wellbeing, fosters creativity, and builds a sense of responsibility. By nurturing plants, children gain early exposure to healthy eating and sustainability, making each gardening moment a fun, memorable, and meaningful experience that connects them to the natural world. Find out more at [broccoliandbees.com](https://broccoliandbees.com)

## 4

### Reception readiness starts with movement

As conversations around 'school readiness' continue to dominate early education, one area cannot afford to be overlooked: physical development. Children are increasingly arriving at school with weaker core strength, poor balance, reduced stamina and delayed movement competence; factors that directly impact attention, self-regulation, communication and early writing. We must remember movement is not separate from learning; it is the foundation of it. Yet many children today are spending longer periods being sedentary and less time in active play. The Physical Activity Adventure Pack (PAAP) supports Reception educators in embedding purposeful movement through imaginative, engaging and curriculum-linked activities. Visit [tinyurl.com/tp-PAAP](https://tinyurl.com/tp-PAAP)



## 2



### Improve behaviour and attendance

An independent evaluation by ImpactEd highlights how relational, preventative approaches are helping schools identify and respond to need earlier. Schools using the Thrive Approach reported higher-than-average wellbeing, alongside improvements in emotional regulation, confidence and classroom engagement. Outcomes were particularly strong for younger pupils and those with additional needs, with SEND wellbeing scores increasing by five per cent over 2023/24 despite national declines. Earlier identification and consistent responses to behaviour play a central role in supporting behaviour, attendance and longer-term pupil outcomes. Explore the full evaluation report at [thriveapproach.com/evaluationreport](https://thriveapproach.com/evaluationreport)

## 5



### Stress-free wraparound

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# Take it **OUTSIDE**

We know that outdoor learning has benefits for our pupils, but taking time to recharge your own batteries beyond the classroom is just as important, says **Ruth Astley**

**A**s teachers, we all know that getting outside and connecting with nature works wonders for our children's wellbeing. It sparks their curiosity, helps them learn and boosts those all-important skills like resilience, problem-solving and communication. Many of us are lucky enough to work in settings where we have forest school truly woven into our timetables, or an embedded outdoor learning policy. And many of us make it our mission to sneak outdoor opportunities into the curriculum whenever we can.

But have you ever taken a step back and thought about how the wonders of nature could be a lifeline for yourself as a teacher, too? In the whirlwind of school life, it's easy to forget that nature can help restore us, as well as our pupils. And, actually, there's lots of evidence that shows that regularly connecting with the outdoors makes teachers happier at work – and also increases retention (see this paper from the Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning as an example: [tinyurl.com/tp-OLteachers](http://tinyurl.com/tp-OLteachers)).

Being hands on with nature has a real, physical impact for everyone. The school day whizzes by, and we're forever rushing about. Most adults in schools spend their days indoors, under artificial lights; simply stepping outside for a bit can recharge our batteries. It gives us space to slow down, recharge, and take in a different environment. Being in nature is proven to lower stress levels and blood

pressure, too; something every adult in school could use! It's a chance to rest your brain and focus on the little things that make life brighter.

## Fill up your senses

You might be thinking, "Now I need to plan for my own wellbeing and learning as well as for the children!" But here's the best bit: nature is our co-collaborator, completely free of charge – and you don't have to spend a ton of time organising complicated activities or travelling to far-flung nature spots. As a natural wellbeing



practitioner, whilst I spend a significant amount of time outdoors with children, I also spend a lot of time outdoors on my own – setting up sessions in preparation. It’s amazing what simply tapping into your senses while completing everyday tasks like this can do. Starting with your eyes is an easy win. It’s about noticing the little things. Spot a cluster of wildflowers, notice the buds growing on the trees, watch a spider climb its web, pause to watch the clouds drift, or listen to birds singing brightly. I try to make sure that I build in a little extra time for this while setting up, so that I’m not rushing around manically. Spotting the webs, the seed pods and the caterpillars on leaves ultimately helps me know what’s on site to point out to the children during our lesson. But it’s also a magic opportunity to calm

your own mind. Being in the present, focusing on the small wonders of nature, calms your brain after being busy indoors.

Taking in the colours in nature can also have a significant impact on your sense of calm. Surrounding yourself with shades of green and white can create a calming sense of balance. Recent research has proven that green and white natural colours are the most calming ([tinyurl.com/tp-CalmingColours](http://tinyurl.com/tp-CalmingColours)), so even gazing at a patch of greenery – the school field, or clumps of daffodils in the borders – can have a huge impact on stress reduction.

For a quick reset in your day, try engaging your other senses. Take time to breathe in the natural scents around you, like fragrant flowers or earthy leaves, or even the scent of conifers and woody

wellbeing, but it can also be valuable to intentionally plan activities.

Engaging in task-based mindfulness activities, such as scavenger hunts or open-ended group challenges, not only supports problem solving and creativity for pupils, but also offers you the opportunity to immerse yourself in the moment and reset.

Sharing memorable experiences, such as watching a child’s amazement at discovering a giant worm or spotting the tallest tree in the playground, also brings happiness and strengthens connections between you and your pupils.

Of course, not all schools are blessed with a wealth of outdoor space. Some have only playgrounds or very small outdoor areas. But don’t let that stop you! There is still much magic mindfulness you can create by bringing nature indoors. Why not try simply marking books with a view of blue skies and clouds, or with the windows open to hear bird song to create positive moments; inviting natural greens and whites into your classroom by having potted plants scattered around to evoke mindful moments of calm; adding seasonal nature tables or sensory trays to your room, where natural objects can be explored and touched when stress levels are running high; or, if risk assessments allow, infuse natural smells such as lavender or cedar into the classroom after school to reset after a busy day. **TP**



*Ruth Astley is a former assistant headteacher, SLE for assessment and*

*English, and former LA moderation manager.*

[nature-makers.co.uk](http://nature-makers.co.uk)

NatureMakers

## How to make the most of the playground



Incorporate some mini ‘forest bathing’

moments into your outdoor sessions; watch the leaves move, notice the different colours and shapes. This can reduce stress and promote quicker recovery from a demanding day. Let the view wash over you, and allow yourself to breathe out that tension.



Risk assessment site walks allow time to observe. Don’t think of site walks as a chore, use them as an opportunity to be alone in nature, engaging all your senses.



Research the health and wellbeing

benefits of different plants and trees and suggest that your school community purchases and plants them in the school outdoor environment.



Flip your thinking about wet and cold

weather! Embrace the wonders of each season. Wet weather can offer its own sense of connection and calm – there is so much pleasure in being outside in a warm coat, listening to the sound of rain on the playground, and observing the patterns created by raindrops on evergreen leaves. Whether it is the gentle patter of drizzle or the crunch of autumn leaves beneath your feet, every season offers mindful magic.

*“Research shows that birdsong can improve your cognitive performance and lower your stress levels”*



trees. These smells can actually reduce anxiety and help you sleep better later on. If you fancy a challenge, engage your ears, listen out for

different birds and try to identify them. Not only is it a fun distraction, but research from the University of Tübingen in Germany shows birdsong can boost your cognitive performance and lower your stress levels, too ([tinyurl.com/tp-Birdsong](http://tinyurl.com/tp-Birdsong)).

**Where there’s a will...**

Spontaneous senses-led moments in outdoor learning can greatly enhance



# THE BESTEST STORY IN THE WORLD... EVER!

## Chip Colquhoun

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# 5

## TIPS FROM THE AUTHOR

### Everyone is a storyteller

You already tell stories every day – about your weekend, your memories, and your life.



### Borrow, then make it yours

Great writers learn from existing stories, borrowing their shape while adding their own personal ideas.



### Tell it before you write it

Practise saying your story aloud to a partner before writing. It strengthens and improves your ideas.



### Story beats matter

Break your story into key moments or beats, then use that structure as a flexible guide.



### Stories need an audience

Storytelling is a conversation; sharing your work with listeners is a vital part of the creative process.



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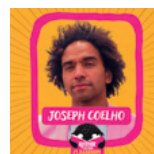
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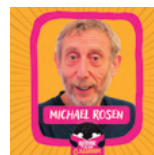
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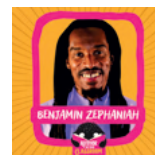
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## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

1

### Listen to the podcast

Start by listening to the *Author in Your Classroom* podcast – you can find it wherever you get your podcasts, at [teachwire.net/podcasts](http://teachwire.net/podcasts) or by scanning the QR code on the right. It's divided into three sections, so you can listen in one go or spread it across your sessions. It's entertaining, thought-provoking and will give you and your class a real sense of Chip's infectious enthusiasm for storytelling.

2

### Explore the teaching pack

Once you've listened to the podcast, work through the teaching sequence. Use the PowerPoint slides to spark discussion, the first two planning sheets to help children gather ideas and map out their stories, and the working wall materials to build a growing display of inspiration. Planning sheet three then supports a vital skill: teaching children how to give each other kind, specific and constructive feedback on their finished work.

3

### Read the book

If you can, get hold of a copy of *The Bestest Story in the World... Ever!* (out on 10/09/26) for your class to enjoy before, during or after the sessions. It's a funny, imaginative story that brings Chip's ideas about storytelling to life perfectly, and will have the children buzzing with their own ideas about what makes a brilliant tale. You can read the whole book together as a class, or just make sure you have copies on hand – pupils are sure to want to know more!

### CHIP SAYS...

"When you're telling a story, you're actually having a conversation with your audience about the narrative. You're a guide, like a conductor."

# Feel the BEATS

Zooming in on a story's most important plot points will help pupils to understand how narrative arcs develop, and set them up for well-structured writing, says **Sophy Henn**

**S**tanding at the foot of a story mountain, staring up at the summit, it's easy to feel intimidated, and even scared. It can be tempting to run at it full speed and see how far you get, but I have found that, more often than not, a few well-placed footholds will get me to the top with much more certainty.

Footholds, plot points, bullet points... call them what you like, but they are an invaluable aid for planning out a story. They help guide how characters move through the action without getting tangled up in details. This is usually only one part of the writing process, but it can be a really useful exercise on its own for teaching children about how narrative works, and how to build and pace their own writing.

When I am creating a picturebook, one of the key tasks is to strip back often quite complicated concepts or situations to their very essence. And to do that I often focus on how the situation affects my character, then put that right at the heart of each spread, so the reader can very quickly understand the situation and its effects. This is a great way to understand how stories work, and what makes them interesting, even if you don't have a lot of space or time.

For the following activity, we won't worry about adding pictures, and just focus on the words. However, if you'd like to extend the lesson, or include

teaching on storyboarding, adding in images is definitely an option.

## Starting with character

I would suggest having some characters ready at the start of this exercise, as it could be too daunting or time-consuming for each child to dream up a character on the spot. And there are only so many stories about Ronaldo at Sports Day you can bear!

Although your pupils won't be creating their own pictures this time, visuals can really help to get their

imaginations firing. Pictures of people or animals cut from newspapers and magazines can work as inspiration for character descriptions, and you can either give the whole class the same character, or have a couple for them to choose from.

Once the children have a character in mind, they can name them, give them a

job or a purpose, and think up three qualities to sum them up (e.g. funny, shy, determined, adaptable, etc).

## Building a world

Next, characters need to be put in a situation that includes conflict.

This can be positive or negative, but all traditional



stories require a development of some kind, and this usually revolves around an obstacle or incident.

Children can write about any situation that includes a beginning, middle and end, though I like the challenge of writing about something (it can be a very ordinary something) from the character's point of view.

You can give pupils as much or as little information as you think appropriate at this stage. They may be confident in coming up with their own situations entirely, or they may prefer to have some suggested scenarios, such as 'your character is having dinner and doesn't want to eat their broccoli!', or 'your character is a spy and is about to get caught snooping around a castle'.

Once pupils have their character and scenario, they can begin writing their stories, remembering to focus only on key plot points,

and trying to get across the essence of the narrative without using lots and lots of detail. The following structure will help:

**1** A beginning and end – the A & the Z. Write just one short sentence for each.

**2** Now plonk a problem right in between those two points. What is getting in the way of our character getting from A to Z? What hurdle must they overcome?

**3** Next, add two more plot points, either side of the hurdle, making five plot points in total. The second plot point gets us from the start to the hurdle and the fourth shows us how our characters deal with the hurdle and get to the end.

For example, here are our five basic plot points for the story of Jeanie's school running race:

- Lining up for the race.
- The race starts.
- Jeanie is falling behind.
- She tries to run faster.
- She finishes the race.

It is very simple (and a bit dull), but now we can bring it to life by writing it from Jeanie's point of view. What is she thinking at every step? Which brings us to...

## Centering the character

Encourage your pupils to put themselves firmly in their character's shoes and think like that character:

- How would that situation appear to them?
- How would they feel in that situation?
- How would that feeling affect their body language, how they physically feel?

*“Footholds, plot points, bullet points... call them what you like, but they are an invaluable aid for planning out a story”*

- How would that situation make them react?
- What is really important to that character in that situation?
- And how would they describe all of those feelings?

For example, if I am writing from the perspective of a 7¼-year-old girl, or an over-confident panda, or a wicked, greedy king, none of those characters is going to use the same language as me. So, what sort of words and phrases would they use?

I find writing in another person's voice can be incredibly liberating, especially if you are not confident with spelling and grammar. We are writing in our character's inner voice, not their best letter-writing voice. Maybe they would use three 'and's in a sentence, or they might describe feeling scared as "prickly but also wobbly". Just relax into the character and enjoy it.

Et voila! Here is An Extremely Short Story of a Running Race by Jeanie, aged 7 and ¾...

*Getting into the line, my tummy feels like it's full of frogs and springs and giant, floppy eagles. Not in a good way. Mr Watkins is yelling "Ready, set...". I know what comes next, but the "GOOOOOO" still makes me jump. RUN!*

*It's like I am running through jelly AND ice cream. Why won't my legs move faster? My lungs feel like they are on fire as I push and push towards the finish line.*

*It's done. Second. I'm happy with that.*

Once pupils have finished writing their stories, you could invite them to write the same five plot points again, but from someone else's point of view. For example, the race could be written from the point of view of another runner, a parent watching, or even a bird in a tree trying to understand what on Earth is going on. This is a great way to build on the work your pupils have already done and demonstrate how the same basic structure can be the basis for lots of different stories, depending on the details you add. This will reinforce the concept of the narrative arc. **TP**



*Sophy Henn is an award-winning picturebook author and illustrator. Her debut picturebook, *Where Bear?*, was nominated for the Kate Greenaway Medal and shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Prize.*



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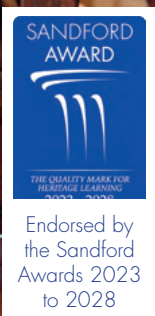
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# This and THAT

Tiny but powerful, determiners can add both precision and strength to children's writing, says **James Clements**

**A**t all ages, grammar teaching works best when it supports composition. We don't just want children to learn the labels, we want them to understand how different grammar choices shape meaning and allow them to share their ideas with their reader.

In the English national curriculum, determiners are introduced in KS1. Children meet the term and learn how words like *the, a, this, my* and *some* work in sentences. Across KS2, this knowledge will deepen through reading and writing. Over time, children recognise a wider range of determiners and use them more deliberately in their own work.

## Types of determiner

There are some common groups of determiners that are especially useful in primary teaching:

- Articles: a, an, the

- Demonstratives: this, that, these, those
- Possessives: my, your, his, her, our, their
- Quantifiers: some, many, few, each, every, enough
- Numbers: one, first

In practice, children wouldn't be introduced to these as long lists all at once. Instead, they'd benefit from meeting them through sentences and texts, then talking about the effect on the reader or the ideas that they share.

## Changing meanings

Determiners may be small, but they can make a huge difference to meaning. They can make writing more precise or more vivid.

For example:

- The house was haunted.
- My house was haunted.

Referring to a specific house changes the meaning considerably (especially for the person who owns the house!).

Or:

- Kat walked quickly along the corridor. One door was locked.
- Kat walked quickly along the corridor. Every door was locked.

Again, a small change shifts the meaning: it's easy to imagine how these different sentences could be used to create very different effects in a story: What lies behind the one locked door? How will Kat escape if all the doors are locked?

This ability to change meaning is where good grammar teaching can focus on creativity. For example, we might share the phrase:

\_\_\_\_\_ spider is venomous

Together, the class can try swapping different determiners into the phrase and discussing what difference they make to the meaning.

Not every version the children suggest will make sense, but that can lead to useful discussion (and learning). Pupils will begin to see that determiners are choices that help writers guide the reader. This grammar-for-writing approach helps children to understand that grammar isn't just something to name, it's something to use for effect.

## Teaching determiners

In KS1, we can start with talk, reading and simple noun phrases. Children can match objects to phrases such as *this pencil, my bag* or *three blocks*. Shared reading is also useful. Pause on a sentence and ask why the writer chose *the* rather than *a*, or *that* rather than *this*.



In KS2, we can build on this by comparing sentence choices in model texts and asking pupils how the meaning changes when the determiner changes. Short editing tasks can work well here, too.

Across both key stages, discuss determiners in context, considering them through oral rehearsal, sentence work and shared writing. Link them to real writing outcomes so children can see a purpose for the grammar.

Used well, determiners can do more than meet grammar objectives. They can help children write with more precision, control and imagination. And that's got to be a good thing! **TP**



*James Clements is an education writer and researcher. His latest*

*project is **FluentZoo**, a resource for supporting children's reading fluency.*

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



# AN INSPIRING SPACE

How taking one step at a time, and drawing ideas from the local library, turned a school's lacklustre view of books into a thriving reading culture

VERITY ROBINSON



## STEP ONE: BOOKS!

When I joined Mangotsfield CofE Primary as the school's librarian in April 2023, I was determined to support its vision of becoming a 'Reading School', and to encourage all the students and staff to truly love reading. I worked with the school's English Hub on a goal to build up the reading culture, starting with the library, as we were all aware of the benefits reading for pleasure would bring to our community.

Part of the action plan was to reintroduce the library into school life as, following the pandemic, many of the books had been relocated and the space wasn't used on a regular basis. We already had a great space with furniture, funded by our PTA in 2017, but we needed to fill it with enticing texts that would tempt our young readers. Along with the library, we talked about plans to improve our offer of book-related

clubs and experiences to enhance our reading culture and create a buzz around reading. Ideas we had included hosting author visits, introducing Reading Sheds in the playgrounds and appointing student librarians to help. We knew these things would all take time, so our first project was building up our library...

Building a reading for pleasure culture in a school is a long game. The landscape of education is ever-changing and pressures on funding and time are always there. Each year I come up with a new area of the library I want to develop – remember, you can't do everything at once!



its books, so that we could teach our learners to become confident library users outside of school, too. Mirroring our local library, then, we labelled fiction alphabetically and used a simplified Dewey Decimal System to organise non-fiction. Everything else is colour-coded. This really helps the children, not only to find the books they like independently, but to help keep it organised, too!

With regard to budget we knew we couldn't buy all the books we wanted, so we referred back to the pupil voice and started with some of the most popular titles. We also ensured we had a diverse and inclusive range of authors and text types.



## DESIGNING A SYSTEM

I sent round surveys and asked for feedback on how pupils would like the library to look and which books we should include. Asking the children helped them to feel more connected to the process and excited about the library reopening. I felt that the layout of the library would be important in making sure it was inviting, but also easy to navigate, so I visited our local public library for inspiration. My hope was that we could emulate the way it organised

Making sure our library was accessible and inclusive was a real priority for me. We have a growing collection of Barrington Stoke's dyslexia-friendly books and I'm always making sure that inclusive books, which represent our diverse school community, are on display.

## LIBRARY LESSONS AND BOOK FAIRS

One of the biggest challenges we faced when revitalising our library was finding time in our jam-packed timetable, but we knew that we needed to offer all children equitable access, and protect that dedicated time at the library, to really make an impact. As a large school, we have factored in fortnightly library time for every class, and some of the older year groups have extra break or lunchtime sessions, too.

Having these dedicated slots helps to raise both the profile of the library and reading itself, with pupils and staff.

The children know the

days to bring their books in to return, and for many it's a time that they really look forward to.

Another inevitable challenge was budget. We knew we couldn't buy all the books we wanted straight away, so we've been supported by donations and have used book fairs to help top up the shelves throughout the year. Running these kinds of events has helped us to share our vision more widely with the school community, and their enthusiasm has been instrumental in making sure the project has had impact; each year we manage to raise an increasing amount, and we're delighted that families are

One fun way to ask for donations is by inviting families to donate a book on their child's birthday. Each 'Birthday Book' has a name plate in it to thank the child, and they go on display. We have a wishlist with our local bookshop, Storysmith, which families can buy from, too.

*"Building a reading for pleasure culture in a school is a long game"*



I'm excited that 2026 is the National Year of Reading – there's so much to get involved in; but it's important to remember the main aim is to inspire more children to fall in love with reading and hopefully keep it up into 2027 and beyond!

## BUILDING READERS FOR LIFE

The engagement in reading across the school is clear to see – not just from the children but from the staff and wider community, too. We know that reading for pleasure is hard to measure, but our recent Ofsted report noted that children 'develop a passion for literature', and we notice this in daily school life. Children who didn't see themselves as readers before the project are finding things they enjoy reading, and we see more and more children excitedly asking when the next author visit is, and more families joining us for book events. Staff are also more engaged with the library since we reopened, and many borrow books to not only share with their class but also for their own reading enjoyment.

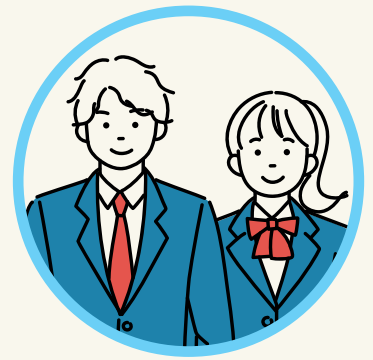
Now our library is fully functional and embedded into school life, our next hope is to

focus on our class book corners to become smaller versions of the library. We hope to raise money to fund books for every class, and to appoint reading champions to promote this across the school, working alongside our already established roles of Year 6 student librarians, so that pupil voice is at the forefront of the change in our reading culture. TP



Verity Robinson is a primary school librarian. Led by Verity, Mangotsfield C of E Primary School Library was named Peter Osborne Primary School Library of the Year in 2025, awarded by the School Library Association.

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



JASPER, YEAR 4

*"Since we started using the school library, a lot of people have found that reading is the thing for them! If you've found a new hobby or interest, you know that the library will have a book about it."*



ESME, YEAR 4

*"Before we had a library I didn't really like to read. I used to think 'Oh no, not reading!' but now I go to the library and find so many books I like and I say, 'Oh yes that's the book for me!'"*



IMAN, YEAR 5

*"When we have author visits, it makes me more excited to read their books, and Mrs Robinson always makes sure they're in our library and classrooms to read too!"*



ZARA YEAR 5

*"I've been inspired to make my own comic after we had an illustrator to visit!"*

# WAGOLL

## *Zo and the Forest of Secrets* by Alake Pilgrim

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**Z***o and the Forest of Secrets* is an exciting fantasy adventure set in the lush natural landscape of the Caribbean island of Trinidad. It's ideal for readers aged nine and up who are fans of Katherine Rundell's *The Explorer* or the *Percy Jackson* series. The story features two children with different secrets who work together to battle strange creatures and dangerous adults who are after them and their gifts. The heroine, Zo Joseph is stuck at a remote seaside village. She's been forced to move there from the city with her mother's new family, after her parents' divorce.



*Zo and the Invisible Island, the sequel to Zo and the Forest of Secrets is out now.*

She's missing her father more than ever as he's out of the country for work. But Zo has a plan: she'll pretend to be lost in the forest so that her dad comes to find her.

Her strategy soon backfires though, and she finds herself in the forest being chased by robotic gnats, smart-mouthed Anansi spiders and a dinosaur-like creature she calls the Flesh-skinner.

Now, Zo has to figure out how to survive and get back to her family. On the way, she rescues a boy, Adri Khan, who is in Trinidad from New York to celebrate his mother's cancer remission. Adri has no memory of the weeks he and his parents have been missing from the village since their boat capsized at sea.

When Zo discovers she has the ability to fall into Adri's memories through touch, she hides it, not sure what his mind can handle.

But is Adri actually the one keeping secrets? After all, he has a broken key card for the abandoned research centre somewhere in the hills. The centre – a place locals called 'the Zoo' – was run by a secretive council who carried out experiments on animals... and maybe even humans. Adri thinks his parents are still in the centre and wants to find them. Zo just wants to get out.

As Zo and Adri fight to escape the Flesh-skinner, the insect-like X, and Yara, a powerful shapeshifter with secrets of her own, they must decide if they can trust each other and work together, to find their way back home.

## FIVE TIPS FOR WRITING A FIRST-PERSON CHASE SCENE

### PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR CHARACTER'S BODY

What physical reactions are they having to being chased? How do these reactions change as the chase continues?

### USE THE FIVE SENSES

What is your character seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching (or being touched by) on the chase?

### CREATE STAGES

Think of the chase as having different stages. Have something change and become more intense in each stage: whether in the setting, events and actions, or your character's feelings and reactions.

### ADD OBSTACLES AND SURPRISES

In addition to what's chasing them, what other challenges, blocks, surprises, or twists

does your character face as they're trying to get away?

### PLAY WITH HOPE

Allow your character to have moments in the chase where things seem hopeful and they have near misses and near escapes, followed by events becoming more intense or taking a surprising turn. This will increase our sense of tension as readers.

# Extract from

## Chapter 4 – Run, pages 42-43

### *Zo and the Forest of Secrets*

Here I used sound (what Zo is hearing) to create a sense of anticipation and fear.

Create a worthy opponent: someone or something smart enough, scary enough, or with interesting talents and abilities, to make the chase exciting. In this case, giving the beast a personified element ('a scream that seemed almost human') adds to the dread that Zo feels.

In addition to what's behind her, there are obstacles in Zo's way that she has to get around to escape what's chasing her. This makes the chase more exciting.

Zo keeps thinking of ways to escape, and this gives her and the reader hope that she might do so. We all need hope to keep going.

I turned and sprinted in the opposite direction, past the hill, into the forest. Behind me, I could hear the scrabble of sliding dirt and stones, the crack and crash of trees. Hopefully, the undergrowth would slow it down. I held the torch in front of me, jumping over roots, and ducking under branches. I didn't dare look back. I could hear it somewhere behind me: a repeating snarl that started low then got louder and higher, until it was a scream that seemed almost human. I pushed myself to run faster, ignoring the knot in my side.

My backpack hooked on some bushes as I scrambled through them. It dragged me backwards. I tried to pull free. I could hear the Flesh-skinner getting closer. I could smell it: a thick swampy rotten-egg smell. I yanked myself forward, but the backpack wouldn't budge. It was me or this bag. I had to leave it behind. I squeezed out of it and kept running.

Sweat blinded me. My legs whipped past each other. I stumbled but kept going. Any second, that thing might reach out and grab me. The thought alone gave me wings. I dashed between the trees. Did I have time to swing myself up into their branches? What if it could climb? There was no time to stop and find out. I kept running. Trees rushed past me. The ground started rising, slowly at first, then more steeply. I gasped for air. I felt the beast fall back slightly, but it was still close. I forced myself to go even faster.

I chose these more specific and dramatic verbs – 'jumping', 'ducking' – to create more intensity in Zo's movements, rather than using 'running' every time, to describe what she's doing.

Zo is already having uncomfortable physical reactions to the chase (a 'knot in [her] side') that make us nervous about whether she'll make it. Your characters' weaknesses and vulnerabilities are important for helping us connect to and root for them.

Even though she doesn't fully see what's chasing her, she can smell it. By dropping details from the five senses throughout the chase, I create a sense of dread in Zo and the reader about what's after her.

Zo's physical reactions are more intense now at this stage of the chase (she can barely breathe). There is tension between hope (the beast has fallen back slightly) and danger ('but it was still close'). This sets us up for the major twist that comes next! An exciting chase has the element of surprise. For more, check out *Zo and the Forest of Secrets*.



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# I'm a Neutrino

Take a moment to look beyond the visible, and introduce your pupils to the building blocks of the universe, with this non-fiction adventure

KAREN HART

**T**his beautifully illustrated picturebook, in which neutrinos are depicted as little spiky creatures, introduces children to the mysterious world of the tiniest bits of matter known to exist – so far.

Written by renowned cosmologist, Dr. Eve M. Vavagiakis, the book is full of fascinating facts to bring the amazing subject of particle physics alive, and shows children how the world at quantum level is a truly magical place.

*I'm a Neutrino* is a great STEM title to use at Key Stage 2, not just for science-based activities, but for kick-starting a project on the wonders of the universe that covers the whole curriculum. The subject of particle physics will be a completely new concept for most children at Key Stage 2, and neutrinos – tiny shape-shifters born from an exploding star – are sure to fascinate.

The main reason for using this book with your class though, is that the quantum world is pure magic, and

although rarely shared with younger children, it could spark a life-long fascination with the subject.

And above all, it shows us that little things – even really tiny things – can make a massive difference.

## Talking about the book What is a neutrino?

After reading the book to your class, ask children if they think it would be exciting to be a scientist finding out about neutrinos. It's useful to explain





and discuss some of the key vocabulary used in the book, which will help pupils engage more with the text, and can be carried over as subject-specific vocabulary in science.

- **Physicist** – a scientist who studies how the universe works, focusing on matter (what things are made of) and energy (how things move or change). Physicists explore everything from tiny atoms to huge stars to learn how things like gravity and light work. They are real-life universe detectives. A quantum physicist is a scientist who studies the tiniest building blocks of the universe, such as atoms, and tiny particles like neutrinos.
- **Universe** – everything that exists, including all the stars, planets, and galaxies in space.
- **Atoms** – the microscopic building blocks of everything in the universe. Millions could fit on the tip of a pencil!
- **Fermion** – atoms are made up of fermions – they are even smaller than atoms!
- **Neutrino** – a ‘fundamental particle’, which means it is so small,

it cannot be broken down into any smaller parts.

- **Electron, muon, and tau** – the three types of neutrino.
- **Mass** – the amount of matter (stuff) inside an object.
- **Oscillate** – to move back and forth, or up and down, over and over again in a steady, regular pattern (like a swinging clock pendulum).

## How do scientists study neutrinos?

Neutrinos are so small, they are impossible to see – even with the most amazing microscope!

Since we can’t see them, how do we know they are there? If you look out of the window and see your pyjamas flapping on the clothes line, you know the wind is blowing them about even though you can’t see the wind itself. Scientists use this same kind of thinking to learn about neutrinos; they study their effects on the matter around them to figure out how they behave.

## Where do they come from?

**The sun** – our sun makes billions of neutrinos every second.

**Supernovas** – a supernova is a massive explosion that happens when a giant star dies, and these supernovas shoot out trillions and trillions of neutrinos.

**The very beginning of time** – trillions of neutrinos were also created from the Big Bang.

## Activities

### Observing and reporting

It’s always fascinating to look at natural objects through a lens.



You realise there’s so much more to see, and how beautiful nature is up close. And of course, observing and reporting what you discover is what being a scientist is all about.

Take your class to a nearby natural area to collect some plant life; seed pods, mossy twigs, pieces of rock, etc. It’s probably best not to include bugs, as they can easily get damaged. You don’t need access to acres of woodland to do this; grassy verges and potted plants in the school grounds can offer up a surprising variety of natural materials.

Back at the classroom, let children spend time just observing the objects collected using magnifying glasses. Then ask pupils to draw one or two of the objects they have observed. Can they identify any of the scientific names for what they see? E.g. *stem*, *petal*, *bark*, etc.

## Take it further → → →

### WAX RESIST NEUTRINOS

For a fun art activity, ask your class to imagine what a neutrino might look like. Explain that, although no one actually knows what a neutrino looks like because they are too small to see, scientists think they are probably shaped just like plain, tiny spheres – but for this art activity, you can let your imaginations run wild!

We turned this activity into a bit of an experiment; finding ways to get the result we wanted through trial and error – it was really about experimenting with the technique more than the result, and was lots of fun.

#### You will need:

- Plain wax candles
- White paper – we used A3
- Water-based paints
- Paint brushes and sponges

Before we started creating our artwork, we looked again at the illustrations of neutrinos in the book, which are shown as pointy, mysterious creatures, and talked about the ways in which we could show them in our own designs. Next, using sheets of A3 paper, children carefully drew their neutrino designs using white candle wax (you could also use

white wax crayons) – best to keep these quite simple as you obviously can’t really see what you’re drawing! We went on to paint over our wax drawings with fairly diluted water-based paints in a variety of colours. We found we achieved a clearer result by lightly wiping over the painted areas with a slightly damp sponge at the end of the process. This wax-resist technique worked well, as it allowed the neutrino designs to appear rather magically – just like the real thing.

### SPLATTER-PAINTED UNIVERSE

Try making your own star-splattered universe pictures (in the book it’s shown as lots of little bright sprinkles over a dark background) – just be sure to put plenty of newspaper down first!



Older children can write three observations for each object they draw, such as: *An oak leaf – little brown spots, strong vein lines, some little round holes that look like they have been made by a caterpillar.* Or, *A Daisy Flower – the centre is made up of mini flower shapes, pink edges to the white petals, a little bug living in the flower.*

Ask for volunteers to share their work with the class. If you'd like to link the observations back to the book, you can remind pupils that everything they've just drawn – and indeed what they're drawing *with* – is made up of atoms.

## Changing states

Just as neutrinos can change their state (described as 'flavour' in the book), lots of everyday objects change state, too. Ask the class if anyone can think of anything that can change its

state – some suggestions are: jelly, wax, butter and chocolate. These can all be melted and reset when chilled. Water can exist in three states – **solid (ice), liquid (water), and gas (steam)** – and is an unusual substance, as although most substances shrink as they get colder, water expands.

The following experiment, although very simple, is a good one for demonstrating how substances can change states.

### You will need:

- 1 empty plastic (not glass) bottle
- A small piece of foil
- A freezer

Fill the bottle to the top with water, covering the top with a piece of foil.

Stand the bottle upright in the freezer overnight.

As the water freezes, it expands, pushing the foil out of the bottle.

Was this what children expected would happen? Why or why not?

## Personification and first person

Start by talking about the following neutrino facts, writing them on the board as reference:

- **Tiny travellers:** thousands of billions of neutrinos pass through your body every single second.
- **Created in the sun:** most neutrinos detected on Earth come from nuclear reactions in the sun.
- **They weigh almost nothing at all:** but, they do have a tiny, tiny, little bit of mass.
- **Space ghosts:** they are often known as 'ghost particles' because they pass through solid objects as if they are not even there.

by carefully removing the paper templates to reveal planets and stars amidst a star-filled universe.

### EXTRA CHANGING STATES

Put a little pinch of salt on top of each of your ice cubes and leave in a cold place for about ten minutes. What do you see? Ice made from pure water doesn't melt until it reaches 0°C (32°F). This is called its melting point. If you add salt to ice, it lowers the melting point, so the ice will melt even though it's warmer than 0°C (32°F), making just the salty part of the ice melt, while the rest remains frozen. Have children seen trucks spreading salt on frozen roads in winter? This is why.

## Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *Super Interesting Facts for Smart Kids* – Jordan Moore
- ❖ *Awesome Space Facts for Kids* – John Hicks
- ❖ *Our Universe (Fun with science)* – Russell Stannard
- ❖ *The Big Book of 100 STEM Activities* – Laura Minter
- ❖ *Science Art and Drawing Games for Kids* – Karyn Tripp

Thinking about these facts and everything that has been talked about in class, ask children to write their own short piece of creative writing titled, *I'm a Neutrino!*

Instruct pupils to write this in the first person as in the book, making sure everyone is aware of what this means. Writers should also practise personifying their neutrino – you may need to remind them that this means giving the neutrino human actions and emotions. You can give a few 'story starter' ideas for children who might have a bit of trouble getting going, such as:

*Hi! My name is Neutrino, and I'm going on a journey to whizz through some humans – and maybe some animals too! Some people call me a ghostly kind of guy, but I'm not scary, in fact I never hurt anyone at all...*

Children can include their own ideas on being born in the sun – rather hot! – weighing almost nothing at all, and what it's like to whizz around the universe. Their neutrino might also prefer to go by a nickname – it's up to them. Remind pupils that this is an exercise in using their imagination, and that they don't have to worry about getting the scientific facts wrong here.

Children can go on to illustrate their stories, before you ask for volunteers to share their work with the class. **TP**



*Karen Hart is an independent drama teacher, literacy workshop organiser, author and freelance writer.*

**f** @Karen.Journalist

### You will need:

- Black paper
- Scrap paper for making templates
- White or coloured paints
- Bristly paint brushes

The first thing we did was draw round some sticky tape rolls for our planets. We also drew some stars, then cut everything out, arranging it all on our black backing paper. We used white paint, but you can use coloured paint if you like, dipping your brushes in the paint and carefully running a finger along the edge of the brush to spatter little drops of paint across your picture. We found it works best if you keep the brush fairly dry, making sure to cover your templates really well. Finish pictures

# The honest truth about READING PROGRESS

Forget shiny, happy promises and focus on the reality of fluency; it might not be glamorous – but it will build real readers

DAVID WEBB

**T**he moment I understood the true purpose of reading, I was reading *Mr*

*Stink* to my class.

During one particularly vivid description, a little boy blew out his cheeks like he was about to vomit, then burst out laughing. Others were literally leaning back in their seats, like they were trying to escape the foul stench of a scene they were fully immersed in. This, I realised, was what reading was really all about.

If you get children to love books first, everything else will follow. Self-motivated readers largely make their own progress. They keep reading, absorb vocabulary naturally, organically move towards more challenging texts and their appetite for stories quietly develops. Research supports this, too; meta-analyses show independent reading has a moderate but meaningful effect on reading attitudes, with self-motivated readers demonstrating deeper engagement, sustained habits and stronger long-term literacy outcomes than peers who only read when directed ([tinyurl.com/tp-IRanalysis](https://tinyurl.com/tp-IRanalysis)).

Motivation also develops faster when we as teachers cultivate it. And, in my

experience, your knowledge and enthusiasm are the most powerful motivational tools in the room.

When I select a read-aloud book, I think about my class first – their interests, the topics we’re covering and what will land. But I’ll be honest: I also think about whether I can perform it. I like playing characters; a well-timed villain voice, or an over-the-top moment of disgust gets children leaning forwards in ways that a worksheet never will. Research backs what most experienced teachers know instinctively: interactive read-alouds have doubled mean comprehension scores in some primary interventions, while daily read-aloud exposure has been shown to close vocabulary gaps significantly in Early Years settings (EEF, 2023). But the data only tells part of the story... the boy blowing out his cheeks and laughing tells us the rest.

## Why I stopped using carousel reading

For a period of time, I used carousel reading – rotating groups, levelled texts and a mix of teacher-led and independent activities. In theory, it offers

differentiation. In practice, it just bored the children.

The carousel activities were designed to be engaging, but pupils quickly worked out that their teacher was busy with another group. By the time they reached the third or fourth activity, many had forgotten the instructions – even when they were written on the table in front of them – and would make a mediocre attempt. The depth of learning I wanted simply wasn’t there, and my expertise was confined to whichever group I happened to be sitting

with. That meant that 75 per cent of the class – this could be even more for those teachers who don’t have a teaching assistant – were receiving little meaningful input for most of the lesson. It all felt rushed. So, I switched to whole-class guided reading. One text, every child, together.



*“Self-motivated readers demonstrate deeper engagement and stronger long-term literacy outcomes”*

Research supports this shift, too. Analysis of whole-class versus carousel approaches shows that whole-class reading provides more frequent teacher modelling, feedback, and access to challenging texts for all pupils – whereas carousel methods show reduced teacher time per child, and independent tasks that often lack sufficient challenge (Kamil & Rauscher, 1990).

### VIPERS in practice

Whole-class reading works best, in my experience, when it's built around a structured comprehension framework. I use VIPERS – vocabulary,

inference, prediction, explanation, retrieval, summarise – because it ensures I'm covering the full range of comprehension skills systematically, rather than defaulting to the retrieval questions that are the easiest to ask. The smartboard is central to how I teach using VIPERS, too. I model good reading practice visually – highlighting key words in the text and key words in the question, and showing children the difference between what the text says and what it implies.

For example, we have been reading *The Chococalypse* as part of our chocolate unit. There is a moment in the story where the characters are salivating at the thought

of receiving chocolate in the post. They hear the letterbox clank and sit upright. At this point, I pause the reading and ask, *Why did the characters sit upright?* This is an essential element of the VIPERS approach (by answering the question, pupils are practising inference, explanation, and summarising), but it really worked because the children were already invested in the text. They wanted to know why these characters were behaving a certain way, because they already cared about them.

### The honest truth

I want to be straight about something that took me a while to fully accept: reading development is slow and unremarkable. There are rarely sudden breakthroughs. No cinematic revelations. No

chrysalis-like overnight transformations. What there is instead, is a steady accumulation of vocabulary, comprehension strategies and confidence. Our job, as teachers, is to try and maximise the pace of that steady progress without pushing it too hard; a skills-based approach – such as VIPERS – steadily applied, with stories that your children truly connect to, is the most reliable way I've found to do that.

One child in my current class illustrates this better than any dramatic story ever could. An EAL learner, he was reading two years below his chronological age when he arrived at our school. He was shy, and not just in a way that meant he kept to a small group on the playground, but that was more a barrier for him than his language knowledge or capability. He rarely volunteered answers in class, and explaining his thinking out loud was like climbing a huge mountain. But, gradually and quietly, something shifted. His ability to read aloud fluently has developed well, he indicates answers even when he doesn't yet have the confidence to explain them fully, and data capture confirms what I can see in the classroom – he is progressing at three times the average rate of his classmates.

This pupil is flourishing. But there's no fanfare, no singular breakthrough moment, just steady, patient, skill-based teaching. And it's building a reader. **TP**



*David Webb is a primary teacher and English leader with 11 years' experience*

*at international schools in the Middle East and South-East Asia. He specialises in literacy development and EAL engagement strategies.*



# Book CLUB



*We review five new titles that your class will love*

REVIEWS BY KATE HEAP

EYFS/  
KS1



## *Maya and Marley and the New Friend*

*by Laura Henry-Allain, ill. Yabaawah Scott*

(£7.99, Ladybird Books)

When siblings Maya and Marley turn up to their neighbourhood's Great Big Community Lunch at Grove Adventure Playground, they immediately channel their excitement into joyfully picking fruit and veg from the garden, and saying hello to the mischievous pet goats. As they welcome all their friends and neighbours, they notice new faces... and in comes Kazuki – a new boy in the neighbourhood. Kazuki is shy and finds it difficult to fit in with the busy, noisy fun, but when a disaster hits the lunch, it's Kazuki's quiet, artistic talent that helps to save the day. A sweet story about how what makes us different can also make us powerful, this is a great book to help explore diversity, shyness, and the power of friendship.



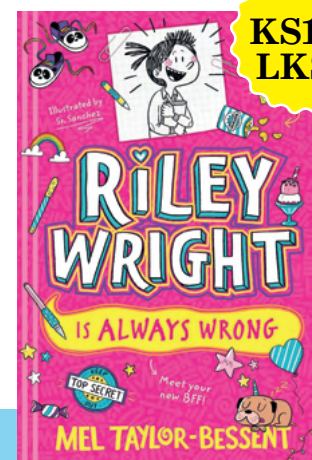
KS1

## *The Panda-Badger* *by Ben Cajee & Brie Schmida*

(£7.99, Puffin)

BBC Children's presenter Ben Cajee and illustrator Brie Schmida have created a beautiful picturebook sharing messages of inclusion, community and belonging for children. Pablo is part badger and part panda. Wonderfully unique in appearance, he is multilingual and takes part in the traditions and customs of both species. But instead of enjoying the rich diversity of his life, Pablo feels confused and different. Where does he fit in? When a mysterious golden creature appears to him, he realises he is special and has the power to bring the two parts of his life together. What follows is a joyous celebration of diverse community and the realisation that we are stronger together. Featuring memorable and engaging illustrations by Brie Schmida, *The Panda-Badger* is perfect as a classroom read-aloud.

KS1 &  
LKS2



## *Riley Wright is Always Wrong*

*by Mel Taylor-Bessent*

(£7.99, Farshore)

Starting Year 4 at a new school was never going to be easy for Riley, especially with her dad as the headteacher! Not only is this totally embarrassing! Not only is Riley struggles to make friends and find a place to fit in. To make matters worse, her dad decides to kick off the year with a whole-school talent show. Riley is sure she doesn't even *have* a talent and she's running out of time. In the end, though, she discovers the most important talent is being a good friend. Authentic and completely charming, Riley is a true child of 2026, and her endearing voice comes through on each page of her diary. This fun book is a wonderful celebration of girlhood and friendship where a BFF makes all the difference and there's always time to find joy in the little things...

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**KS2**



**UKS2**

***Bim Blake's Hot Takes: My Pencil Case Doesn't Define Me***

by **Tolá Okogwu**

(£8.99, Puffin)

The first in a new tween series about friends, family and growing up, and glowing with the Nigerian British culture of its loveable protagonist, it's sure to be a hit with readers age 9+ who are trying to work out who they are and how to fit in. Having lost her mum to cancer, Bim Blake needs to keep an eye on her dad and her older brothers, while her twin aunts handle the female side of growing up. Now, leaving Year 6 behind, Bim is ready to take on a new school with her best friends by her side. Since her dog ate her paper journal, she's trying out a new "Inner Thoughts" app, which allows her to record all her private thoughts and publish a blog – which is great, as long as she doesn't get the two confused... A must for UKS2 and KS3 libraries.

***The Ocean and the Bones***  
by **Genevieve Carver**

(£7.99, Rock the Boat)

Little Meg is an apprentice Sunhealer, training in the ways of the Spirits, healing and storytelling. She must help the Sunhealer make an offering to the Water Spirits: the bones of the Longdead, including those of her parents who died at sea. Meg can't bear to part with all the bones, so she keeps some hidden in her pouch. When a storm rages through the settlement, she knows the Water Spirits are angry and it might be her fault. Through this unique story, Genevieve Carver weaves together threads of spirituality, nature and the human experience, creating a tapestry of faith and truth. Connection to nature and each other reveals the continued importance of family, community and working together.

Meet the  
**author**

**LAURA HENRY-ALLAIN**  
**ON EXPLORING FEELINGS**  
**AND THE BEST**  
**POTLUCK DISHES**



Maya and Marley are great at welcoming a nervous Kazuki into their community. Have you had an experience as the

**new person in a space?**

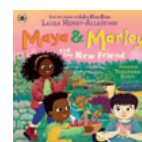
Yes, like most people I can become slightly anxious at times when I enter a new space. I remember to regulate my breathing, and I say a repetitive mantra that I will be okay. It also helps if the people in the new space make me feel welcome.

**A community lunch is a lovely background for the story. What's your go-to potluck dish?**

Great question. I have several favourite dishes! Maya and Marley have Grenadian roots, so it would have to be a traditional Grenadian breakfast, which can be eaten as a lunch and is full of love and warming to the heart: saltfish souse, smoked herring, bakes, plantains and avocado, all washed down with cocoa tea!

**How would you like teachers to use your book in the classroom?**

I would suggest reading the book from start to finish and then offering the children a few provocations. For example, how do they think Kazuki felt being new to Grove Adventure Playground? Teachers can support children to label Kazuki's feelings: he was worried, scared, etc., and talk about how it is okay to have a range of feelings when visiting a new place and how important it is to label and share our feelings with others. Teachers could also ask children what they would do to make a new child or adult feel welcome. As an extension activity, pupils could make bunting just like Maya, Marley and Kazuki did and display it in their classrooms. Children could also write, or draw about what they like doing, just as Kazuki loves making origami. This will help pupils to feel positive about themselves and support their self-esteem and worth.



***Maya and Marley and the New Friend*, by Laura Henry-Allain, ill. Yabaewah Scott (£7.99, Ladybird), is out now.**

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## 4

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## 5



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Science



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- What mummification is and why the ancient Egyptians mummified their dead
- What the process of dehydration is
- The importance of a 'control' subject for observation and comparison
- How to measure and record results carefully

# Have you ever mummified a tomato?



This investigation of dehydration and preservation will raise laughs and eyebrows, says **Paul Ian Cross...**

[@questfriendz](#) [questfriendz.com](http://questfriendz.com)

Science experiments offer a brilliant opportunity for children to develop critical thinking skills, as well as a deeper understanding of how complex processes work in practice. In *SuperQuesters Mission: Desert Danger*, the main characters have to solve puzzles and overcome obstacles set within a desert context, heavily influenced by the ancient Egyptians. Such fictional scenarios provide exciting opportunities for cross-curricular learning. This practical lesson plan allows children to explore and understand the key scientific processes involved in mummification, in a simple and relatable way.



START HERE

Start by showing children an image of an ancient Egyptian mummy. Ask pupils to think about what they already know about mummies, making a note of their existing knowledge on the board. Explain that in ancient Egypt, people used to mummify their dead because they believed that this helped to ensure that the souls of the dead would live forever in the afterlife. Explain that mummification involved removing the internal organs, leaving the body to dry out using natron (a salt mixture), wrapping it in linen for protection and placing amulets or performing spells for magical protection for the journey ahead.



MAIN LESSON

1 | MUMMIFICATION AND DEHYDRATION

Tell the children that mummification stopped bodies from rotting. One of the most important steps in this process was the drying out of the bodies. In ancient Egypt they used natron to do this (a natural salt mixture). Explain that children will be working in small groups to mummify a tomato. Ask pupils to discuss with their talk partners what they think they might use instead of natron in their experiment. Encourage them to explain their reasoning when they feed back.

Tell pupils that they will be using a mixture of salt and bicarbonate of soda to replicate the effects of natron

in the mummification process. Explain that the salt and bicarbonate of soda will draw water, or moisture, out of the tomato. This process is called dehydration.

2 | TOMATO EXPERIMENT

Explain that each table/small group has been given two tomatoes. Why do children think this is? Explain that one of the tomatoes will be left to decay naturally. This tomato will be known as the 'control' tomato and will be used to compare the results of the mummification process on the other tomato.

Ask groups to check that they have all the equipment and materials needed for the experiment. You can show a checklist on the board, comprising the following: two tomatoes; antibacterial handwash; table salt and



**“This practical lesson allows children to explore and understand the key scientific processes of dehydration and preservation”**

bicarbonate of soda; a knife; a teaspoon; small bowl; weighing scales; blank recording sheet. You can then share the steps of the experiment, but make sure to model it yourself, too, to ensure understanding and scaffold learning.

Now for the experiment itself! First, children need to cut a small hole in the tomato and carefully scoop out the pulp and seeds using the spoon. This will mimic the removal of

the internal organs in an ancient Egyptian mummification. Ask pupils to discuss why this is an important first step (answer: to prevent mould and bacteria from growing, which would otherwise cause the organic matter to rot).

Next, ask children to rub the tomato with anti-bacterial gel. Again, encourage children to think about why they are doing this.

Explain that this helps to kill any bacteria on the tomato, which could cause it to become mouldy and rot.

The next step involves adding the ‘natron’

mixture to the tomato, which children will make themselves.



Ask pupils to mix four teaspoons of bicarbonate of soda with one teaspoon of table salt in the small bowl. Once mixed, they should rub the mixture on the inside and outside of the tomato. Remind them that this will help allow the process of dehydration to occur.

### 3 | OBSERVATION AND RESULTS

Explain to the children that they will now leave the tomatoes to decompose for several weeks (ideally 2-3 weeks, but a minimum of one week will still allow for successful comparison). What information do the pupils think they should record to assess if the mummification process has been effective?

Allow children to discuss this in groups, then note down ideas on the board.

Explain that children will record the following: the weight, colour and texture (e.g. whether the tomato skin becomes wrinkled), for both the test tomato and the ‘control’ tomato. Explain that they will repeat these measurements and observations over the coming weeks. Allow pupils to complete the first set of observations and measurements, ensuring they carefully weigh both tomatoes. Ask pupils to make a prediction of what they think will happen to both tomatoes during the coming weeks.

*Paul Ian Cross is a scientist and author of the SuperQuesters Mission books: River Crest Rescue, highly commended at the Teach Primary Awards 2025, Rainforest Magic and Desert Danger (May 2026).*

## EXTENDING THE LESSON



- After 2-3 weeks of observation and recording, children should discuss their findings. What did they notice? Why do they think they obtained these results? What do the results tell them about the processes of dehydration and preservation?
- What changes would pupils make to the experiment? For example, would they repeat the experiment with a third tomato that was placed in a sealed bag, or kept in a dark location? Would they use more/less of the ‘natron’ mixture? Would they only use salt instead of the ‘natron’ mixture?
- Ask pupils if they think the process would work for other fruits. Pupils could repeat the experiment with different fruits of their choice and compare their findings. What do they think might be the same or different and why?

## USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What factors do pupils need to consider to ensure that the experiment remains fair?
- What do children think will happen to the weight of the tomatoes and why?
- When might mummification, or dehydration and preservation, be useful?



WHAT  
THEY'LL  
LEARN

- To identify Viking place-name endings
  - Use maps to locate Viking settlements in Britain
  - Explain what place-name evidence tells us about Viking settlement patterns
  - Draw conclusions using historical and geographical evidence

# Rebuild a picture of Viking Britain



Discover what place names and etymology can teach us about the UK and its geographical history, with **Sarah Farrell**

[@SarahFarrellKS2](#) [tinyurl.com/tp-SarahFarrell](https://tinyurl.com/tp-SarahFarrell)

Place names in the UK can tell us a lot about the area they describe, including everything from topography (e.g. Hillside) to built features (e.g. Church Village). This lesson draws on both geographical exploration and historical enquiry to investigate what we can learn from Viking place names, all while strengthening map-reading and evidence interrogation skills. Pupils will enjoy acting like detectives to use their knowledge of naming conventions (including drawing on past learning of prefixes and suffixes), to predict what place names belong where.



START  
HERE

Start by showing pupils a range of different place names and asking them to group them in any way that they can. This encourages them to start looking at parts of words and linking them to other places. Some pupils may use their locational knowledge here (e.g. if they recognise places in the north of England). For the given place names, I would provide some with common suffixes (e.g. Gillingham and Fulham) or names including directions (e.g. Southport or Westbury) for pupils to sort in different ways.



MAIN LESSON

1 | VIKING PLACE NAMES

Begin by introducing the idea of using place names as historical evidence. Provide pupils with a range of Viking place name parts (e.g., **by** = farmstead/village, **thorpe** = small village, **thwaite** = clearing, **kirk** = church, **toft** = homestead, **ness** = headland). Explain what any unfamiliar words mean (for example, 'headland' or 'homestead') and give pupils the example of a place name made up from given parts (e.g. Kirkby). Ask pupils to use the list of place names to work out what type of location

Kirkby might be. Seeing that 'kirk' means 'church' and 'by' means 'village', may lead them to suggest that Kirkby means a village with a church.

Show pupils a simple, blank map of the UK, and encourage them to draw their own predictions about where different place names might be found (for example, a name containing **ness** is likely to be near the coast.) This means that when they start their map investigation, they will be able to focus on what to look for in which location. Encourage pupils to use their knowledge of prefixes and suffixes to predict where in the word the different parts of the place names may be (for example, 'ness' is likely to be at the end of a word). You might consider encouraging

## “This lesson draws on both geographical exploration and historical enquiry”



### EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Provide the pupils with an Ordnance Survey map from a different region of the country that was also heavily populated by Vikings, but blank out the place names. Task the pupils with matching up the place names to the correct locations using their understanding of Viking place names and map features.
- Identify anomalies, such as Viking place names away from other Viking settlements. Challenge pupils to think about why this might be.
- Provide the pupils with an Ordnance Survey map from a different area. Task pupils with suggesting names for Viking settlements based on their map-reading skills and knowledge of naming conventions.

children to categorise their list of Viking place names into sections (e.g. those to do with farming or with the coast) or even colour-code them. I have taught this lesson several times over the last few years, and found that colour-coding, while not essential, did help pupils to spot patterns when they started their investigation.

### 2 | MAP INVESTIGATION

When all pupils are clear with what the Viking place names mean, it's time for them to put their learning into practice. Split the class into pairs, and provide them with enlarged maps of a focus area (e.g. Yorkshire) and a list of Viking place names. Task children with identifying place names that have a Viking origin

and using their meanings to infer features of the local area.

As pupils begin to locate more Viking-type names, they may notice clusters close together. Depending on confidence levels, you could also provide a list of Anglo-Saxon place names for them to compare. For example, an area with few Viking place names may instead contain a concentration of Anglo-Saxon names, which would suggest a different pattern of settlement.

### 3 | EVIDENCE INTERPRETATION

Once children have located a range of different place names, they should then interpret the evidence to deepen their historical understanding and ensure that it is more than a simple

map-labelling activity. Providing pupils with a single, purposeful line of enquiry can direct their thinking, e.g. “Use the pattern of place names on the map to explain where Vikings settled most densely and why this region was suitable for settlement.”

Depending on how successful the map-labelling was, pupils may need some direction to identify clusters of names which may suggest areas of settlement.

They could then compare the selection to the Anglo-Saxon names and consider whether there is any overlap or whether they stay in distinctly separate groups.

At this point, guide the children to consider the geographical link. What physical features are near the Viking clusters? Why might the Vikings have chosen to settle in these locations? Provide sentence stems to help children to structure and articulate their thinking:

‘Most of the Viking-type place names are located \_\_\_\_\_.’

‘This area is \_\_\_\_\_ which makes it suitable for \_\_\_\_\_.’

‘The Vikings may have chosen to settle near \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.’

‘This evidence suggests that Vikings settled most densely in \_\_\_\_\_.’

‘The pattern of place names suggests that this region may have been part of the Danelaw because \_\_\_\_\_.’

*Sarah Farrell is a KS2 teacher in Bristol who makes and shares resources online.*

### USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What physical features (rivers, coasts, etc) might explain the pattern?
- Why might the Vikings have settled near \_\_\_\_\_?
- Why might some areas have more Viking names than others?

MFL



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to understand the question 'who is your favourite player?' in French
- To express opinions about different players
- How to use their skills as linguists to work out the meaning of unknown words
- How to use a physical or online bilingual dictionary to find the meaning of words
- A variety of ways to justify their opinions

# Give an opinion on football – *en français*



Bring the excitement, energy and passion of the World Cup into your language lessons this summer, with **Ellie Chettle Cully**

[@ECCMFL](#) [myprimarylanguagesclassroom.com](#)

Football has an incredible power to unite people across cultures and borders, so using it as a springboard for language learning is a natural fit. As a subject, it always sparks lots of lively debate on the playground; everybody, it seems, has an opinion on who is the greatest player of all time and, of course, whose is the best team. The 2026 World Cup is an excellent opportunity for pupils to begin to express and justify some of these opinions in French, using both familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary to chat with peers about their views on the beautiful game...



START HERE

Begin by introducing the concept of the World Cup – *la Coupe du monde* – with a range of famous footballers, and teach the children the question *quel est ton joueur préféré?* (who is your favourite footballer?) Ask individual pupils around the classroom and allow them to answer the question simply with a name before explaining how they might improve their responses by adding more detail with the phrase *mon joueur préféré est...* (my favourite footballer is...). Give children some practice time in pairs and then ask a selection of pupils to demonstrate their conversations to the class.



MAIN LESSON

1 | LIKES AND DISLIKES

Split the class into pairs. Put a pile of flashcards with images of famous footballers turned face down between each pair. Child A asks child B the question *qui est ton joueur préféré?* and child B turns over a card to reveal a player before responding in a full sentence. Pupils should take turns to ask and respond to the question until the pile of cards is finished. Explain that, whilst it is great to be able to say which footballer is our favourite, we can also develop this to give more information to the person we are talking to, and that today we are going to be

adding in some opinion phrases, as well as learning how to justify our responses. Introduce – or reintroduce – the children to the phrases *j'adore* (I love), *j'aime* (I like), *je n'aime pas* (I don't like) and *je déteste* (I hate), using a range of hand signals: two thumbs high in the air for *j'adore*; two thumbs at chest height for *j'aime*; two thumbs down at chest height for *je n'aime pas* and finally two thumbs down at waist height for *je déteste*. Have the children listen and repeat several times and then prompt their responses through your physical movements alone, showing different hand signals and getting them to respond chorally in French.

2 | BATTLESHIPS

Introduce a game of Battleships (see the resource



**“Football has an incredible power to unite people across cultures and borders”**

*est...* (because he is...). Explain to the children that they can extend their sentences further by adding this phrase and an adjective to justify the opinions they practised earlier in the session. Give pupils a range of adjectives in French to describe football players, for example: *rapide* (quick), *créatif* (creative), *athlétique* (athletic), *agressif* (aggressive) and *nul* (rubbish). Ask the children if they can use their knowledge of cognates – words in different languages that share the same root – to define the new vocabulary.

Pupils could also use a physical or online dictionary to search for other adjectives to express their own ideas about individual players. Move around the classroom asking children the question: *qui est ton joueur préféré?* Listen to their responses to check for pronunciation and encourage them to extend their sentences using *parce que il est...* Pupils can then share their opinions with the class, or record their sentences in writing, alongside pictures of the players they are describing. They may also wish to present their ideas in the form of mini books, which are great for displays. Fellow languages teacher Clare Seccombe has lots of great ideas for mini books that can be created in the primary classroom.

Find them at [tinyurl.com/tp-MiniBooks](http://tinyurl.com/tp-MiniBooks)

*Ellie Chettle Cully is a French teacher and languages and international lead at a Leicester primary school.*

link on the right) to enable pupils to put the opinion information learned at the start of the lesson into simple sentences. Ask them to put six circles on their grid, out of sight of their partner, each representing a different sentence, for example, *j'aime Cristiano Ronaldo*. Model how to say the sentence by reading the opinion phrase in the column heading and the name of the footballer labelled on the left of each row. Children then take it in turns to state an opinion about a footballer to try and hit their partner's targets. They mark off the bottom grid with a cross for a

miss and a tick for a hit. See if the children can guess all the locations of each other's crosses and move around the class as they do so, listening in and correcting pronunciation. At the end of the game, ask a selection of pupils to read out one of the sentences that they guessed from their partner.

### 3 | JUSTIFICATION

Move on to introducing the phrase *parce ce que il*



## EXTENDING THE LESSON



- Encourage the children to write a short biography of a specific player, including information such as his name, his nationality, the country he plays for and some aspects of his physical description, such as hair or eye colour.
- Describe the kits of various countries, including their colours and designs. Pupils could design their own kit for a country of their choice and describe it in French, using adjectives of size or colour to add detail.
- Repeat this description activity with the flags of countries taking part in the World Cup.

## DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT



Download your **FREE** Battleships grid at

[tinyurl.com/tp-Battleships](http://tinyurl.com/tp-Battleships)

## USEFUL QUESTIONS

- *Quel est ton joueur préféré?* Who is your favourite player?
- *Pourquoi?* Why?
- *Qu'est-ce qu'il porte?* What is he wearing?
- *Tu supportes quelle équipe?* Which team do you support?

# Start your journey to **EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH**

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*“Leading English aligns with the new Writing Framework”*

Our role is to walk alongside your team – it's not a handover and a goodbye. We help build clarity, capacity and confidence, working with leaders and teachers to make a difference to provision and practice.

## **What working with us looks like**

### **Step 1: Getting to know you**

The process begins with a short video call with your dedicated school improvement partner. Together, you will:

- walk through the implementation project
- explore how to access and use the teaching materials
- share key documentation (e.g. SEF/SDP)
- set visit dates and prepare for launch

### **Step 2: Explore and prepare**

This is the first of three in-school consultancy days. It's held anywhere between one to three months ahead of the project launch and focuses on vision and planning. During the day there will be:

- a strategy session with the headteacher
- planning and co-design with the subject lead
- pupil voice sessions
- CPD for the implementation team (slides provided)

A key focus is placed on how the curriculum should not be viewed as documentation only; it is what's taught in the classroom that's key. 'Lived not laminated' is our curriculum mantra. We help leaders to foster genuine alignment between what's written and what's taught – as research shows this is critical to pupil outcomes.

We advocate for curriculum-embedded assessment that helps teachers adapt in real time. It's assessment that feeds forward, not data that sits in a file.

We also support schools in embedding spoken language across the curriculum. Too often, oracy is treated as incidental. Pupils need explicit teaching, high-quality modelling and progression in speaking and listening if they are to thrive. Our units ensure oracy is part of English, not an optional extra.

When it comes to writing, we focus on clarity and control. The new Writing Framework echoes our belief: emphasis should be on less hurried writing and more meaningful drafting. Modelled writing, sentence-level work, and purposeful redrafting sit at the heart of our approach.

### **Step 3: Deliver**

The second consultancy visit takes place one to two months after the project launches and centres on implementation. Here we will:

- hold a review session with the subject leader
- operate co-planning, team teaching and drop-ins
- organise pupil voice sessions and feedback
- lead a CPD session (INSET or after school)

Implementation is not intended to result in perfection overnight. We encourage iterative improvement: small tweaks, informed by staff voice, lesson observation and reflection. We believe in the importance of manageable,

Ready to start your journey?

Visit [leadingenglish.co.uk](http://leadingenglish.co.uk) or email [adam.lowing@leadingenglish.co.uk](mailto:adam.lowing@leadingenglish.co.uk)

meaningful practice including modelling and more sentence-level control. We help you to bring this thinking into the classroom through practical strategies and supportive coaching.

#### Step 4: Sustain

The third and final visit in the first year takes place three to six months post-launch and supports sustainability.

It includes:

- a final review of the implementation plan
- pupil voice and classroom observation
- strategic CPD and leadership guidance
- evaluation of impact and next steps

#### Ongoing support

Ahead of each project day, you'll receive a 30-minute planning call. CPD slides and visit notes are provided. Schools are encouraged to form an implementation team to embed change and trial approaches.

We're here for the journey. From regular planning calls to email support, we act as thought partners to help refine your strategy, troubleshoot challenges and celebrate success. We want to help you achieve real impact – not through shortcuts, but through structure, support and care.

## WHY LEADING ENGLISH WORKS

#### Clarity and coherence

200+ units structured to develop vocabulary, grammar and composition in small, purposeful steps.

#### Model texts that inspire

Written by Jon Mayhew, Joshua Seigal, Ross Montgomery and more. These texts are crafted to engage pupils and annotated to support confident, high-impact modelling.

#### Support for everyone

Leading English helps pupils write with confidence, teachers teach with clarity, and leaders lead with impact. Everyone benefits because everyone is supported.

#### Pedagogy

Through coaching, CPD and co-planning, we help you build pedagogical approaches that lift quality, reduce workload and improve consistency.

#### Flexible integration

Our materials offer structure without straitjackets and freedom without confusion.

#### Context-sensitive

We appreciate that every setting is unique.

#### Built for real classrooms

We know that even the best curriculum needs to be lived out in practice. That's why our units include guidance on modelling, scaffolding, oral rehearsal and vocabulary teaching – all grounded in what works day-to-day.

#### Improvement that sticks

We don't chase gimmicks. We support leaders to take a long view, building processes, not just products. Our partnerships focus on what matters most: great teaching, aligned leadership, and better outcomes for pupils.

## HOW THE NEW WRITING FRAMEWORK ALIGNS

The Writing Framework sets clear expectations. Leading English helps schools meet (and exceed) these by offering:

- A strong focus on technical accuracy and clarity in writing
- Expert modelling using high-quality, annotated texts
- Emphasis on planning, redrafting and sentence-level control
- Teaching writing as a process, not just a product
- Purposeful, manageable assessment that informs teaching

▶ **Leading English**

to book a short call, discuss your context and find out how we might work together.

# Q & A

We take the famous Proust questionnaire and pose eight of its questions to a fellow educator. Take a peek into the deepest depths of a teacher's soul...

## 1 What is your idea of perfect happiness in your job?

The feeling of really wanting to do it and getting joy from it. If you find something you love, then it isn't work.

## 2 What is your greatest fear at work?

Getting it wrong, because the impact of that – whether as a head, as a consultant, or worse as an Ofsted inspector – will impact people's lives. Especially children's. And that's not something to take lightly.

## 3 What is your current state of mind?

I'm pretty chilled. I did an inspection over the last two days and today I'm doing free support in my nephew's school. But I'll be done by lunchtime and I'm meeting my friend Claire this evening for dinner. She's still a primary head, so we can spend the evening putting the education world to rights!

## 4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

Martyring yourself for the job. Yes, it's a workload-heavy profession, and yes there are things like school fairs and residentials you kind of have to do outside of the usual hours, but this whole "I give my life to my children, I'll do anything for them"? Oh, shut up. No one will thank you for it in the long run, and while the job is important, your work should not be your whole life.

*"When you know you've made a difference, that means the world"*

## 5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

I sometimes lie about how I'm feeling. It's always the edited version! Don't get me wrong; it is important to share feelings with children, as they then see the range of human emotion, and that it is normal. But they don't need to know the extremes; as I say, the edited version!

## 6 Which words or phrases do you most overuse with your class?

I didn't know what these were until we did a writing piece on Joyce Grenfell in the style of George, don't do that... And apparently my phrases were "Let me look at you"; "First things first"; "If you don't sit on the chair's four legs you can stand your own two" and "Were you born in a barn?". The latter of which my Grandma used to say to me if I left the door open.

## 7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

Having a positive impact on children's lives. Some of my schools were in pretty grim areas of London and only recently a past pupil found me on LinkedIn to tell me what a positive impact I had on his life. That's now a WhatsApp group, and we're planning a reunion of the Y6 class of 1999. When you know you've made a difference, that means the world. Because that's all you're really trying to do.

## 8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

A picture I framed that a child drew me. His name was Matthew Nelson, and he must've drawn it in around the year 2000. It's me, with a yellow face and orange spiky hair, and it says 'Miss Gilmore, teacher of 4G, best teacher in the world'. It's followed me to every classroom and office I've had since he gave it to me.



**NAME:** Kate Owbridge  
**JOB ROLE:** Retired primary exec head, now part-time consultancy & support, and Ofsted inspector.  
**EXTRA INFO:** Read more about Kate's work at [kateowbridge.co.uk](http://kateowbridge.co.uk)



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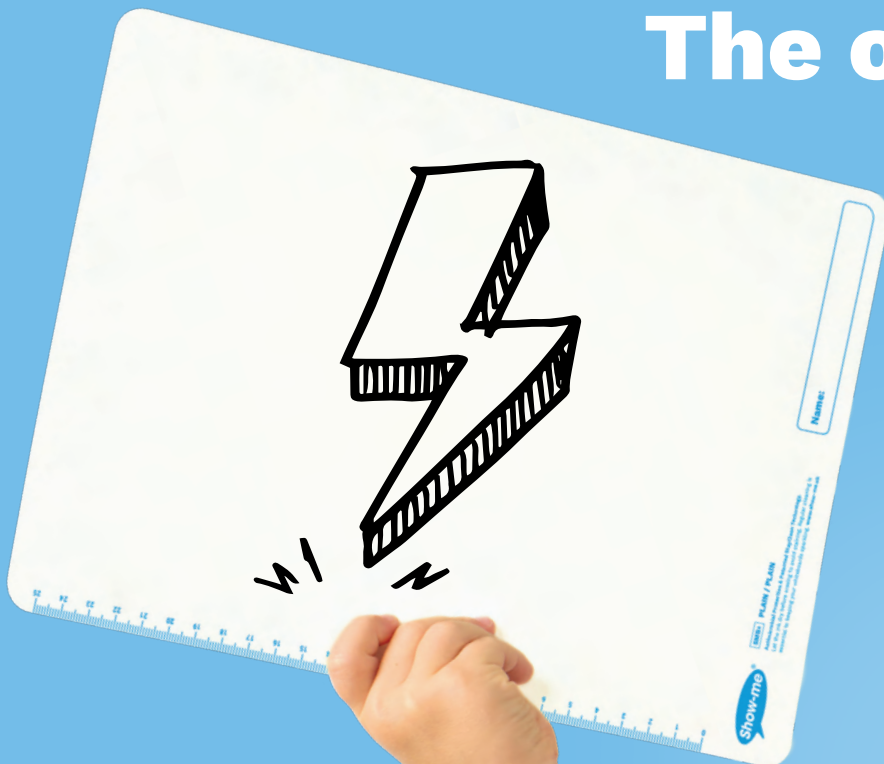
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