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INTERVIEW SECRETS

What the panel's
really thinking

First five minutes

For SEND it's
sink or swim

MARY MYATT

**THE READING
FIX HIDING IN
PLAIN SIGHT**

**STOP
EXPLAINING.
START
OPEN-GOAL
MATHS**

After THE CALL

Four Ofsted insights to act on now

SCIENCE

UNDERSTAND BIODIVERSITY

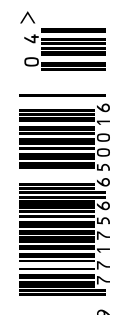
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Hello!



And welcome to the latest issue of *Teach Primary*. After months of waiting with baited breath, the government's white paper, *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, is here. Though it covers an expanse of different topics across education within its 118 pages, the much-publicised focus on SEND reforms has been a hot topic. Luckily for us, Aaron King has gone through the white paper and brings us the lowdown

on what the SEND recommendations mean for real teachers. Check out his analysis on page 46.

Aaron's breakdown of the government's white paper forms just part of our special focus on SEND this issue. Becky Baxter of Down Syndrome UK has written a useful guide on how to support pupils with Down syndrome in mainstream classrooms (page 49), and headteacher Gemma Quantrill shares how her Essex school rewrote the rules for learning across their cohort, thanks to insights from pupils with PDA (page 44). As well as this, Asmaa Ahmed explains the profound impact the first five minutes of a task have on pupils with SEND, and how to get off to a strong start, whatever you're teaching (page 53).

Elsewhere, we also have an insight into the recruitment process, and what interviewers may not be telling you – from someone who has been there and done it on both sides of the panel. Read what Alan Shields has learned in his 30 years of teaching (and hiring) on page 32. We also have an article by the esteemed Mary Myatt, who is questioning whether the true answer to reading for pleasure, and improved attainment, has been staring us in the face all along. Check it out on page 58.

As always, we also have a wealth of free resources for you, from an exclusive WAGOLL on magical descriptions from author Maz Evans (page 60), to a six-week art plan bringing a modern twist to spring florals, from Adele Darlington (page 22).

Thanks for reading,

Charley

Charley Rogers, editor

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

Don't miss our next issue, available from 22nd June

POWERED BY...



SAL MCKEOWN

on how to find ideas for engaging engineering projects in every classroom

“Nursery rhymes and fairy tales are wonderful inspiration for engineering”

P28



PIE CORBETT

shares his top tips and examples for writing short-burst, non-fiction paragraphs

“Children benefit from ‘boxing up’ texts so that they can organise writing into chunks”

p66



JO AUSTEN

Explains how ‘open-goal’ maths lessons can develop creative thinking and numeracy skills

“Perhaps the biggest strength of a goal-free problem is that it's very low-stakes”

P78



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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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PRIMARY**

We want to hear from you!

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



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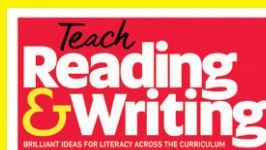
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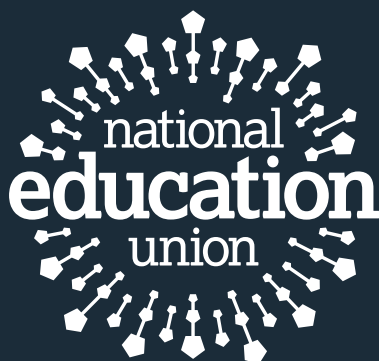


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Breaktime

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The hunt is on!

The organisers of the new Children's Booker Prize have launched a nationwide competition to find young people to join their 2027 judging panel. The team are looking for three children, aged from eight to 12, who will help choose the winning book alongside adult judges Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Lolly Adefope and Sanchita Basu De Sarkar. The three winners will receive copies of the eight shortlisted books to read and keep, and a trip to London to join the other judges in making their final decisions. In addition, Beano illustrator Nigel Parkinson will create a personalised portrait of each winner, and a comic strip capturing their judging experience.

"If you love reading and you love talking about books, you would be perfect to be a Children's Booker Prize judge," urges Cottrell-Boyce. Around 30,000 copies of the shortlisted books will be gifted to children who need them the most. Entries for the first round of the competition will close on 2 June. Nominate a young book lover in your life at tinyurl.com/tp-booker

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



MY MONEY WEEK

Running from 15–21 June, My Money Week helps children gain skills, knowledge, and confidence in money matters. Pupils can use the free My Money Week Map to explore their communities and learn about money, spending, jobs, businesses, and public services. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-money-week



GO GREEN!

The Great Big Green Week is a mass moment for climate and nature that will take place from 6–14 June. Free teaching packs and two live lessons – one presented by Steve Backshall – are being offered to schools. Download your pack and get involved at greatbiggreenweek.com/schools



SAFEGUARDING STARTER PACK

The pack, designed for UK primary teachers and DSLs, includes mini-lesson frameworks, observation indicators, disclosure reminders, and safeguarding conversation guidance for children aged 5–10. Visit tinyurl.com/tp-StarterPack

→→→ TODAY'S **TOP** **RESOURCES**

World Cup Comprehension Pack

The FIFA Men's World Cup this summer offers a great hook to get children reading. Using this KS2 resource pack, children will learn about the history of the competition and some of the former winners. A series of comprehension questions are included, with answers provided to check pupils' understanding.

Download the pack at tinyurl.com/tp-wcpack





Pupil numbers down again

The DfE reports that demand for primary school places fell three per cent between 2018/19 and 2024/25 and is expected to drop another

seven per cent by 2030. In 2024/25, the percentage of unfilled primary school places rose to 14 per cent, compared with 10 per cent in 2018/19. With an estimated 56,300 fewer pupils in 2027, schools may receive around £288 million less funding.

Budgeting is proving particularly difficult in instances where roll numbers drop enough to significantly impact funding, but not so much that this can be offset by staffing cuts. Local authorities (LAs) do not have any explicit statutory duty to manage unfilled places, but the DfE have set out some expectations, requiring them to use birth rates, migration, and housing development data to forecast demand. Responding to a DfE survey, 92 per cent of LAs suggested they would downsize schools to manage falling pupil numbers. Read more at tinyurl.com/tp-changing-demand

Summer reading boost

The Reading Agency has announced a new two-year partnership with Explore Learning to support the Summer Reading Challenge. This much-loved annual event encourages children to keep reading during the holidays, building confidence and boosting enjoyment. In addition, it can help stem summer learning loss and provide a literacy boost for the autumn term. The challenge takes place in public libraries across the UK and is free to join. Children set a reading goal and collect rewards for reading anything they enjoy.

The new collaboration includes themed workshops for children and families, digital resources to support literacy, and a range of activities designed to keep reading social and engaging. Thousands of Summer Reading Challenge packs will be available nationwide via Explore Learning centres, and children who take part in the challenge will have a chance to get their own books.

Find out more at summerreadingchallenge.org.uk



72% of British parents back an under-16s social media ban*

*opinium.com

Look ahead | Book ahead



LONDON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FESTIVAL
The UK's largest dedicated children's

literature festival returns from 21 May–26 June, in venues across London. Featuring kid lit stars like Maz Evans, Michael Rosen, and MC Grammar, it's not to be missed. See barneskidslitfest.org/schools

CELEBRATE PRIDE MONTH

Looking for LGBTQ+ resources?

Teachwire is here to help, with a great roundup of lesson and activity ideas. Find free resource packs, guidance on creating a more inclusive curriculum and more at tinyurl.com/tp-pride



Pam Ayres

Poet, broadcaster and writer

What was primary school like for you?

I went to the village Church of England primary school, and there were four teachers – including Miss Edmonds, whom I loved.

One memory that really stands out was when we got a school library. It occupied about a metre of shelf space, but it was the opening of a door for me. Miss Edmonds knew I loved ponies and introduced me to a book called *Wish for a Pony* by Monica Edwards, which was a revelation.

What made you want to write children's books about wildlife?

When I was a child, I took for granted that wildlife would be around me forever. Through my lifetime I've seen it diminish, and it's heartbreaking. I hate that we [humans] shove everything out of the way to make way for us. The books I've written are factual, and I hope they'll help children to want to look after wildlife. From the children I've spoken to, they're very keen to do so.

What has the reception to this book series been like so far?

I've been going into schools recently, and I've been charmed. It's so informal compared to when I was at school. The children were so full of information, and everybody had something to say. Pupils were incredibly enthusiastic about what they'd seen and heard in nature, and happy to chat about it. I loved it.



I am Dandy the Dormouse (£7.99, Two Hoots), by Pam Ayres, illustrated by Nicola O'Byrne, is out now.

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6 ways to support neurodivergent children with transitions

Though bigger adjustments often take our attention, we mustn't overlook the many small changes that happen every day

1 | MAP OUT THE SCHOOL DAY

Neurodivergent children can be more sensitive to unpredictability and change than their peers. Moving between the many different elements of the busy school day can impact on how they feel, focus and learn. When you can, map out the school day in its separate pieces or elements. Ask yourself: How might these different parts of the day shape the experiences of neurodivergent pupils? What might feel supportive, and what might be overwhelming?

2 | BE EXTRA CURIOUS

The better we get to know neurodivergent children in our class, the more we can help them with transitions. Observe each child. Notice the rhythms of their day, what sparks their interest or increases anxiety. Remaining open and curious about a child can help us to adapt to their needs more effectively. Attuned connections create a foundation of safety for children, and from that comes a readiness to learn and explore. Avoid simply correcting behaviour and find workable strategies, for instance, letting them get their coat from the cloakroom ahead of their peers, so it is less busy.

3 | LISTEN TO WHAT THEY SAY

It's incredibly useful to hear from children about how they experience transitions through the school day. Hearing that a child "gets frustrated when I have to move quickly", or that they like "knowing from my teacher about what comes next" provides valuable insights. Create safe spaces where neurodivergent children can feel comfortable to speak or have a range of ways to communicate non-verbally. Do they prefer to talk when they're busy with an activity? Is it more comfortable to use visuals, symbols or written methods? Do they enjoy drawing their thoughts and experiences? Flexibility is key, and what feels comfortable for one child, may not for another.



BECCA TABARY-PETERSEN is a former educational psychologist and part of Tapestry's education team.

4 | CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT

Across the school, different areas have distinct rules and expectations, social demands and sensory input. Pupils might need to be quiet in corridors, but be expected to be active and social in the playground. The classroom might have scratchy carpet, the corridor bright lights, and the hall may smell of school lunches – all significant sensory differences. Support pupils by showing them what to expect and giving them time to process and adjust. Be ready to make adaptations and accommodate needs, for instance, by offering a transitional object (a small, familiar item), which a child can carry during moves.

5 | JOIN THE DOTS

Speak to parents and carers to get valuable insights about how a child is feeling on a particular day. Did they sleep well? Did they have breakfast? How comfortable are they in their clothes? How did they feel about leaving their family to come to school? This information is vital for understanding how a child is arriving at school on a particular day. Book in regular check-ins to listen, discuss routines and plan strategies – parents can often share what they find works. Offer accessible, and flexible, ways to communicate such as online journals, and remain mindful of cultural context and language differences.

6 | SIGNAL CHANGES

Helping neurodivergent children to anticipate changes can make transitions less disruptive. Knowing ahead of time that they'll be in the hall for PE helps them prepare. Support this by using timers so a child knows how long they have until a change, or by creating a visual timetable showing where, when and with whom they will be for each stage in the day. Signal changes with songs, clapping or countdowns and use cues consistently. Supporting a child is an ongoing process; continual reflection on our practice, strategies, and provision enables us to respond effectively to their evolving needs.



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Movement isn't a luxury for pupils – it's a lifeline

Lack of activity is leading to worrying trends in children's health in the UK...

There is a consensus that children should be active for at least 60 minutes every day. Yet fewer than half of five to 16-year-olds in England meet that benchmark. Put simply, most of our young people don't move enough. Activity levels remain worryingly low, childhood obesity rates in the UK are among the highest in Europe, and children born in this country today can expect to live in good health only until their early 60s. That long-term trajectory is deeply concerning. Sedentary lifestyles, rising screen use, curriculum pressures and reduced access to safe outdoor space all play a part. Family routines have shifted, free play has declined, and movement is no longer built as naturally into childhood as it once was. Whatever the causes, the consequences are becoming harder to ignore. For this reason, we need to make movement a normal, protected part of every school day.

More than just physical

When we talk about physical inactivity, it is tempting to focus solely on metrics like weight. But the impact goes much deeper. Recent research published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* suggests that regular physical

activity in childhood may also reduce the risk of mental health disorders later in life. Each additional hour of daily physical activity at age 11 was associated with a 12 per cent lower risk of being diagnosed with a mental disorder before the age of 18.

We see that children who move regularly tend to concentrate better, regulate emotions more effectively and build resilience. Movement supports brain development, reduces stress and helps children arrive in the classroom ready to learn. This is not about enforcing strict regimes or creating elite athletes; it's about giving every child the daily opportunity to feel energised, capable and confident in their own body.

Inequality starts early

But this challenge is not evenly distributed. Healthy life expectancy remains a postcode lottery, and – most concerningly – the gap continues to widen. We see the signs of this inequality in schools at an early age. In the most deprived communities, obesity rates in Reception and Year 6 are more than double those in the least deprived areas. The reasons are complex and multi-faceted. Access to safe green space and play facilities varies widely, and

organised sport carries costs that place it out of reach for many families. Diet also plays a role, with healthy food less affordable in many areas. All of this means that already vulnerable children are most likely to lose out.

How to make real change

Schools alone cannot solve a national public health crisis, but they are uniquely placed to make a profound difference. The school day is one of the few opportunities for every child, regardless of background, to access regular physical activity. The most effective solutions are often the simplest: short, inclusive bursts of movement embedded into the school day. No special kit. No complicated timetables. No competitive pressure. Just children having fun moving together, at their own pace, and building healthy habits for life.

This is the guiding philosophy behind The Daily Mile: 15 minutes of running, wheeling or walking outdoors during the school day. The goal is simple: to make children fitter, happier and more focused, while also supporting staff wellbeing – all without placing an unnecessary burden on teachers. Time exercising in fresh air helps to lift moods, ease stress and create a shared moment of reset for both pupils and staff. Encouragingly, this focus on everyday movement is beginning to gain wider attention. This winter, Sport England launched its 'Let's Move' campaign, urging families to stay active during the colder months and reinforcing the importance of regular activity for all.

But this conversation must go beyond any single initiative. We need joined-up action across education, health and community services. We need safe spaces for play, support for families, and policies that make healthy choices easier to make. Investment in sports facilities and school food standards matters, but small daily habits matter just as much.

The encouraging truth is that movement is one of the most accessible and powerful tools we have. When we build daily movement into the fabric of school life, we are not just helping children run a little further. We are giving them stronger bodies, more resilient minds and a better chance of living longer, healthier lives. And that is surely something worth prioritising. **TP**

Elaine Wyllie MBE is founder of The Daily Mile Foundation, supported by INEOS.

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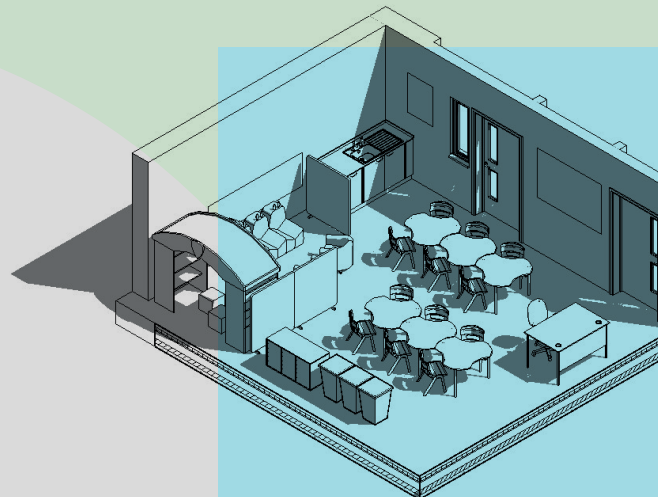
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Each issue we ask a contributor to pen a note they would love to send

A letter to...

Madame Gazelle

Children's favourite *Peppa Pig* has given us a main character with hearing difficulties. Here's what I'd like his teacher to know...



I am writing to you in your role as George Pig's teacher.

The happy, fun atmosphere in your classroom has always impressed me, so please don't take this advice as

criticism, but as coming from a place of collegiate respect.

You see, like George, I'm deaf in one ear. These days I use a bone anchored hearing aid (BAHA), but throughout my entire school and university career, I was unaided. Whilst my hearing loss was picked up early on (before I started school), the attitude back in the mid-80s was "Her other ear is 'normal', she'll cope".

However, everyday experiences such as listening to a teacher talking, or trying to take part in activities like the whispering 'pass it on' game, were difficult and alienating for me. But a few simple changes in your classroom could make a massive difference to George, and any other pupils with hearing difficulties. For example, let George sit where he can see both his teacher and his classmates (I'd naturally turn round to see what my classmates were saying, but then get in trouble for turning around).

Thinking about the furnishings in the classroom is also really useful; soft carpets are lovely to sit on and dampen background noise nicely, too. When I was at school in the 1980s, concentrating in the classroom – or worse still, the assembly hall in the big, echoing Victorian building – was challenging. High ceilings, hard floors and plastic chairs made for a challenging and incredibly tiring listening environment. The constant need to try and join the dots, and guess what words were missing to piece together what people had actually said was

hard work. There were inevitable moments when I guessed the wrong word, much to other children's (and sadly teachers') amusement.

It's important to communicate clearly with George, too. I'm sure you'll make sure George doesn't feel different simply because of his hearing loss, and some small gestures can really help make George feel seen. For example:

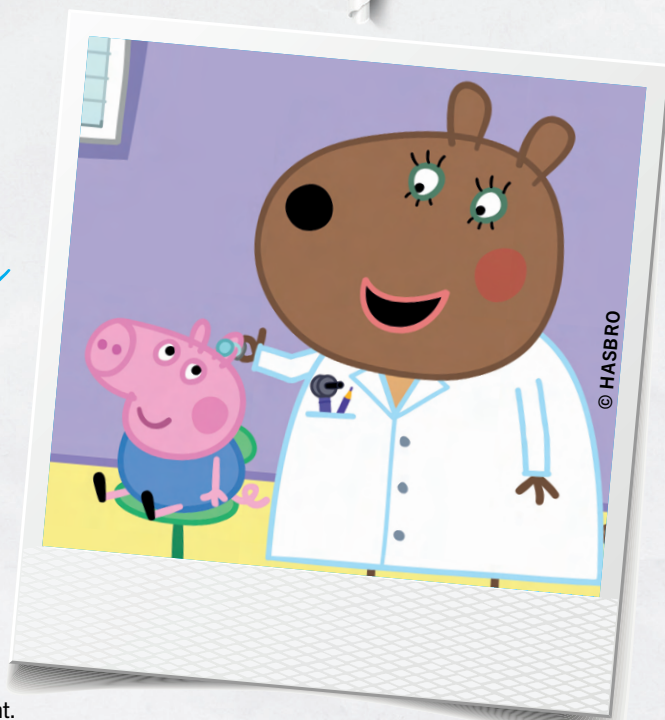
- Remember which ear is George's good ear, and try and position the important sounds to his good side.
- Use his name to get his attention.
- George might subconsciously lipread

"Getting my hearing aid was life-changing"

(lockdown showed me that I do), so always look at him when you're talking to him, and encourage his classmates to do the same.

- Try and avoid games like 'pass it on' (sometimes called the telephone game) with the whispered sound going in the wrong direction. For me these games were a nightmarish, isolating experience – I felt I was letting the others down by not being able to pass on their message.
- Encourage George to embrace technology; there's so much mainstream and assistive tech available to help, such as closed captions.

My final piece of advice will no doubt delight young George: remember that getting used to lots of new sounds is exciting but can be overwhelming at times.



Make sure George gets plenty of time outside doing his favourite activities, like jumping in muddy puddles, to let off steam.

I hope George gets on well with his new funky blue hearing aid once he's got used to it. My BAHA was life-changing; everything became easier and less tiring, especially in challenging listening environments like classrooms, lecture theatres, mainline rail stations, cafes and pubs. It also meant I could hear beautiful new sounds, from birds singing to my daughter's soft voice.

In closing, I would like everyone to know that hearing difficulties should not stop them following their dreams. I was delighted to learn recently that *Gladiators* star Jodie Ounsley (also known as *Fury*) pursued her career dreams while wearing a cochlear implant. At university I played women's football and took up climbing. Since then, I've had a successful career that has included working for the NHS as an IPS employment specialist (helping people with mental health difficulties find jobs) as well as working in marketing in several industries.

I've also volunteered for The Scouts for over 20 years and would like to say that George would be warmly welcomed by his local Squirrel Dray or Beaver Colony.

Finally, thank you for supporting George and other pupils with hearing difficulties. Having someone who understands and champions you can be a serious self-esteem boost. And I should know...

From,

Linda

Linda Cole is a freelance EDI consultant. She uses her lived experience of health conditions including single-sided deafness to assist universities, charities and the NHS with research and service improvement.



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UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Our anonymous educator gets something off their chest

While we're busy planning history units and how to introduce fronted adverbials, there's a separate, secret, curriculum running in the background...

Planning. Educators spend an extraordinary amount of time considering it. We think about the curriculum as a whole. We pore over long-term plans, debating sequencing of lessons, mapping knowledge organisers, and discussing whether Year 4 are quite ready for fronted adverbials. So much time goes into developing curriculum intent, implementation and impact.

But alongside this official curriculum that is planned with every detail in mind, every school also runs another curriculum – and this is not written down. Nobody maps it on a progression spreadsheet or stores it in a subject leader folder, yet children learn it faster than anything else we teach. It's the secret curriculum.

From day one we can see it at work. Oh, so slowly to begin with; blink, and you might miss it. All these little things that the adults believe are hidden from the children, but as the weeks turn into months, our pupils discover them and learn them faster than any fronted adverbial usage. For example, who the strict teachers are, which teachers mean 'silent' when they say it, and who tolerates a light whisper if the noise begins to creep up. They become experts in uncovering which rules are... negotiable. For example, the classic rule of 'no talking on the carpet' actually means 'no talking when I am explaining a task'. A quick whisper during a long pause? Acceptable. A comment while the teacher turns to write on the board? Risky but possible. The secret curriculum starts by teaching children how to read the room.

Then there's the hierarchy. It doesn't matter what school you go into. Officially, the rules are clear and everyone follows them, all staff are equally respected, and behaviour expectations are consistent. Unofficially? Children know exactly who runs the school.

They know which teachers can silence a hall of 400 pupils with one look and keep them hanging on their every word for the entire assembly. They know which teaching assistants will always be listened to, and which lunchtime supervisors are not to be messed with under any circumstances. They absolutely know which adults might give you 'one more warning'. You will not find a policy that documents this, and it won't come up in any performance management meetings, but the

children learn it all the same. When adults are working under pressure, it is the pupils who notice how they behave.

There are so many variables in teaching, and without any notice at all, huge changes in the day can shift the energy in a classroom and disrupt those well-thought-out plans. Photocopier jamming,

WiFi disconnects as you press play on a video, your lunch slot moves unexpectedly, or assembly overruns (that one's usually me – I love assemblies).

These small moments of chaos are mini masterclasses for the children we teach. They learn how adults respond; *do we panic, improvise, or even laugh it off?* They notice whether staff treat mistakes as national disasters or as minor inconveniences.

Children are extraordinarily skilled observers. They see everything: where our attention goes, when positive attention is given, and who gets corrected. It doesn't

matter what is laminated on the classroom walls, the secret curriculum is constantly teaching them what the school, and the adults in it, really care about. Of course, none of this is necessarily negative. In fact, much of it is incredibly powerful.

As they should, children learn that adults can admit mistakes, and that teamwork makes busy days manageable. Pupils notice kindness between colleagues, and how humour can disrupt tension. They learn that rules exist for a reason, but also that good judgement sometimes matters more than rigid enforcement. Which, in all honesty, is learning how communities work. During lessons, they may forget the date of the Battle of Hastings or the difference between a subordinating conjunction and a coordinating one, but they rarely forget how adults made them feel, or how those adults treated each other, which means the secret curriculum might actually be the most important one we teach. Not because it replaces the formal curriculum, but because it shapes the environment in which all learning happens.

So, while we continue to polish lesson plans, it might be worth remembering that another curriculum is quietly running in the background. One that doesn't require planning documents, just a room full of observant children, and a group of adults modelling – often unintentionally – how the world works. **TP**



The writer is a teacher in England

5 REASONS TO TRY... a JCA residential

Help your pupils to make memories that will last a lifetime with holistic, tailored experiences



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Fun, friendship, and fast-paced activities that get students out of their comfort zone. Our unique approach to activity residential is the reason why primary schools love to visit JCA.

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KEY POINTS

Our school residentials are suitable for all ages and abilities and can be tailored to your specific needs. Find out more at jca-adventure.co.uk

Groups have access to around 70 different activities across our two residential centres, with more being added constantly

Our small team sizes and same-instructor approach ensure that students leave feeling more confident in their abilities

At Croft Farm, groups have access to a wide range of water sports activities in addition to our core offering

Meeting the needs OF ALL LEARNERS

A call for inclusive practice in a time of reform...

AMY HUSBAND

Across the UK, we are witnessing a marked increase in children and adolescents experiencing Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA). It is crucial to recognise that EBSNA is not synonymous with truancy, defiance, or a wilful choice to avoid education. Rather, it is often rooted in complex mental health challenges, including anxiety, stress and a profound fear associated with physically attending a school setting.

Every child and young person deserves access to high-quality teaching and a broad, balanced curriculum, irrespective of any additional needs they may have.

As school leaders, we must reflect on how we fully support families where EBSNA is evident. This includes considering not only the emotional and practical barriers to attendance, but also how and what these students are learning during periods of non-attendance.

A partnership approach involving DfE-accredited online providers – such as Academy21 – can be highly effective. This partnership should be regularly reviewed and remain focused on gradual, supported reintegration into the school community, and ultimately, the mainstream classroom.

The challenge is to ensure that these interventions are not static or siloed. Instead, they should be dynamic, responsive and always aimed at re-engaging the learner with their peers and the wider school



environment. At Academy21, we take a collaborative approach to co-produce bespoke solutions that are compassionate *and* ambitious.

Every Child Achieving and Thriving

The Department for Education's recent white paper places renewed emphasis on mainstream settings adopting a layered, truly inclusive, graduated approach. At the heart of this is the expectation that a school's Universal Offer is inclusive by design, providing high-quality adaptive teaching that meets the needs of all learners.

Targeted and Targeted Plus Support must also be sufficiently robust to deliver interventions that are 'additional to and different from' your Universal Offer. These interventions should be rigorously evaluated and tailored to the diverse needs present within mainstream cohorts. The white paper's 'Experts at Hand' proposal is particularly welcome, advocating for timely access

to external professionals with specialist expertise – ranging from counselling and educational psychology to Alternative Provision (both online and in-person) and dyslexia assessment.

For many local authorities, especially those covering large rural areas or facing high demand for specialist input as part of students' EHCPs, the ability to partner with online providers offers a scalable and immediate solution. This can ensure that no child is left waiting for the support they need, and that expertise is available at the point of need, not just when capacity allows.

Whole-school inclusion

True inclusion is not a bolt-on; it is a whole-school commitment that should permeate every aspect of a setting's ethos and practice. Leaders must ask themselves: what does a truly inclusive mainstream school look like in our context? Key questions to consider include:

- Curriculum design: how is your curriculum constructed with equality,

diversity and inclusion (EDI) at its core?

- Access to quality teaching: how do you ensure all students on roll have access to subject-specialist teachers and consistently high-quality teaching?
- Re-integration and partnerships: in what ways are you working with external partners to prioritise re-integration for students with attendance challenges, ensuring this is central to their provision and attendance targets?
- Access to expertise: where 'Experts at Hand' are required, how does your setting facilitate swift and effective access to these professionals?
- Student experience: what does it feel like to be a student in your school? How do you know?
- Culture of belonging: how have you built a culture of belonging, and what does your stakeholder voice – students, families, staff – reflect?

Inclusion is not a destination but an ongoing journey. It requires relentless self-evaluation, a willingness to adapt and a commitment to listening to those we serve. Let us keep the needs, voices and aspirations of our young people at the heart of all we do. Only then can we ensure that every child is given the opportunity to thrive. **TP**



Amy Husband is executive headteacher at Academy21.

Wraparound care YOU CAN TRUST

Is your provision sustainable, or just working for now?



Most schools already have wraparound care in place. Sessions run each day, children are supervised, and parents rely on it every day. From the outside, it appears to be working as intended.

However, the day-to-day reality behind that provision can feel very different. Staffing is often stretched, recruitment rarely aligns neatly with demand, and much of the consistency relies on existing staff stepping in

where needed. The system holds together, but it's under pressure.

Over time, that effort becomes part of the model.

The hidden operational load of in-house provision

Running wraparound care in-house can appear to be the most practical and cost-effective option. It builds on existing teams, sits within familiar structures, and gives

schools a sense of direct control over delivery.

What is less visible is the cumulative operational demand that sits behind it.

Recruitment and retention require ongoing attention. Cover needs to be arranged when gaps appear. Safeguarding, compliance, rotas, parent communication and payment management all require consistent oversight. Individually, these are manageable responsibilities. Collectively, they create a level of operational complexity that is easy to

underestimate.

The challenge is not that the model fails suddenly, but that it gradually becomes more difficult to sustain without drawing time and focus away from other priorities within the school.

A different way

A fully managed wraparound care service changes where that responsibility sits.

Premier Education works with over 270 primary schools to deliver provision that integrates into the

Find out how Premier Education can support your wraparound care provision.

school day without adding to leadership or staff workload. The full operational delivery is managed externally, including staffing, recruitment, safeguarding, activity planning, bookings, payments and parent communication.

Full delivery, without the burden

Schools retain oversight of quality and standards, but they are no longer responsible for managing the day-to-day delivery.

There are no upfront costs to the school, and as parents pay directly for the provision, many schools find that wraparound care becomes financially sustainable alongside being operationally reliable.

The result is a model that does not depend on internal capacity to keep it running effectively.

A model that fits your school

For schools already working with Premier Education in other areas, such as PE delivery or extracurricular provision, the transition into wraparound care is typically straightforward.

Existing relationships, familiarity with staff, and an understanding of how provision is delivered mean that the service can be extended without significant disruption.

For schools exploring this approach for the first time, the process begins

“The challenge is not that the model fails suddenly, but that it gradually becomes more difficult to sustain”

with a detailed consultation. This allows for a clear understanding of the school’s priorities, available space, scheduling requirements and any specific considerations before a tailored programme is designed.

In both cases, the intention is the same: to ensure that provision fits the school, rather than requiring the school to adapt around it.

Better experiences for children. Greater confidence for parents

The impact of this approach is not limited to operational efficiency.

Children benefit from structured, activity-led sessions that are designed to engage them meaningfully at the start and end of the school day. Rather than simply filling time, sessions focus on movement, confidence-building and social interaction, creating an experience that children

enjoy and want to return to.

Those sessions are delivered by qualified activity professionals who understand how to work with primary-age children, bringing energy and consistency to every

session.

At Premier Education, we believe that continuity matters. When children see familiar, enthusiastic faces each morning and afternoon, it shapes how they feel about the school day as a whole. It builds routine, trust and a genuine sense of belonging that extends beyond the classroom.

Parents experience greater consistency and clearer communication, which builds confidence in the provision and reduces the need for ongoing queries or reassurance.

When parents know their child is engaged, supervised and enjoying their time, it removes a layer of daily uncertainty, and that peace of mind is something they notice and value.

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HOW WRAPAROUND CARE WORKS WITH PREMIER

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Nothing is agreed until it fits your setting.

Tailored programme design

Your provision is built around your school day, pupils and existing policies. It is not an off-the-shelf model.

Full management and delivery

We manage staffing, recruitment, safeguarding, activity planning, bookings, payments and parent communication. Schools retain oversight without carrying the operational burden.

Ongoing support

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Already offering wraparound care? We can enhance your current setup. Find out more at premier-education.com/schools/wraparound-care

quality and reliability of the service. All provision is fully aligned with Ofsted expectations.

For many schools, the question is no longer whether wraparound care can be made to work.

It is whether the current model will remain sustainable as demand increases, staffing challenges continue, and expectations from parents continue to rise. **TP**

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MEDIUM TERM PLAN

KS2
ART & DESIGN

FLORALS, FOR SPRING?

ADELE DARLINGTON

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tinyurl.com/tp-Bloms

When you think of traditional classroom art projects focusing on vases of flowers, your mind's eye will, no doubt, conjure up images of artwork inspired by (and looking very much like) the well-known works of Vincent Van Gogh, Henri Matisse and the like. This six-week art project aims to wake up and shake up this floral theme by adding the energy of the bright, vibrant paintings of contemporary artist Tim Fowler to the mix. Tim's fluorescent colour palette, bold use of line, and graffiti-esque spray and drip techniques bring a relevant, modern-day twist to this popular still-life subject.

time to absorb the paintings and discuss the features with their peers. How are they different from the ones they have already looked at? Do they like them? Can they justify why, or why not?

Open sketchbooks and give pupils the freedom to fill a double-page spread in any way they wish on the theme of vases of flowers in art. This could include some or all of the following: facts about artists and their artworks (names, titles, dates, tools, media); likes and dislikes; drawings/paintings of vases of flowers from observation or imagination; drawings/paintings of the artists and the artworks looked at during this session.



Assessment

Can pupils compare and contrast two or more still-life artworks featuring vases of flowers? How are they similar? How are they different? Have individual conversations or listen in to peer discussion.

WEEK 2 Learning objective

- To understand what botanical art is, and the important role it has played in scientific history
- To know how to make a concertina sketchbook

For this lesson pupils will need a strip of watercolour paper (half an A3 piece folded in half horizontally), watercolour paints, paintbrushes, water, a strong

WEEK 1 Learning objective

- To recognise a vase of flowers as a popular still life subject for artists throughout history
- To compare and contrast features of paintings

For this lesson pupils will need sketchbooks and a selection of mark-making tools such as pencils, pens, crayons and oil pastels.

Begin by sharing artworks depicting vases of flowers on the whiteboard. Paintings such as Vincent Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (1889), Henri Matisse's *Vase with Two Handles* (1907), Rachel Ruysch's *Flowers in a Glass Vase, with a Cricket in a Niche* (1700), John Constable's *Flowers in a Glass Vase* (1814) and Hiroshige's woodblock print

Hibiscus (1845) are just a few of many possible images to share. Vases of flowers have long been the chosen subject of many an artist's creation, and these are just a few of the thousands and thousands out there to admire and explore!

Give pupils time to look at each artwork, to take in its details, colours, shapes and form and allow time for discussion. Use question prompts (there's a set in the downloadable resources at the link above) to encourage conversation, and to guide pupils to compare and contrast images effectively.

Next, share some of Tim Fowler's work, from the gallery section of his website (timfowler.co.uk). Pupils will immediately notice the difference in style – from the vivid colour choices to the dynamic brushstrokes and incorporation of drips and splatters into the traditional floral compositions. Again, give pupils



paintbrushes including decorator brushes, and a selection of fluorescent-coloured, ready-mixed paints.

Many of Tim Fowler’s artworks are very big; much taller than a tall person and wider than several people standing side by side! Look at the larger canvases in the gallery on his website and ask your pupils how they think he paints his backgrounds, bearing in mind their size. Do they think he uses small paintbrushes or large? In general, when painting larger areas, it is much more effective to use larger brushes, and sometimes Tim even uses pressurised spray bottles filled with paint to cover the background of his biggest canvases.

In this session, pupils begin to paint their own artworks inspired by Tim’s vibrant bloom compositions. To start with, they need to create abstract backgrounds using a fluorescent colour palette, choosing from bright pinks, blues, yellows and greens. A piece of A3 watercolour paper is the perfect canvas, and pupils should select their colours and fill their bases, leaving no sections of the paper untouched. Provide a selection of brushes for pupils to choose from. Discuss the fact that the paper is big,



coffee mix (to use as a paint – NOT for consumption), glue, old book pages and/ or brown parcel paper for collage.

Botanical art is a genre that combines scientific accuracy and artistic beauty. Artists working in this field create precise representations of plants and flowers, including their structural details, colour and form.

Historically, such illustrations have played an important role in the documentation and classification of plants, with attention also given to seeds, lifecycles and dissections. You can see the influence of botanical illustration in Tim Fowler’s paintings; many of them have details akin to those found in this traditional artform in addition to the central, bright vases of flowers or plants.

Share some botanical illustrations with your pupils and draw attention to their realism. To create artwork in this style, artists must look closely at their subjects, observing carefully the whole way through the drawing and painting process. In the next session, pupils will have a go at drawing in this style in the concertina sketchbooks they are making this week.

Give each child a strip of watercolour paper and demonstrate how to fold it in a zig-zag manner, resulting in four faces on both the front and back sides. Then, give them old book leaves (you can often find old botanical texts in charity shops) and/or brown parcel paper to rip and stick onto the pages. This breaks up the white space and adds texture to the sketchbooks.

Using the coffee mixture and some green watercolour paint, pupils can paint areas of the pages to add even more interest to them. They can choose whether to paint whole sections or just add random splashes and drips. Leave the sketchbooks somewhere safe to dry, ready to be drawn in during the next session.



Assessment

Can pupils explain what botanical art is, what its main features are, and the important role it has played in the world of science?

.....



WEEK 3

Learning objective

- To draw plants and flowers accurately from observation using pencils

.....

For this lesson, pupils will need the concertina sketchbooks made last week, and sketching pencils or woody pencils in black or brown.

Begin this session with a reminder of the definition of *botanical art*. Ask pupils, in pairs, to compose a definition in a sentence, then ask some to share with the rest of the class.

Now it’s time for everyone to have a go at drawing as botanical artists. If you’re teaching this lesson indoors, bring a selection of plants and flowers inside for pupils to study, or give them photographs to work from. Alternatively, if your setting is suitable, take pupils outside to draw, documenting the plants and flowers in the school grounds.

The concertina sketchbooks created in the previous session form the canvas for these drawings; however, some pupils may want paper to practise on before committing their pencils to these final pages. Individuals can choose where they want to place their sketches in the sketchbooks, making use of all eight pages. They may wish to draw one large plant illustration on each, or several smaller ones to fill the space. Different flowers and leaves can be drawn, or the same plant can be represented from different angles, it’s up to each individual artist!

It’s important that the children use their skills of observation to inform the drawings in this session. Remind your class that they are representing what they can see – not what they want to see – with their pencils. They must make sure they regularly look at the plants and flowers they are focusing on, noticing the lines, shapes and textures. Encourage them to sketch out the basic shape, before adding the finer details and shading.



Assessment

Can pupils draw from observation, representing the plants in front of them? Do their drawings have recognisable features of the plants and flowers?

.....



WEEK 4

Learning objective

- To create a fluorescent background for an artwork using paint and large brushes

.....

For this lesson pupils will need A3 watercolour paper, a variety of

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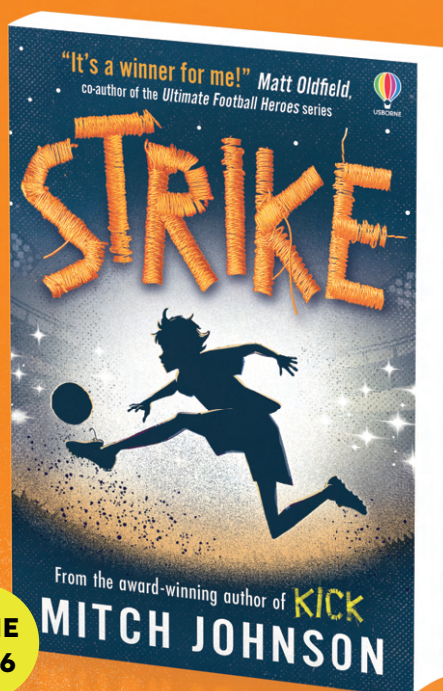
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so larger brushes may be the most effective choice to fill the space. The vase of flowers (created in the next session) will sit on this background. Explain that the 'background' is the important space between the subject (in this case, a vase of flowers) and the edge of the medium (paper).

When switching colours, children need to either wash their brushes or use new ones to avoid unwanted colour mixing. These paintings are meant to be bright, and mixing colours will dull the palette.



Assessment

Can pupils select from a variety of paintbrushes to choose some suitable for the task in hand? Can they explain what a background of an artwork is?



WEEK 5

Learning objective

- To draw a plant/vase of flowers from observation
- To paint using an abstract colour palette in the style of Tim Fowler

For this lesson pupils will need A3 watercolour paper, pencils, paintbrushes, a selection of fluorescent-coloured ready mixed paints, scissors and glue.

It's now time to draw and paint the main subject of the composition. Bring a vase of flowers or large potted plant into the classroom for pupils to study (or provide photographs for them to draw from if real ones aren't available). Plants with big leaves such as monstera, elephant ear or banana tree are good choices.

Spend time at the beginning of the session discussing the appearance of the flowers or plants with the children, and focus their attention on the main features. Ask them to draw the outlines of these botanical subjects in the air with their fingers to help them notice the main shapes. They will need to commit these to paper carefully from observation, focusing on the forms and lines they can see clearly, rather than the delicate details and textural elements – they will add these with oil pastels or paint sticks in the final lesson.

Once pupils have had the time to look closely at their subject, give them each a piece of A3 paper and a sketching pencil. Ask them to draw the flowers and vase, or plant and pot, carefully on the paper. Encourage them to use as much of the space they have on the paper as possible.

Once the outlines are complete, pupils can use paintbrushes and the fluorescent paints to fill them in. This week, thinner brushes prove a more suitable choice for filling in smaller sections. Painting the outlines of sections before filling them in helps to achieve a cleaner finish and avoids painting outside the lines.



Assessment

Can pupils represent the plant or flowers they are observing using pencils and paint? Can they discuss the subject in terms of the lines and shapes they can see in it?



WEEK 6

Learning objective

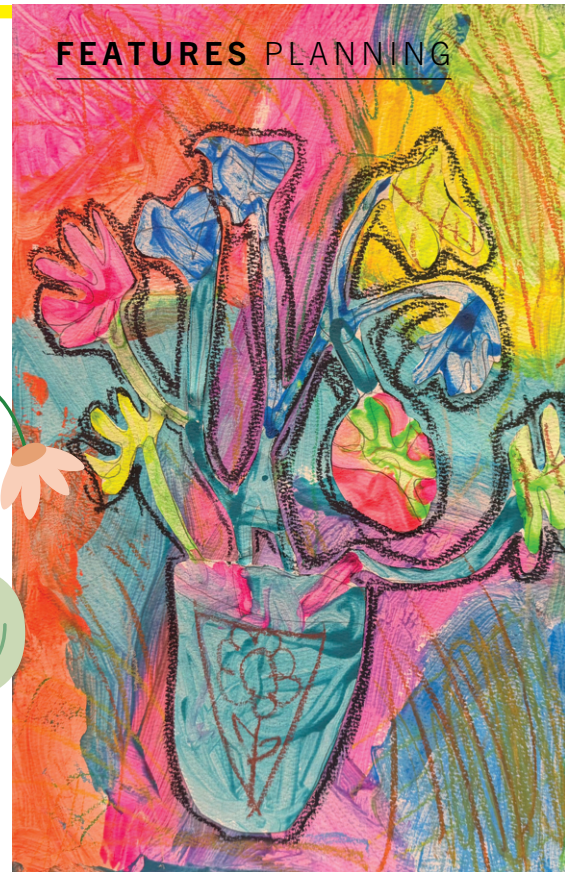
- To use oil pastels or paint sticks to add bold line details to artwork

For this lesson pupils will need their backgrounds, plant or flower drawings, scissors, PVA glue in pots, glue spreaders, oil pastels and/or paint sticks.

The first task in this final session, is to carefully cut out the plants/flowers drawn in the previous week. Once these are cut out, children can stick them onto the backgrounds created in week 4. PVA glue is a good bet for this job. However, pupils do need to be careful with the amount of product they use to avoid creating a sticky mess! Reassuringly though, PVA glue does dry clear, so won't ruin the appearance of the final work.

It's now time to add the finishing touches. Look closely at some of Tim Fowler's works and draw attention to the details he adds to them with paint sticks – the veins on the leaves, the outlines of different parts of the plants and flowers, and the stems, amongst other features.

Using oil pastels or paint sticks, children can make marks on their own artworks where they wish to add more details in Tim's style. Taking a leaf, for example, they could draw an outline, add a central vein and some on each side, or just on one side. Pupils could



also outline petals on flowers, add seeds to the middle and add textural details. It really is up to the individual child where they add the detail, and which colours they use to do so.

Once all the artworks are finished, why not display them in a class gallery for other classes, teachers, parents, carers, friends and family to come and experience? Their bright, sunny colours will be sure to make all the visitors smile!



Assessment

Can pupils control marks they make with oil pastels/paint sticks to add details to a piece of artwork?

Can pupils articulate the process they went through to complete their Tim Fowler-inspired piece? **TP**



Adele Darlington is the creator of the Haringey Education Partnership Art & Design Curriculum and author of 100 Ideas for Primary

Teachers: Art (Bloomsbury, 2022) and Primary Art in Action (Hachette Learning, 2026).

Thank you to the Year 3 children at Holy Trinity Church of England Primary Academy in Handsworth, Birmingham, for sharing their artwork.

 @adele.darlington

 Adele Darlington

Surviving the new Ofsted: LESSONS LEARNED

There's reason to be cautiously optimistic about the new framework, but the onus is on you to tell your story, says **Lee Herdman**

There's a myth about schools and Ofsted. It says if a school is in good health, an inspection is nothing to worry about. I don't think I've ever spoken to a teacher who really believes that.

However confident a school is in its standards of teaching, behaviour management and ability to deliver for all groups of children, it's natural to be nervous when an inspection is due. With the new Ofsted framework now in use, it's even more likely that schools will be apprehensive about what they will face.

By my reckoning, my school was one of the first to experience inspection under the new framework. And while there is a high degree of continuity between the old and the new, there are several subtle differences. Here are my reflections.

The structure

Before I dive into the bigger-picture thoughts, it's worth breaking down what happened during the two-day inspection.

A team of five inspectors arrived at 8am on the first day (in our case, one was quality-assuring the inspection, so it might be four, typically). They met the staff and joined us at the school gates. They spoke with parents and observed as children were welcomed into the school.

Inspectors then asked for a list of any children we judged to be 'deserving

of equity'. This included children with SEND as well as those considered to be disadvantaged. Three of the inspectors immediately went out with leaders on a learning walk to look at Early Years and Key Stage 1. The lead inspector spent time with us checking the single central record. He and I then went on a learning walk from Year 6 down to Nursery.

We talked as we went about key priorities, leadership, and the curriculum as we

judgements, and we collaboratively planned the timetable for day two.

On the second day, just three inspectors attended, one of whom was a senior HMI. We revisited some aspects of provision and inspectors reviewed books across the curriculum, and met with our attendance and behaviour lead and several groups of children. They also met with trustees and the chair of our local board.

During the final reflection meeting, further evidence was added, including feedback from parent surveys and staff meetings. It was during this meeting that inspectors shared their provisional judgements.

“New ‘reflection meetings’ were more engaging than the ‘keep in touch’ meetings under the old system”

saw it in action. We also stopped to observe provision for the children chosen for case-profiling.

As the day went on, more time was spent looking at the wider curriculum, teaching and learning, inclusion and behaviour. Specific safeguarding and inclusion meetings took place with leaders before further learning walks. Reflection meetings were held regularly. These encouraged more engagement than the 'keep in touch' meetings under the old system and felt like a genuine two-way conversation. At the end of the first day, inspectors formed some indicative



Four clear themes

Each aspect of the new toolkit was graded separately. However, four key themes were prevalent throughout the entire inspection:

Inclusion

Young people who deserve equity are the 'litmus test' for how well a school is doing and improving. This is a focus across the framework. Evidence for this was added across the two days.

Curriculum

Inspectors care about everything the school is doing to teach children, develop learning behaviours and retain that knowledge over time. They explored how staff development, timetabling and Early Years all support that.

As always, there was scrutiny of exercise books to gather evidence around learning outcomes. But at no stage were we asked to provide documentation or planning we did not have already. There was very little focus on paper and much more on impact.

Foundational knowledge

There is a cultural shift happening in Early Years. Expectations are moving from establishing an enticing provision with carefully planned enrichment, to identifying needs and gaps that children have and drawing them toward appropriate provisions.

This shift was reflected in the inspection. There was a focus on how we develop and apply foundational knowledge and how this is mapped out over Early Years and Key Stage 1.

Relationships

Strong relationships underpin the evaluation of schools in this framework. Inspectors appreciate that these relationships can't just be transactional; that they are sometimes messy, but lead to genuine community and engagement.

Building and maintaining these relationships requires the school to be open to feedback and not defensive. It also means the school should speak up when things are not right and be prepared to challenge – staff, pupils, parents and other stakeholders.

Scoring, standards and priorities

I was struck by a genuine commitment to the importance of inclusion and foundational knowledge. Early Years really mattered and inspectors did their best to examine the breadth of learning and the depth of values across the school.

But make no mistake: inspectors are determined to hold schools to exacting standards. The 'expected standard' classification demands more of schools than the 'good' rating did under the predecessor framework. 'Strong standard' is harder to achieve than 'outstanding' used to be. 'Exceptional' schools will, quite literally, be few and far between.

Every inspection will be different, and the framework is bound to evolve. But based on our experience, there is good reason to be cautiously optimistic. The new framework does create an opportunity for the school to tell the story of the breadth of its work. But it is an opportunity that leaders must grasp proactively. Things that are obvious to us will not always be clear to inspectors. If something is important, the onus is on the school to raise it. **TP**

DOS AND DON'TS

DO

✔ Signpost evidence of impact

Don't just assume the facts will speak for themselves. To you, something might be obvious, but in a packed timetable, anything can be missed.

✔ Ensure all leaders can cover all bases

Any member of the leadership team can be asked about any aspect of school life, regardless of their specialism, so make sure your whole team is prepared.

✔ Focus on the 'why' more than the 'how'

Inspectors wanted to know why staff did what they did, what lay behind unusual patterns in behaviour or progress made, and how specific strategies supported children.

DON'T

✘ Treat Early Years as a silo

Inspectors expect all leaders to be able to articulate how early foundations are built upon throughout a child's time at school.

✘ Expect inspectors to ask for your reasons behind every decision

If it's important, make sure you raise it.

✘ Assume there are things inspectors don't care about

They will try and observe activities across every aspect of the school and expect to understand how everything contributes to the school's objectives.



Lee Herdman is the principal of **Kenyngton Manor Primary School**.

But where DO I START?

The thought of introducing the wide world of engineering to primary children can be daunting, but a couple of simple projects can help you hit the ground running, says **Sal McKeown**

“There’s loads of free engineering stuff out there if you just go out and look for it,” says Gill Fitzpatrick, who used to be a structural engineer and worked all over the world, testing the structural integrity of buildings. These days, she is assistant head at Beech Hill Community Primary School and has won awards for her work in design & technology.

Gill introduced engineering into the Wigan school in 2017. From the beginning, it was woven into the curriculum at all key stages. Now, she also works as a consultant with Manchester University’s Science & Engineering Education Research and Innovation Hub and runs collaborative projects with a network of schools.

Teachers learn how to devise tasks that use simple, cheap or free resources and then look at how they can thread the learning into other areas of the curriculum.

Often, she will start with the engineering habits of mind, which include:

- Systems thinking
- Adapting
- Problem-finding
- Creative problem-solving
- Visualising
- Improving

During lockdown, staff at Beech Hill discovered that parents and children enjoyed making things together; though some parents in the community struggle with English or can’t read,

everybody was able to follow instructions if they were presented in various ways. The school also noticed that engineering activities worked well for many of the pupils who have EHC plans. Gill explains: “Children don’t necessarily need to be able to read, write or do maths. Using manipulatives, and presenting something visual and practical, allows those children to shine.”

A couple of the projects that Gill has found work best with pupils across the SEND and mainstream spectrums are recreated for you below:

“There’s loads of free stuff out there to support teaching”

Project 1: the ballpoint pen story

This simple task brings together systems thinking and visualising.

First, give every child a clickable ballpoint pen and ask them to look at it, draw it and visualise what is inside it (sealed versions won’t work – it needs to disassemble easily). You can then guide them to take it to pieces and lay the parts in a row – the casing, the spring, the ink container – and consider the function of each part and the materials that have been used. Ballpoints are a relatively recent feat of engineering, so you can

also tie in learning about previous writing tools, such as papyrus scrolls, reed pens and ink made from soot and gum. As papyrus was supplanted by parchment and vellum, the pens had to change, and over the years we have had quills and dip pens, fountain pens, biros, and of course the stylus for tablets. Learning about adaptations over time will spark pupils’ imagination to devise improvements and visualise pens of the future.

Gill recalls a pupil with absolutely no interest in science and technology

whatsoever, whose mother struggled to sign her daughter’s reading log because of arthritis in her hands. The girl designed an adaptation that would meet her mum’s needs. She drew a prototype, described the materials that would be needed and how it would work. Gill submitted the design to the Business of Science Innovation Awards at Salford University (theinnovationawards.co.uk), and the pupil won a prize. “The design was relevant and real for her,” said Gill. “That was evident in the work she produced, the diagrams she drew, and the passion with which she could speak about it in front of an

audience of university professors, dignitaries and other award winners.”

Project 2: the problem with coat hooks

Early years is a hotbed of manipulatives, from wooden blocks and shape sorting to counters and Lego. Engineering is all about solving a problem, preferably a real one that will impact on people’s everyday lives. One Early Years teacher I worked with noticed that coats were falling off the coat pegs onto the floor, and children were treading on them. She decided that this was a problem for children to solve.

They looked at the shape of the hooks and how the coats hung up on them, and tested some of their ideas. One child drew a shape that looked as if it would work and a parent 3D printed it, so it could be tested.

Now, the 3D printing aspect isn’t necessary of course, but this could work as a nugget of an idea for children to iterate and improve on a design.

If you don’t have a problem to hand, or want to integrate books into your hands-on lessons, nursery rhymes and fairy tales are wonderful inspiration for





engineering. *Billy Goats Gruff* is a great stimulus for bridge building. Or read *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and challenge the children to build a fence to help Mr McGregor keep Peter out of his garden or to build a trampoline to help Peter escape. *Dear Zoo* leads into building a container to transport children's favourite animal home from the zoo, while *The Three Little Pigs* is nothing if not an investigation into materials in the built environment. **TP**



Sal McKeown is a freelance journalist with a background in education.

sallymckeown.co.uk

5 IDEAS AND 4 FREE RESOURCES



Start with an after-school club to build some enthusiasm and expertise.



Send out a letter to parents and governors and build a database of those who work in engineering and would be willing to share their skills.



Find a local company and see if they will run sessions, provide resources or send in apprentices to mentor pupils.



Look for local or online training opportunities and projects.



Brainstorm ways to bring engineering into every classroom, forging links with science, humanities, PSHE and even PE.



SEERIH Tiny Tinkering Tasks Booklet ages 5-11. This has 12 tasks with learning outcomes, resources, how to run the task, top tips and evaluation: tinyurl.com/tp-TTT



Learners can use the Engineering Design Cycle to ask, imagine and create a robot that could address their chosen problem, such as protecting endangered animals: tinyurl.com/tp-DesignCycle

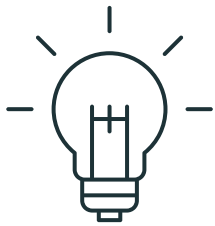


Competitions plus fully funded STEM projects in rail, vehicle and construction: tinyurl.com/tp-EngComps



Videos and picture resources, including a paper towers investigation about the shapes and strengths of different structures: tinyurl.com/tp-PaperTowers

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
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.

How I do it

Use Team GB and their values as inspiration to foster a sense of belonging and teamwork in your classroom...

ADRIAN BETHUNE

1

Start by sharing a video of Team GB at a recent Olympics. A simple internet search will bring up the inspiring montages that the BBC create at the end of each Olympics (like this one: tinyurl.com/tp-BestOfTeamGB). These videos show the highs and lows of athletes, the tears of joy and of heartbreak, and the soundtracks are always extremely moving and emotive. The idea is for your class to be moved emotionally.



Children in primary schools are lumped together randomly in groups of 30 and we just expect them to get along and show teamwork. But unless we teach children what good teamwork looks like, or show them examples of role model teams, teamwork and belonging are more about luck than anything else. ‘What makes a good team?’ and ‘what values do good teams show?’ are essential questions to get children to reflect on. I have been using Team GB for years to foster a sense of team and tribe among the children I teach.

Pose this question to the class: ‘What values, qualities or attributes make a good team?’ Share a few examples such as hard work, kindness and honesty, to get the children started. Then guide them to come up with their own lists in pairs or small groups. After a few minutes, bring the pupils back together as a class and ask them to share the values, as you create a large word bank on a flipchart or on the board.

2

Now the children get to be creative! Ask them to each choose a value they think is important for a team to be successful and cohesive. Give each child a piece of paper (A5 is ideal but can be larger if you have the space), and ask them to create a piece of word art using their value. Write it in big, bold letters and fill their page with colour!

3



4


When the individual pieces of art have been finished, piece them all together to create one big, eye-catching team flag. From that moment on, I only refer to my class as a team. So, if their class name is Penguins, for example, they are now Team Penguins. The flag acts as a symbol of unity – everyone belongs, everyone is valued and we are all part of something bigger than just ourselves.

The team flag really galvanises children and helps them feel like they belong but it doesn't end there. You can use the flag and refer to it in any lesson to reinforce your values. For example, in my classroom, in a maths lesson, I might say ‘I want us to show our values of determination and support. If we get stuck, we don't give up and if we see someone else is stuck, we can help them out.’ Teamwork makes the dream work, after all.

5



Adrian Bethune is a part-time teacher in Aylesbury. The second edition of his book, *Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom* (£19, Bloomsbury), is out now.

 @adrianbethune

 teachappy.co.uk

‘Why should we HIRE YOU?’

Applying for a job can be one of the most stressful things in life. But sometimes, going back to basics is your best bet, says **Alan Shields**

I still remember the first interview I had for a permanent teaching job.

I received quite positive feedback, but I didn't get the job. On reflection, the pivotal factor was probably the fact that I was distracted by the chap I could see out of the interview room who was using a ride-on lawnmower to cut the grass in the school grounds.

Almost 30 years later, I have been interviewed more times than I care to remember, I have served on interview panels, I have chaired interview panels, and I have appointed all grades of staff including headteachers. So, what really goes on during interviews?

What is talked about before you enter the room... and after you leave it? I'll try to share some of my experiences, to give you the very best chance of success.

First impressions really do matter

This may be a cliché, but it also happens to be true. Do all you can to get the basics right; this starts by turning up properly prepared, and on time. If you are late or poorly organised, the panel chair will probably reassure you – but you will already have put a major doubt in their mind, no matter how well you go on to perform. If the venue is unfamiliar, it's probably wise to do a 'dry run' in terms of travel. If you are going to complete a task, or perhaps teach a lesson,

leave nothing to chance: be fully prepared and consider having a back-up plan in case of problems with technology.

Do your homework

Now, you can't secure a job before the interview day, but you probably can consider yourself out of the running if you fail to

prepare properly. Sometimes people want to try and work out what the questions will be, but this is not a great idea – and almost certainly impossible – given the number of different questions that can be asked and the various ways in which they can be posed.

In my experience, the candidates who do best prepare around particular topics rather than trying to prepare for exact questions. For example, if the school has a high number of learners for whom English is an additional language, then expect questions around that theme. If the school has struggled with attainment, then expect questions linked to raising attainment. If you prepare around relevant themes, then you

can tailor your answers to suit the individual questions. All of this presupposes that you have done your homework around the individual school to which you are applying. I once read a very well-written letter of application. Unfortunately, the applicant had started the letter by saying how much

navigate the final hurdle in the interview? Perhaps it's easiest to figure out what not to do. Above all, don't ask a question that a) you should reasonably know the answer to (how many students the school has, for example) or b) will put the interviewers under pressure / on the back foot (e.g. "What's the biggest mistake

“You are going into the room to present the best version of yourself; to put across your knowledge, skills and experience”

they wanted to work for our biggest rivals. It was clearly a cut-and-paste job and, unfortunately, they didn't make it to interview. Whilst interviewers know you may be applying for lots of jobs, the candidates who come across best are those who can personalise things to that specific role. Everyone likes to feel special... even interviewers!

The dreaded question

Many an interview has gone well until, at the end, the interviewers ask the dreaded question... "Is there anything you would like to ask us?". Cue awkward silences, lots of *um*ing and *ah*ing, and worst of all, the asking of ridiculous questions. So, how do you

SLT has made this year, and how did you learn from it?”).

So, what are your options in this moment?

Perhaps the safest path is to politely decline the option and explain that you found all of the information available

helpful, that you have been glad of the opportunity to be interviewed and that it has only served to reinforce how much you would like to work with them. If you do want to ask a question, take it as an opportunity to put across something positive:

“I’ve got quite a bit of experience with both football and netball, might there be the opportunity to help with the school’s extra-curricular programme?” or “I have a real interest in supporting children with special educational needs, would there be any opportunities to further develop my skills in this area?”

Swim your own race

I think that lots of people talk themselves out of jobs before they even get into the interview room. People often focus on other candidates... those they may know, or suppose, to have more experience, better qualifications, more to offer the school or, even worse, those who are a dreaded internal candidate. The reality is that an interview is not a boxing match. You are not going into the room to slug it out against the other candidates. You are going into the room to present the best version of yourself; to put across your knowledge, skills and experience. You can do nothing about the performance of other candidates, so try not to waste your time and energy thinking about them.

If it doesn't go to plan

If you are not successful, all is not necessarily lost.

If you are offered the chance of feedback, then accept it graciously.

Even if the feedback does not resonate with you, it can still be a valuable insight into how you might fit within the school – there may be other opportunities, maternity covers, etc, just around the corner.

I also always encourage people to ‘take the average’ of their feedback. If you receive a piece of

Interviews in numbers

Teacher Tapp reported the following stats, in 2025:

- **91%** of people applying for classroom teacher roles were asked to teach a lesson, compared to **72%** of those applying for senior leadership roles, and **14%** of headteacher applicants.
- **19%** of classroom teacher applicants took part in a student panel, compared to **43%** of senior leaders and **67%** of headteacher applicants.
- Prioritisation tasks (also known as the ‘in-tray task’) were given to **13%** of classroom teacher applicants, **58%** of senior leader applicants and **70%** of headteacher applicants.
- Although only **19%** of classroom teacher candidates faced a student panel, **40%** thought it should be on the interview.
- **After an unsuccessful interview, 44%** of candidates felt supported, **29%** felt neutral and **27%** felt unsupported (and **2%** couldn’t remember!).

Source: tinyurl.com/tp-TTinterviews25

feedback once, don’t panic and change your approach. If several interviewers tell you the same thing, it is worth listening to.

I wish you well in your interviews... and don’t get distracted by the lawnmowing! **TP**



Alan Shields is a local authority inclusion officer and former

primary head with almost 30 years’ experience in the state and independent sectors.



From struggling TO THE TOP 3%

Our school was in trouble. But instead of jumping headlong into different initiatives, we took a step back – and it skyrocketed us to success

ANDY DONE

For me, the lightbulb moment came early on in my first-ever position as headteacher. At lunchtime on day one at Masfield Primary School, I was faced with a line of eight children outside my office, waiting to be ‘told off’. After inviting them in for a chat about what had happened, it soon became clear that these children were not ‘naughty’. They were bored. This then revealed a much wider problem across the school: we had no structure, no engaging activities and no agreed way to manage behaviour.

All this clearly had to change. But what we didn’t need was another new, rushed-in initiative to plaster over the cracks. Rather, it was clear that we needed an entire shift in focus – away from managing symptoms to diagnosing the cause. This was the spark that launched our turning point, and before we knew it, Masfield Primary had bloomed from a struggling school to one in the top three per cent for attainment in the country.

Find your why

Previous initiatives, whilst well intentioned, had been scattergun, and as a result had had minimal impact and longevity. Before deciding on a new plan, the SLT and I knew

that we first needed to determine what we wanted our direction and purpose to be. After all, every journey needs a destination.

Once your ‘why’ has been defined, the role of headteacher becomes much easier, as your purpose guides every decision. On the evening of that very first day, inspired by Simon Sinek, I made a start by writing down my personal ‘why’, which was to *Create a consistent, efficient environment where every single child has the opportunity to thrive and progress.* This was the seed of what became our collective school ‘why’, which we defined together as an SLT: *To create a clear, consistent and efficient school, where every child has the opportunity to belong, thrive and succeed.*

To get to this point, we discussed our moral purpose and identified pain points. Staff and pupil audits then followed, to ensure everybody had the opportunity to be involved in shaping this shared purpose.

The process took weeks, but it was time well spent, as this purpose now informs every policy, conversation and decision in our school.



Embed consistency

Good intentions are one thing, but changes to everyday practice are what make the real difference. The engine of our transformation journey has been a focus on embedding consistency. This isn’t about control. It’s about liberating our teachers, staff and pupils to concentrate on what really matters. We achieved this by creating systems that serve everyone, and that free teachers to teach and children to learn, by removing daily ambiguity and cognitive load. For example, one big change is that we’ve shifted focus from the endless search for new schemes, to perfecting core practices, using our ‘doing less, better’ approach. Central to this is our evidence-informed teaching framework:

a simple, shared model that defines what great teaching looks like at Masefield.

It breaks practice down into core elements such as clear explanation, modelling, questioning, guided practice, and feedback, to ensure consistency without restricting professional judgement. The framework is implemented through aligned systems – book expectations, classroom environments, teaching routines and concise staff handbooks – so that expectations are visible, repeatable and

sustainable. In short, it removes the guesswork and frees up teachers to focus on impact.

But this didn't all happen overnight. We introduced changes step by step on a small scale first, to provide the chance to review, monitor and adapt before a full rollout.

Foster belonging

Central to success has been ensuring that our children all feel like a part of the process. We want pupils to feel that they belong at Masefield, that they can contribute and are well supported. To achieve this,

we made sure to explicitly teach them how to be a part of our community. For example, we opened a pupil-run tuck shop (The BASE) and produce a school podcast as a collaborative effort between children and teachers – this has really improved oracy, too.

So, what has happened to those eight, bored children standing outside my office? Well, our new behaviour curriculum has meant their experience hasn't been repeated. Playtime is now an extension of the classroom, with staff trained in leading activities and purposeful play. Children are no longer bored and understand how to play together, how to lose gracefully at games and most importantly, how to communicate effectively with one another. As a result, playtimes are now far more relaxed and joyful.

Sustained success

If there's one 'secret' to making all this last, it's the proper measurement of results and progress. We do this in a number of ways, ranging from analysis of attainment and progress data, to using a subject-monitoring booklet. This is a structured document, updated termly, which our teachers and subject leaders use to triangulate evidence – bringing together attainment data, samples of pupil work, learning walks and teacher reflections. Each section prompts leaders to identify strengths, pinpoint gaps and define precise next steps, ensuring monitoring leads directly to action rather than simply recording information. Over time, it builds a clear, cumulative picture of how each subject is developing across the school.

4 WAYS TO BE SCHOOL SMART

1 Do a 'friction audit' walk to identify where daily school life creates inefficiencies or unnecessary cognitive load for teachers or pupils.

2 Try the 'why filter challenge' by listing every current initiative or programme and scoring each for its effectiveness and impact.

3 Test cultural alignment by asking staff to complete three sentences:

- a. "Our school exists to..."
- b. "Excellent teaching here means..."
- c. "The most important thing we protect is..."

4 Ask SLT: "If we were starting this school again tomorrow, what three systems would we absolutely protect?" If the answer isn't clear, your 'why' needs strengthening.

Pupil voice is also paramount. As we all know, children really do say it as it is, and this makes them the perfect critics when it comes to helping us understand how well things are working, and how our systems are experienced day to day. This consistent, human approach has delivered extraordinary results for us – both academically and pastorally, for staff and pupils. We are on our journey. Could now be the time to begin yours? **TP**



Andy Done is an award-winning headteacher in the North West, leadership ambassador at Learning by Questions, and author of the School Done Smarter blueprint.

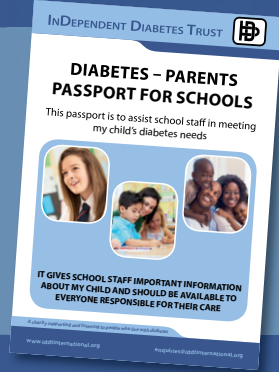
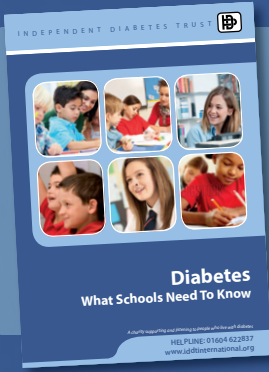
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“Good intentions are one thing, but changes to everyday practice are what makes the real difference. The engine of our transformation was focusing on embedding consistency”



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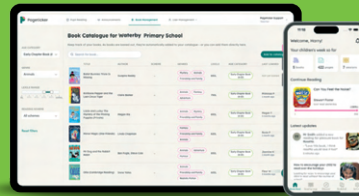
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A HEALTHY *labour market?*

Falling numbers

The number of primary school teachers in state schools started to decline in 2021/22 and there has been a drop each year since then. This trend is linked to a fall in the number of primary pupils as the average birth rate across the UK dropped (and continues to drop: [tinyurl.com/tp-GuardianBirthRates](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-GuardianBirthRates)). All else being equal, fewer pupils mean the school system needs fewer teachers.

Forecasts suggest the fall in the number of pupils in primary schools is likely to accelerate over the coming years. Nationally, it's likely that there will be a drop of around five per cent in the number of pupils between 2023/24

Pprimary school teachers play a vital role in giving every child a high-quality education and enabling them to meet their potential, so it's vital that primary schools can recruit and retain fantastic staff to teach their pupils.

At the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), we publish an annual report looking at the trends in the labour market for teachers. In 2026, the overall picture is improving. However, important challenges remain and more are emerging...



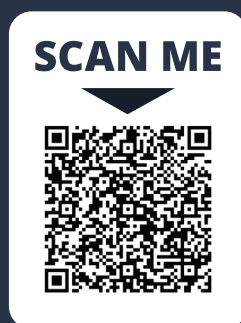
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and 2027/28, which will continue to reduce demand for primary school teachers. Some areas of the country will see smaller reductions while others will see larger, but managing falling budgets will be a key challenge for many schools over the next few years.

Hitting recruitment targets

While pupil numbers may be falling, the education system still needs to recruit more teachers each year to replace those leaving the profession.

The Department for Education's (DfE's) main measure of teacher recruitment compares the number of postgraduate trainees in initial teacher training (ITT) to a target that it calculates based on expected system need. For example, in the 2025/26

training year, there were around 9,800 primary teaching trainees; significantly more than the target of 7,650. As such, the target was exceeded by nearly 30 per cent. This should mean there is a good pool of candidates for vacancies in most areas, although there may be pockets of the country that struggle to attract high-quality candidates.

Looking ahead, emerging data from applications so far this year suggests primary recruitment will probably be above target again for the 2026/27 training year. Young graduates may be more attracted to teaching because alternative options in the wider labour market are being squeezed. We saw a similar effect during the pandemic.

There has also been an improvement in teacher retention in primary schools,

which is likely due to a range of factors. Teachers' pay has, on average, increased by more than inflation over the last few years, and whilst growth in teachers' salaries has lagged behind wider earnings over the long-term, it has made up a little bit of ground. This will have improved the competitiveness of teacher pay relative to other jobs, and encouraged more teachers to stay.

But pay isn't the only factor. NFER's analysis of data from various surveys suggests that workload pressures across the state sector continued to ease slightly in 2024/25. However, these improvements should not be overstated; many teachers still report having an excessive workload, and work longer weeks than comparable professions during term-time.

Challenges, old and new

Of course, the numbers don't tell the whole story. Whilst overall recruitment and retention data in the primary sector looks healthy, not all schools and

What does a job advert say about your school?

When we talk about teacher recruitment, we often focus on application forms, interviews and selection panels. But long before any of that happens, many teachers have already made a quiet decision: whether a role *feels* like it's meant for them. That judgement is often made in seconds, while scrolling through a job advert.

Working closely with school leaders on recruitment, I've seen just how much influence these adverts carry. The words we choose don't simply describe a vacancy; they offer a snapshot of the school itself. They signal what is valued, what is assumed, and who we picture standing at the front of our classrooms.

Most adverts are written with the best intentions, yet it's easy to fall into familiar patterns: long lists of 'essential' criteria, vague references to resilience or pressure, or a heavy emphasis on experience can all suggest there's only one acceptable route into teaching. None of this is designed to exclude, but it can quietly narrow the field. For some teachers, particularly those early in their careers, returning after a break, or balancing responsibilities beyond school, this kind of language can be enough to put them off applying.

Clarity matters, too. When job adverts are unclear about pay, progression or working patterns, candidates are left to fill in the gaps themselves. That uncertainty can undermine trust and confidence, especially for teachers who already feel less secure in the profession.

While clear language won't fix every systemic issue, it can play a role in encouraging more teachers to take the next step.

Alongside this, job adverts should do more than describe what the school needs; they should clearly set out what the school can offer in return. For a candidate, this is often the deciding factor. What kind of support will they receive in their first term? How is professional development approached? What does workload look like in practice, not just in policy?

Schools that articulate their commitment to staff wellbeing, mentoring, collaboration and career progression send a powerful message that teachers are valued as individuals, not just as resources. Making this explicit helps candidates picture themselves not just getting the job but thriving in it.

Inclusive job adverts aren't about lowering expectations or adding fashionable phrases. They're about focus and honesty. What really matters in this role? What support is available? Where is there room to learn and grow? And, crucially, what does success actually look like in this school?

Some of the most effective adverts I've seen are also the simplest. They prioritise purpose over paperwork and speak directly about the impact teachers will have on pupils, colleagues and the wider school community. They acknowledge that great



teachers arrive with different experiences and at different stages of life.

Job adverts are one of the most overlooked tools we have for shaping an inclusive school workforce. Taking the time to read an advert through a candidate's eyes can be revealing. Every job advert answers a question, whether we intend it to or not: *Is there a place for someone like me here?*



Natalie Turner is recruitment manager at Shaw Education Trust, working with school leaders to improve recruitment practice, candidate experience and inclusive hiring across schools.

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Rewrite the future



“Not all schools and teachers will recognise their experience in the national averages”

teachers will recognise their experience in the national averages.

For example, we know that primary school vacancy and turnover rates are higher in schools with more disadvantaged pupils, increasing their reliance on supply staff. There will be geographic areas where recruiting staff is more challenging, too.

In a recent survey, half of senior leaders said they were still having difficulties with recruitment, which suggests a significant gap between schools feeling the squeeze and those seeing improvement, rather than a homogenous view across the UK. This proportion has come down since a similar survey in 2023, but is still high.

Looking forward, our report identified policy developments that could risk significantly increasing primary teacher workloads, which could in turn increase teacher exits. Firstly, teachers will need to update schools’ teaching approaches and schemes of work when changes to the national curriculum are published in September 2027. Second, the government’s reforms to the system for children with SEND may increase the workload burden many teachers face. Schools will be expected to create Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for pupils with SEND, in partnership with

parents, and review them regularly. The government has said it will put support for teachers in place, but it remains to be seen what the net effect on workloads will be.

Both these changes will need to be carefully implemented – by government and by school leaders – to ensure they are not making teachers’ jobs unmanageable and leading to a rush for the door.

An ongoing battle

So, the overall view is mixed. Research suggests the labour market for primary school teachers is in a relatively good place in 2026: nationally, recruitment is above target and exit rates are falling. On the other hand, many schools say they are still finding it difficult to recruit teachers.

Similarly, teachers’ workloads, while improving slightly, remain high. We must keep improving conditions in the face of existing and emerging pressures, while keeping teachers’ pay competitive, to ensure the progress made in recent years is not lost.



Michael Scott is senior economist at NFER.

[nfer.ac.uk](https://www.nfer.ac.uk)






How to stand out





Research carried out by YouGov suggests that interviewers most commonly pinpoint demonstration of the following soft skills as making applications rise above the rest:

-  Passion and enthusiasm (62%)
-  Good communication (60%)
-  Good organisation (36%)

The top-rated hard skills include:

-  Classroom management skills (81%)
-  Knowledge and understanding of curriculum (79%)
-  Writing/grammar skills (48%)

The research also revealed the most common mistakes that teachers involved in staff recruitment see. These include:

-  Untailored applications (65%)
-  Grammar and spelling mistakes (62%)
-  Leaving blank gaps in their work history (32%)
-  Not including how they can contribute to wider school life (24%)

Source: Research commissioned by Teaching Vacancies and carried out by YouGov.

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



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SEND SPECIAL

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'We had to rewrite the rules'

At Woodend Farm in Essex, learning how to effectively support pupils with PDA transformed learning across the whole school...

GEMMA QUANTRILL

People often ask me how I ended up redesigning almost every aspect of teaching and learning at Woodend Farm School. I usually smile, because the truth doesn't sound very strategic or polished. It did not begin with a five-year plan, or a leadership training course, or a glossy new curriculum model. It began with a handful of children who were quietly – and sometimes very loudly – telling us: *"This isn't working for me."*

These were not defiant or 'avoidant' children, or children trying to make life difficult. They were some of the most creative, sensitive and perceptive young people I had ever met. But they were also children who had been misunderstood for a long time. Many arrived exhausted and burnt out from years of adults trying to use conventional approaches that their bodies simply could not cope with. They were not refusing to learn, they were protecting themselves from overwhelm, pressure and expectations that felt too big.

What looked like avoidance on the surface was actually anxiety rising so quickly and so intensely that even the smallest request could tip them into overload. When you are living in that state, the world becomes

a series of landmines, and school, with its routines, transitions and demands, can feel impossible to navigate.

It became clear very quickly that the old ways were not going to reach them. I made the decision that, rather than forcing these children to bend themselves into a system that was never designed with them in mind, something much simpler and far more radical had to happen – the system had to change shape around them.

"When a relational approach anchors everything, progress becomes possible"

The moment

The moment everything shifted did not happen in a classroom at all. It happened when I was scrolling through an article from the PDA Society. I reached a checklist describing the traits of pupils with a PDA profile, and a lightbulb went on so intensely that it almost startled me. Child after child flashed through my mind.

In that moment, it was not the pupils I questioned, but our approach. I knew we needed to completely

rethink what learning looked like.

Our starting point was not behaviour, or progress data, or curriculum coverage. It was safety; in the nervous system, in relationships, in autonomy, and in knowing that adults would not push, corner, or shame you for something your body was refusing to do.

That realisation is what ultimately shaped our Juniper Pathway; a sensory-rich curriculum

created for pupils whose anxiety closes the door on traditional methods and designed, instead, to gently grow their window of tolerance, so they feel safe enough to learn.

A curriculum of possibility

We rebuilt the curriculum from the ground up by asking one simple question: *"What would learning look like if the first priority was reducing anxiety?"*

The answer became the backbone of our approach: learning through play,

story, sensory exploration, genuine choice and safety.

We start with the informal stage, where everything is play-based and pressure-free. Play is not a break from learning, it is learning. It allows pupils with high anxiety to explore the world without feeling watched or judged, developing communication, imagination, problem-solving and social engagement at a pace that feels manageable to them.

As pupils grow in confidence, they move through 'semi-formal' and 'approaching formal' stages, where learning expands from child-led to more structured, adult-led activities. We do not rush them, we do not compare them, and we do not ask them to be ready before they genuinely are.

Finally, in the 'formal' stage, pupils begin to join other classes for particular lessons, not because someone has ticked a box saying they are 'ready', but because they feel ready and have built the internal capacity to manage those transitions. It's important to note that pupils do not have to move through the stages; some may never reach formal stage and that's ok!

Magic behind the scenes

If you sat in a Woodend Farm School classroom today, you would notice staff talk differently. We use a structure called WIN Scripts – Wonder, Invite, Notice – which softens the edges around demands and opens gentle pathways into learning. You will hear things like: “*I wonder which picture feels like the beginning...*”; “*You’re welcome to choose the puppet or the prop first,*”

and “*I notice the clue you used to order those events.*”

This is not a gimmick; it’s neuroscience. This indirect, invitational language keeps the nervous system settled. It communicates “*You’re safe. You have choices. I’m here with you.*” It lowers the sense of threat that often triggers avoidance in PDA pupils, and it works beautifully.

One of the misconceptions about low-demand learning is that it means ‘low challenge’. That could not be further from the truth. We design high-challenge tasks that are disguised inside playful, imaginative structures. During our Once Upon a Time theme, for instance, children might drive a story car across floor tiles to sequence events, join in with repeated phrases using a puppet, or take part in a press-conference style hotseating activity.

There is academic challenge woven through all of it – inference, sequencing, vocabulary, cause and effect, show don’t tell –

but the pressure is removed. Children choose their path:

- Path 1: accessible
- Path 2: stretch
- Bonus Quest: optional challenge

By offering real autonomy, we move anxiety out of the way so the learning can shine through.

Regulation first

There is no learning without regulation; every member of staff at Woodend Farm School knows this. If a child arrives dysregulated, distressed or withdrawn, we do not push ahead with the timetable. We start with coregulation, such as walks outside, sensory circuits, or simply sitting together until the storm passes.

Once the child’s nervous system settles, we gently re-enter learning with a WIN script, such as:

“*You’re welcome to start with the chalks or the water tray, whichever feels easier.*” In that moment, the child chooses safety and because of that, they often choose engagement, too.

Small steps, big transformations

The impact of this model is quiet, but profound. Children who once hid under tables now direct their own learning with confidence. Those who could not tolerate demands now negotiate options calmly, and pupils who felt ‘wrong’ in previous settings now feel seen, valued and understood.

When anxiety reduces, learning becomes possible. When we increase autonomy, engagement deepens and when a relational approach anchors everything, progress becomes possible. **TP**



Gemma Quantrill is headteacher at Woodend Farm School, Witham, Essex.

What are the new SEND REGS?

The government's long-awaited white paper is here, but what does it mean for real teachers? **Aaron King** lays it all out...

What do you remember of 2014?
Uptown

Funk? Selfie sticks? The Ice Bucket Challenge?

If you were teaching back then, you'll recall that a shift began in SEND. It included new EHCPs to replace Statements of SEND, and changes took years to bed in.

System-wide SEND reforms are rare, but brace yourself: it's time for change again. New reforms could lock in changes until the early 2040s, by which time our Y6 children might sit beside us in the staff room, clutching their very own World's Best Teacher mug.

The proposals are set out in 118 pages with the title *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*. But why now? What will change? When will it change?

Why now?

Many parents say that the system feels too adversarial. In truth, many schools say the same.

Government data tells us that children's sense of belonging has fallen, and the achievement gap has not narrowed between pupils with SEND and their classmates. It's the same now as it was 10 years ago.

In staffrooms, many teachers speak of an increasing complexity of need, meanwhile SENCOs talk of their intense workload. In the Westminster halls of power, the data also causes alarm: more children are being educated away from their local school; EHCP numbers are rising by more

than 10 per cent each year, and some council budgets are under severe strain.

Experts at hand

Specialist support services are a lifeline to teachers and support staff. At their best, they come in with a fresh set of eyes and help us overcome the biggest barriers that our children face. In future, there will be around £600 million a year to pay for more of these experts.

Support from school.

- Targeted Plus: child gets SEND Support from school plus external experts.

The EHCP layer will stay, under the title Specialist Layer. Pupils at all three layers will have an Individual Support Plan.

Individual Support

Individual Support Plans (ISPs) are new. Less than an EHCP, but more than a

support plan, every child with SEND will have one. Written by schools in partnership with parents, they will set out the child's needs and provision. Once each year, they will be reviewed.

The plans will be 'digitised' – expect them to be hosted via online portals.

“Government data tells us that children's sense of belonging has fallen”

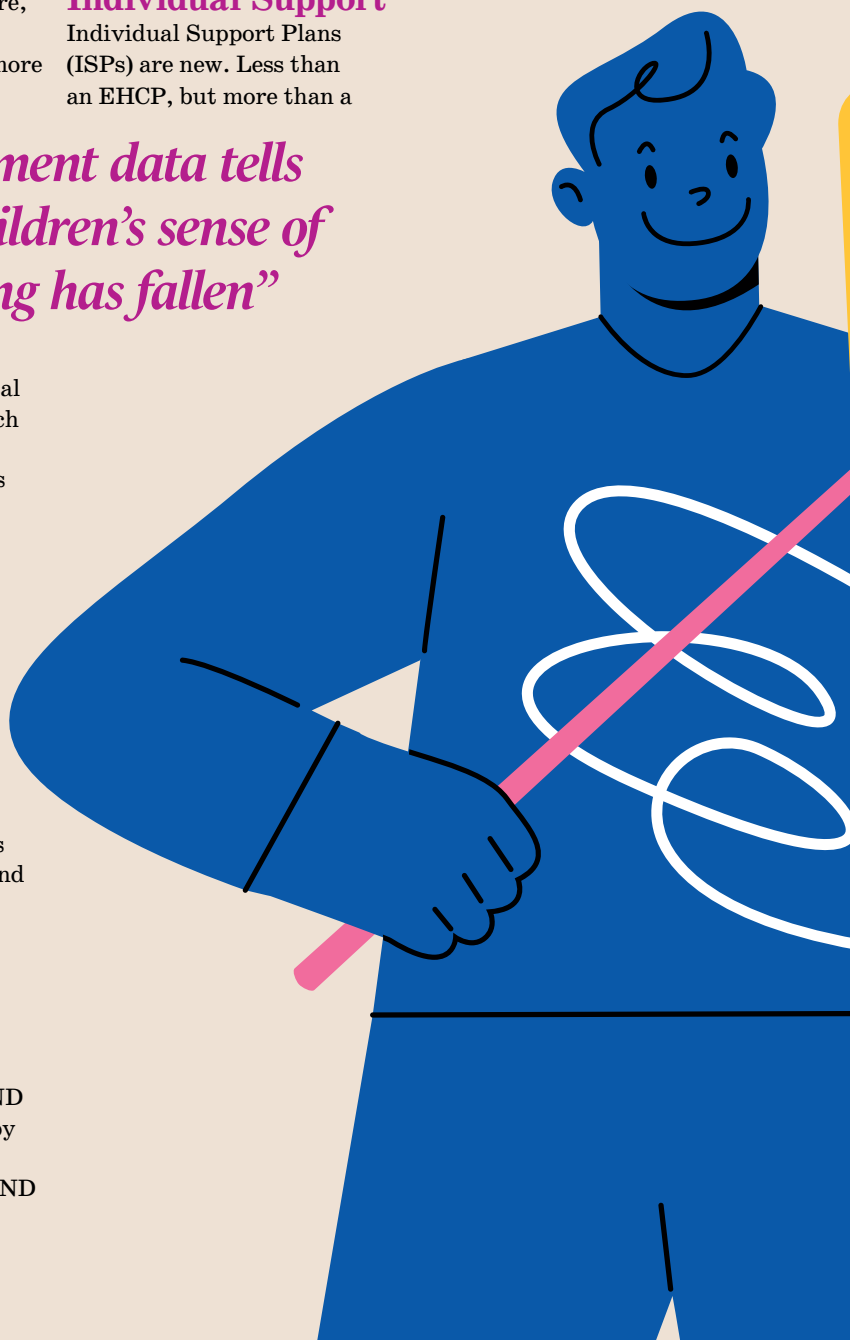
This idea is hard to deliver. There is no magical 'specialist tree' from which to pluck this expertise. Educational psychologists or NHS therapists need training places and, for some specialists, the training takes years. However, money talks, even if it will take time.

Elsewhere, special schools are where expertise can be scaled up more quickly. They'll be asked to increase outreach services as well as offer training and short-term placements.

New layers of support

Currently, there are two layers of support: SEND Support and EHCPs. SEND Support will be replaced by two new layers:

- Targeted: child gets SEND



For children who have an EHCP, the two plans should work in tandem: the EHCP tells us the legal entitlement, while the ISP handles the day-to-day detail.

EHCPs

In 2014, every council chose its own EHCP format. As a result, EHCPs can look different depending on where you live. This will change. All existing EHCP templates will be replaced by a national EHCP.

Given that we'll have ISPs, we might see EHCPs become shorter documents.

EHCPs will be reserved for children with the most complex needs, who require a specialist package of provision. This means that

ministers anticipate that the EHCP numbers will fall, although not until 2031.

Inclusion bases

One aim of the reform changes is for more children to attend a local mainstream schools. To help achieve this, there will be more inclusion bases.

Some schools already have SEND units or resource provision. These will be renamed *specialist bases* and will continue to be for children with an EHCP.

As now, children will be given places via the local authority.

As well as these specialist bases, more schools will open a *support base*. Support bases will be funded by a school or academy trust and will

also provide expert SEND support.

The government wants every secondary school to have an inclusion base (which could be a support base or specialist base), but not every primary will. The plan is that there will be an equivalent number of primary places compared to secondary.

Many schools already have spaces where children have group or 1:1 work. They will stay. The bases are extra.

Nationally, pupil numbers in primary schools are falling. That means fewer classrooms are needed, and some can be turned into bases. If the bases need building work, there's £740 million available.

SEND training

Trade unions have long called for enhanced training for SEND. The government has heard this and is providing £200 million to start in the 2026-27 school year. That is a substantial pot of money.

The goal is that every teacher will be able to meet a broader range of needs. Crucially, the training will reach everyone, including support staff.

The journey ahead

For the changes to layers and plans, new laws are needed. That takes time and it could be two years before they appear on your to-do list. For now, the current systems remain.

These reforms won't transform your classroom overnight. New systems and training take time; culture change takes longer still. But the direction of travel is clear: more children attending their local school, achieving and thriving alongside their peers.

The ambition is right, and teachers have navigated big SEND reforms before. We will rise to the challenge again. **TP**

FIVE HAZARDS TO WATCH OUT FOR

1 Paperwork is not provision
New national systems do not automatically translate to high-quality SEND provision. Staff need feedback to refine plans and provision to effectively narrow the attainment gap.

2 Behaviour or SEND
When is a child's behaviour an expression of SEND, and when is it not? This is not well defined in our current system. If better articulated, it can avoid becoming a weak point in the refreshed system.

3 Alignment with Ofsted
Most Chief Inspectors (HMCI) introduce new inspection frameworks. The SEND reforms will outlive Sir Martyn Oliver's five-year tenure at Ofsted. So, when the next HMCI comes, their framework will need to support the inclusive vision of ministers.

4 Cramming in the changes
The white paper contains big changes that will need plenty of time in schools' development plans. To avoid cramming in SEND development, you'll need to note deadlines well in advance.

5 We're all leaders of SEND
SENCOs are pivotal. But they cannot lead this alone. Every leader must own it.



Aaron King is a SEND advisor who supports schools and councils to improve inclusion. He also teaches Year 6 on Thursdays.

in Aaron King Inclusion



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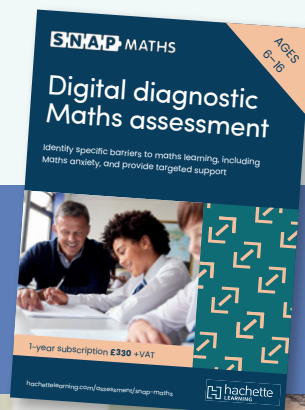
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How to support pupils with DOWN SYNDROME

A few practical, evidence-informed strategies can make a world of difference to classroom inclusion, says **Dr Becky Baxter**

Like all pupils, children with Down syndrome make the most progress when strengths are recognised, expectations remain high and barriers to learning are thoughtfully removed.

Many pupils with Down syndrome benefit from visual supports, clear structure and opportunities to revisit new skills. At the same time, difficulties with hearing, verbal short-term memory and auditory processing can make it harder to follow spoken instructions or learn new vocabulary.

Small adjustments to how we present information, organise the environment and structure learning can make a significant difference to engagement and progress.

Learning from listening

Given the potential verbal short-term memory and auditory processing difficulties, it is probably not a surprise that listening times are particularly challenging for many children with Down syndrome. These difficulties also impact how pupils

follow instructions, learn new concepts and participate in whole-class teaching.

Practical strategies include:

- reducing background noise where possible and seating the pupil near the front of the class
- pairing spoken language with modelling, visuals, gestures and/or written prompts
- breaking instructions into short steps and checking understanding before moving on
- providing repetition and rehearsal, especially when introducing new vocabulary

These approaches facilitate pupils to access spoken information by reducing demands on learning from listening.

Learning from looking

Visual learning is a relative strength for many pupils with Down syndrome. They often retain information they see more easily than information they hear. However, visual difficulties and visual fatigue are also common, so clarity and accessibility are essential.

Teaching staff can support visual learning by:

- using clear, bold, uncluttered visual supports such as objects, pictures, symbols and written words
- modelling tasks explicitly – showing rather than telling
- using video recordings, repetition and personal books to reinforce learning – enabling the pupil to look back at previous examples/work
- minimising unnecessary visual distractions in the classroom

These strategies help pupils access learning more independently and reduce cognitive load.

Motor skills

Fine and gross motor skills can be challenging for many people with Down syndrome. You may find that pupils move more slowly or with less accuracy than their peers, which can affect handwriting, cutting, PE and practical tasks.

Helpful approaches include:

- being clear about the target skill and modelling it step by step
- offering frequent

“The most powerful support happens in the rhythm of daily classroom life”



- opportunities to practise in short, manageable bursts
- providing appropriate equipment, such as adapted seating, scissors, pens or dark pencils, and paper with clear, dark lines
- allowing extra time to complete tasks without rushing or reducing expectations
- providing other ways to record e.g., use of word cards or a laptop

Supporting motor development is not only about physical skills; it also builds confidence and independence.

Social understanding

Social understanding is often a strength for pupils with Down syndrome.

They are motivated by connection and benefit from structured opportunities to interact with peers.

At the same time, pragmatic language skills can be more challenging, which may affect initiating conversation, or managing conflict. Teachers can nurture social and emotional development by:

- setting high expectations for behaviour, aligned with the rest of the class
- using structured group activities to support peer interaction
- providing supports for communication and peer interaction at break and lunchtimes
- preparing pupils for changes using social stories and visual explanations
- celebrating small successes to build self-esteem and motivation

When behaviour is understood and supported, pupils are more likely to stay engaged in learning and enjoy positive relationships.

Communication

Speech, language and communication can be tricky, and targets should be set in collaboration with a speech

and language therapist (SLT). Effective strategies for support include:

- identifying unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts in the curriculum and everyday activities
- setting targets around new vocabulary and concepts and measuring this progress to demonstrate learning
- using clear language matched to the pupil's level of understanding – this includes spoken language and written language in text and worksheets
- including speech and language targets when differentiating lessons
- ensuring strategies and resources to support communication are used consistently for the pupil – in the classroom, at break and lunchtimes, in clubs and at home
- creating regular opportunities for communication throughout the day

Embedding strategies

The most powerful support happens not in isolated interventions, but in the rhythm of daily classroom life. When strategies are woven into routines, pupils have more opportunities to practise skills, generalise learning and build independence. For example, activities such as counting, vocabulary and mark-making can be embedded into everyday activities, and providing visual timetables and task planners, and assigning structured roles and responsibilities, can encourage independence. Giving pupils a chance to repeat and consolidate their knowledge will also help them to maintain progress.

These small, consistent adjustments help

pupils feel secure, capable and ready to learn.

Every pupil with Down syndrome brings their own strengths, interests and ways of learning. When we combine high expectations with practical, everyday strategies, we create classrooms where children with Down syndrome feel valued and are able to succeed. **TP**



Dr Becky Baxter is director of education and speech and language

therapy at Down Syndrome UK. Celebrate World Down Syndrome Day on 21 March. Head to the DSUK website to download free resources for your school.

 downsyndromeuk.co.uk

The stats



According to research, 65 per cent of pupils with Down syndrome now attend mainstream schools – a huge increase from just 38 per cent, 30 years ago.



Recent studies found 88 per cent of parents believe schools would benefit from Down syndrome-specific training.



But according to the latest research, of those working with pupils with Down syndrome, more than half of the teachers (53 per cent) and almost a third of teaching assistants (31 per cent) had not received any Down syndrome-specific training.



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- Nathan Jones, PE Coach

The power of the first FIVE MINUTES

Assessment outcomes for pupils with SEND are often shaped before the task even starts, so the beginning is paramount, says **Asmaa Ahmed**...

You can feel it in the room before a word is spoken: chairs scrape a little faster than usual, voices drop half a tone, and adults move with purpose. It's assessment time.

Nothing dramatic has changed. The task is familiar, and the children have done similar work before. And yet, within the first few minutes, you can see it happen... one pupil goes quiet. Another starts fidgeting. A third asks repeated clarification questions about something they already understand.

We often focus on the adjustments pupils with SEND need during assessment, such as extra time, a reader, a quieter space or clear instructions. But in primary classrooms, outcomes are often shaped long before those adjustments come into play. For many pupils with SEND, the first five minutes decide everything...

Steady the start

In those opening moments, pupils are not thinking about the task. They are scanning for predictability: where am I sitting? Who is in the room? Who is giving instructions today? What feels different from a normal lesson? What happens if I get stuck?

For pupils who rely on routine to regulate themselves, even small shifts can feel significant.

A different adult reading instructions. A more clipped tone. A slight change in seating to 'space everyone out'. A sense of urgency in the way the activity is introduced.

Nothing new

We don't intend to change. But assessment can subtly alter how we behave, (time feels tighter, and we want a smooth start, so instructions may be delivered more quickly, or we may correct behaviour more sharply).

For most pupils, this barely registers. But for some pupils with SEND, it changes the emotional temperature of the room; by the time the first question appears, the work is no longer the only challenge. Regulation is.

Schools rightly agree reasonable adjustments for pupils with SEND in

advance. But something supportive on paper can still feel unsettling in practice if it only appears on assessment day (e.g. an alternative room used only for formal tests, a laptop introduced just for this activity, or an unfamiliar adult stepping in 'to help').

If something feels new, it adds demand rather than reducing it. So, before assessment, it can help to ask: Is anything new today? *No new adults. No new layouts. No new tools. No new language.* This is less about eliminating change and more about protecting what needs to remain steady. When the start of assessment mirrors the start of a normal lesson, pupils are more likely to focus on learning rather than on self-regulation.

Protect continuity

Support for SEND assessment often relies on informal systems; we remind one another verbally, we pass on information in corridors, or we assume everyone knows what works for a particular child. This is often OK until someone is absent. A pupil who

usually has a trusted adult nearby finds themselves with someone unfamiliar. A break that is normally offered at a subtle cue is forgotten. Instructions are delivered in a different voice.

None of this is intentional. But for pupils who depend on predictability, inconsistency can feel harder than the assessment itself. Strengthening continuity doesn't always require new policy; often, it simply means making key information visible and shared. A short summary of a pupil's usual way of working can help any adult maintain consistency, particularly in those opening minutes.

Consistency isn't about lowering expectations. It's about recognising that adult-led shifts in tone, pace and presence at the beginning of assessment can carry more weight than we realise. If we steady those first moments, pupils are more likely to show what they truly know.

Sometimes the difference between a pupil struggling and a pupil succeeding isn't the question in front of them. It's what happened in the five minutes before it. **TP**



Asmaa Ahmed is a former primary teacher and mental health lead, now senior customer success manager at The Access Group.

 theaccessgroup.com

Supporting SEND

Cultivate an inclusive and caring classroom with these expert resources

1 *Challenge Down syndrome stereotypes*

Down Syndrome UK is a parent-led charity working hard to challenge outdated stereotypes and raise expectations for individuals with Down syndrome. Our flagship Primary Education Programme was developed by Dr Becky Baxter, a speech and language therapist who has been working with children with Down syndrome since 2007. The programme includes CPD-accredited training, information and resources for parents and professionals, as well as online support sessions with our experts – all tailored to ensure children with Down syndrome achieve the best outcomes possible. For more information, visit downsyndromeuk.co.uk



2 *Inclusive comms*

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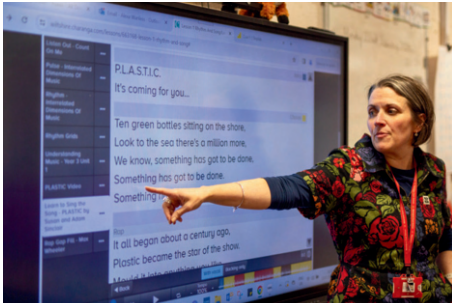
4 *Discover SNAP, discover hidden challenges*

SNAP is a group of online, diagnostic profilers that focus on maths learning difficulties, behavioural needs (SEMH), and specific learning difficulties (SpLD). With three options (SNAP Maths, SNAP-B, and SNAP-SpLD), SNAP generates personalised reports for SENCos, learning resources and strategies, and further supporting materials. SNAP's triangulated approach involves parents and carers in their pupil's support with a parent questionnaire and personalised reports. It also covers the biggest range of specific learning difficulties (20) and behavioural needs (17), including maths-specific learning difficulties. The Core Profile makes identifying areas of need quick and easy. Learn more at hachettelearning.com/assessment/sen



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Open the door TO HISTORY

Step out of the ordinary and into a world of wonder with portal stories

M. G. LEONARD

When I was a child, I read two stories that captured my imagination, and began a lifelong fascination with doors. One was *The Secret Garden* by Francis Hodgson Burnett and the other was *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis.

Whether it's stepping through a wardrobe, opening a long-locked door to a secret garden, or falling down a rabbit hole, readers all understand the thrill of crossing from the ordinary world into somewhere new. This is the power of the portal.

Using portal stories in the classroom can be powerful, too. They can connect creative writing with curriculum learning; when pupils step through a fictional doorway into the past, history stops feeling distant and starts to feel real. Additionally, they give children a clear structure, a strong story hook, and endless opportunities for imagination.

Every portal story has a crossing point between worlds... it all starts with a door; but which door? A great starter activity is getting children to design their own

portal. Ask pupils to draw and label their own magical doorway. Encourage them to think about where the portal is, what it looks like, who made it and how it opens. The more mysterious the door, the stronger the story hook.

Portal stories work brilliantly with history topics because you can use real historical buildings and when the characters arrive, the reader discovers the world right alongside the characters. It helps them vividly imagine the past.

In *Hunt for the Golden Scarab*, the characters travel to Ancient Egypt, entering the world of Tutankhamun and witnessing the mummification process. In *The Legend of Viking Thunder*, the readers visit a Viking settlement in Norway at a time when old Norse beliefs were beginning to mix with Christianity. In *The Impossible Gladiator*, they'll find themselves in the dramatic world of Ancient



“Portal stories work brilliantly with history because the reader discovers the world alongside the characters”

Rome, at the Colosseum. All of these settings can mesh well with history teaching. Those first moments through the portal must be impactful and are a great subject for descriptive writing. Why not ask your pupils to describe the moment their character passes through their doorway? What do they see? What do they hear? What do they smell? What clothes are people wearing? Is there anything surprising through the door?

This exercise encourages pupils to focus on sensory description, which will strengthen their writing.

I think portal stories become especially exciting when fictional characters meet real historical figures. In the *Time Keys* books, the children encounter people such as Howard Carter, Tutankhamun and Emperor Hadrian. Putting unexpected meetings with real people into the adventures allows historical facts to appear naturally in the story.

Teachers can use the same technique to reinforce historical knowledge. Ask pupils to imagine their character meeting someone famous from history. Perhaps they meet a Roman gladiator, a Viking warrior or a famous archaeologist. What questions would their character ask them? Thinking about this will enable to children to see that conversations with historical characters can reveal details about daily life, beliefs and culture.

Portal stories can also provide excellent points of tension, as any time-travelling character risks getting trapped in another time or another world. Often the challenge is for them to get back home, but the more obstacles or problems they face in doing so, the more exciting the story is. If the obstacle rises from the historical setting, even better!

The final part of a portal story is always the journey home. The experience has changed our heroes.

ACTIVITY PLAN

Portal stories are perfect for KS2 because they provide a clear structure for pupils who might otherwise struggle to start writing. Try this simple five-step activity plan to help pupils create their own time-travel adventure.

1. Discover the portal

Begin with a simple prompt: *"In the darkness, there is a door that nobody else seems to notice..."*

Ask pupils to decide where their portal is located. It might be through a picture in a gallery, behind a cupboard, inside a cave, or hidden in an ancient building.

Encourage them to sketch the doorway and write three descriptive sentences about it.

2. Through the door

When the door opens, the character enters another place or time. Link this to your history topic. For example: Ancient Egypt, Viking Britain, Ancient Rome, Tudor England.

Ask pupils to write the moment their character arrives. What do they see, hear, smell and feel?

3. Meet someone from the past

Stories become more vivid when characters interact with people.

Challenge pupils to introduce one historical character such as:

- a Viking sailor
- a Roman soldier
- an Egyptian temple priest

What questions would their character ask this person?

4. Face a challenge

A good story must have drama. Ask pupils to come up with a problem for their character, such as:

- escaping the Colosseum
- finding a lost Viking treasure
- solving a mystery in an Egyptian tomb

Ask them to write down how their character solves this problem.

5. Home time

Finally, the character must return home. How do they find the doorway again? What have they learned from their adventure?

If you want to expand the idea, why not invite pupils to illustrate their portal and display the finished stories on a classroom **Time Doors** wall?

Encourage pupils to think about what the characters have learned from their adventure. Have they become braver? Found out something new about history? Discovered a secret?

What I like about portal stories is how they remove one of the biggest barriers to creative writing, which is that terrifying question: *Where do I start?* And the framework can be used again and again, to produce new ideas. In my experience, stories can be

powerful learning tools. When children imagine themselves walking through history, they see the past not as a list of dates but as a living world full of people, danger and discovery. All it takes is a door. **TP**



M.G. Leonard is an author of children's books. Her latest *Time Keys* novel, *The*

Impossible Gladiator (£7.99, Macmillan), is out now.

Let me tell YOU A STORY...

In our quest to help children discover the joys of books and improve reading attainment, have we missed the most obvious solution?

MARY MYATT

For years, we've worried about declining reading engagement. We've introduced strategies, interventions, and ever more complex approaches. And yet, many of you will recognise the same concern: pupils are not reading with the depth, stamina or pleasure we would hope for.

But what if the answer isn't more complexity? What if it's doing less?

The Faster Read research from the University of Sussex (tinyurl.com/tp-FasterRead) points to something both simple and powerful: reading aloud to pupils from ambitious, challenging texts, every day, is essential. Not as an add on, or a reward, but as the core reading experience in the classroom.

In the original trial with Year 8 pupils, reading ages increased by eight-and-a-half months, in just 12 weeks; for weaker readers, the gain was 16 months.

And the structure is deceptively straightforward:

- the teacher reads aloud
- pupils follow the text
- there are no immediate tasks or worksheets
- the focus is entirely on the story

This sounds almost too simple. But the impact suggests otherwise.

Serious gains

Across different schools, a consistent picture is

emerging. In one primary school, daily reading sessions were introduced in Years 5 and 6 using challenging texts. The results were striking. Pupils became more engaged and absorbed in stories, reading for pleasure increased beyond the classroom and attainment improved significantly. In one cohort, the number of pupils reading above the expected standard rose from 63 per cent to 80 per cent, and those reading below expected standard

“Depth matters more than coverage; attention matters more than activity”

dropped from 24 per cent to just seven per cent. Even pupils who remained below age-related expectations made substantial gains – in some cases, two years' progress in a matter of months.

In another school, the approach was introduced in Year 6 – a bold decision given the proximity of SATs. Yet outcomes at greater depth rose to over 40 per cent, compared to a national average of 33 per cent. And it wasn't just attainment that shifted. Classrooms were characterised by sustained concentration, extended responses using precise Tier 3 vocabulary and every pupil following along with the text.

Teachers described a “calm, but intellectually active” atmosphere; a noticeable contrast to more task-driven lessons.

In a third school, where challenging texts were embedded across the wider curriculum, outcomes rose even further. The proportion of pupils achieving greater depth reached the top one per cent nationally, without any further changes to provision.

The pattern is clear: when pupils are immersed daily in

rich, demanding language, both thinking and attainment improve.

High challenge, low threat

One of the most powerful aspects of this approach is its alignment with a key principle of effective teaching: that of high



challenge, low threat. The texts are demanding, often beyond what pupils could decode independently, but the experience is safe; there's no performance pressure, no written tasks and no fear of getting it wrong. As one leader put it, "All you have to do is listen and track the story." This experience creates something that's quite rare in modern classrooms: sustained, shared attention. And the even rarer outcome? Genuine engagement.

Why it works

There are several reasons why this approach is so effective.

1. Because listening comprehension outpaces decoding: children can understand far more when listening to someone read out loud

than they can when reading independently. Exposure to rich language in this context accelerates vocabulary and comprehension development.

2. It builds stamina. Daily immersion in a sustained story develops focus and endurance.
3. It creates emotional engagement. When pupils care about the story, they want to keep reading. In some schools, children have gone on to seek out sequels to the books they've heard, and start to read more independently.
4. It models reading as a process. When teachers encounter unfamiliar vocabulary and think aloud, pupils see that reading involves effort, even for adults.

Isn't this just story time?

Not quite. Leaders often ask how this process differs from reading at the end of the day. The answer lies in intent and rigour. This approach to reading aloud is not an add on, but rather a timetabled, consistent process of 20-30 minutes per day, focused on high-quality texts and delivered with clear expectations; pupils are expected to track the text and remain engaged. This is deliberate practice, not incidental exposure.

Realities of reading

One of the most compelling aspects of this approach is that it doesn't add to workload. Instead, it replaces existing reading lessons. As one leader explained: "The key is not to add something extra... we do this instead". This is both manageable and liberating.


If you're considering introducing this approach, my advice is to start small. Choose a rich, challenging text, commit to 20 minutes of reading out loud per day, remove follow-up tasks (at least initially), and prioritise consistency. Many schools begin with one year group and scale up over time.


It's tempting to see this approach as simply another reading intervention, but the evidence suggests that it's something far more significant. When pupils are immersed in ambitious language every day, their vocabulary expands, their thinking deepens and their outcomes improve. This isn't just about reading; it's about the quality of the whole curriculum experience.


In a system that often pushes us towards complexity, Faster Read offers something refreshingly uncomplicated. It reminds us that depth matters more than coverage, that attention


QUICK WINS


If you're wondering how to begin, start small and keep it simple:


 Read aloud for 20 minutes daily from a challenging text


 Ask pupils to track the text as you read


 Keep expectations clear: attention, listening, following


 Pause briefly to clarify meaning, then continue


 Begin each session with a short recap of the story so far

 Choose texts with rich language and strong narrative pull

 Allow space for natural discussion, rather than set questions

 Model what to do when reading is difficult: "I'm not sure what that means..."

 Build consistency: same time, same routine

 Resist the urge to add tasks — the reading is the work

matters more than activity and story matters more than task. If we want children to become readers, we need to let them experience what reading really is. It's not a set of strategies, and it's not a series of questions. It's the deep, absorbing, shared experience of a great book. **TP**



Mary Myatt is an education writer, speaker and founder of The Teachers' Collection and Myatt & Co.

The Teachers' Collection and Myatt & Co.

 marymyatt.com

WAGOLL

The Last Bard

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[tinyurl.com/tp-Bard](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-Bard)

One thing you might not know about me: I am a mega, enormo-fan of William Shakespeare. Seriously, a massive fangirl. (It's very hard to keep a book in print these days and his Complete Works is still selling pretty well, I understand – a true feat in today's publishing landscape.)

I wanted to write a book set in the world of Shakespeare for a long time, but I needed my story to be in the right place, too. It's always been my goal to encourage young readers to express their own stories through engagement with the classics, but for young people, Shakespeare's stories can be a bit... incomprehensible (though the insults are great). I wanted to create something accessible, something that celebrated and gently introduced readers to the world of Shakespeare without being too wordy and worthy.

And so, *The Last Bard* was born: the story of 13-year-old Will Davenant, the last descendant of Shakespeare, who inherits his family's legacy of a magical Complete Works from which he can summon the characters. He spends the summer at his late grandfather's flat in Arden Heights, a retirement complex infused with references to the Bard,

where he must save the building and its community with a little help from his new Shakespearean friends.

It's my hope that some of the brilliant children reading my story might go and seek out some of Shakespeare's own works. The originals are sensational – but there are lots of modern translations and loads of films that are based on his work: *West Side Story*, *The Lion King*, *10 Things I Hate About You* (ask someone in their 40s), and *Forbidden Planet* (ask someone in their 90s) are just a few of the classic films inspired by Shakespeare's tales. Even today, people are constantly using his stories as inspiration for theirs. I guess because we still care about all the same things: love, identity, power, loss, hope... The way we tell our stories might have changed a bit since W-Shakes was prancing around the Globe in his tights, but the stories themselves haven't changed that much at all.



The Last Bard, by Maz Evans (£12.99HB, Chicken House Books), is out now.

5 TIPS FOR INTRODUCING A MAGICAL OBJECT

1. SHOW, DON'T TELL

We writers *love* using extra detail to enhance descriptions. Instead of just saying something is magical (i.e. *telling* the reader), is there a way you can *show* them using extra detail instead?

2. FIVE SENSES

Describing how something looks is useful, but you can add to this by calling on all the senses: how something sounds, feels, smells and tastes. (Use the last two at your discretion.)

3. MAKE COMPARISONS

Metaphors and similes are your friends. If you're describing something invented or magical, for which the reader doesn't have a reference point, try comparing it to something the reader is already familiar with.

4. DON'T FORGET PEOPLE

Whether you're describing scenes or objects, it's just as important to write about how a character feels or interacts with their surroundings.

This helps the reader imagine how *they'd* interact with something, and brings your scene to life.

5. DON'T JUST LOOK OUTWARDS, LOOK INWARDS

The best stories evoke an emotional response from their reader. Seeing how a character responds to their surroundings can help readers visualise the overall scene, and a way to do this is to show the character's emotions. Are they scared? Happy? Surprised?



Extract from

chapter 2,
pages 25-26

This is a really important moment in *The Last Bard* – when Will opens his magical copy of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* for the first time.

Instead of saying ‘Will was confused’, this is a more visual way of presenting Will’s feelings to the reader.

Here, I describe something magical happening using a real-life example to help the reader visualise something they’ve never seen before.

This physical description builds further anticipation, and enables the reader to visualise the scene.

Will reached for the bottom right corner to raise the thick cover. It was worn in places, but still intact, and holding the pages firmly in its grasp, he curled his fingertips under the corner of the cover and started to lift it.

The moment his skin made contact with the book, a glow – or what his tired eyes thought was a glow – seeped from the pages. Will blinked heavily. It had been a tiring couple of days and he didn’t entirely trust his own brain. But his mind and eyesight agreed – the book was lighting up from the inside, as though someone had lit a lantern within it.

Half-terrified, half-fascinated, Will tightened his pinch on the corner of the book. Some deep impulse urged him to open the cover, to reveal whatever secret was hidden within. He knew that he shouldn’t. But he also knew that he would. So with a deep breath and a bold heart, he grasped on to the cover and—

‘Will!’ his mum yelled from the study across the hallway. ‘Are you done yet? I could use a hand in here!’

Will snatched his fingers away like they had been burnt. He hadn’t done anything wrong and yet he felt as guilty as if Doug had caught him on his neighbourhood watch. He looked back at the book, which had returned

to its usual colour. Or had it been that way all along? Will reached out again—

Adding this doubt in shows the reader that this feels like an unbelievable, magical moment.

Will uses logic and reality here, but then he believes what his eyes are telling him – this adds further impact to the magical event.

To make an otherwise potentially ordinary event feel extraordinary, use emotions to heighten the reader’s anticipation.

This interruption from reality breaks into the magical atmosphere that has already been created, reminding us that Will is between two worlds.

This is a clever use of a simile (if I do say so myself) – referencing something from earlier in the book to help readers further understand the situation.

Once upon A TIME

Four simple words will not only keep your pupils engaged with literacy, but make learning stick across the curriculum, say **Emma Thompson** and **Sita Brand**...

It's a rainy Tuesday. You're halfway through teaching science – the properties of materials – and half your class is staring blankly at a brick.

Now, imagine starting that same lesson with the story of the *Three Little Pigs*. Suddenly, children aren't just seeing and feeling the materials. Instead, they're experiencing the huff-and-puff consequences of a poor material choice.

Strategic storytelling can act as a fuel for the entire curriculum. Whether you are tackling the water cycle in science or the question of identity and choice in PSHE, the narrative is the hook that keeps your pupils engaged and curious.

The science of the lean

Say the words “*Let me tell you a story,*” and watch what happens. There's a physical shift – shoulders drop, eyes widen, every child leans in. But why?

The pedagogical principles behind this aren't just ‘fluff’; they are rooted in cognitive science. As humans, we are neurologically wired for narrative. Research shows that storytelling triggers chemicals in the brain, including oxytocin – also known as the trust hormone – which increases empathy and helps children simulate experiences in their own minds.

When you tell a story, your brain synchronises with your pupils'. This is known as ‘neural coupling’. In a traditional lesson, a child's brain is busy decoding abstract facts. In a story-led lesson, they are living the



information. The result? Teachers often find they need far less explanation time, because the context is already built in.

Three questions

The biggest barrier for most teachers is the fear of performance. You don't need to be an RSC actor or a stand-up comedian to make it work. You don't even need a single prop or a funny voice. You just need the ‘Start with Story’ framework: three questions which transform any traditional tale into a powerhouse lesson.

1. What's the emotional core? What is this story really about? Is it bravery, persistence, the danger of a shortcut?
2. What's the curriculum link? How does this connect to the subject area you need to teach? For example, *The Tortoise and the Hare* is a masterclass in growth mindset or the physics of speed and distance.
3. What's the extension opportunity? How can pupils act, create, or think about the story as it relates to their learning? Can they build the bridge for the *Billy Goats Gruff* using DT skills?

This is what this looks like in practice:

Science: The Brave Little Water Drop

Instead of a diagram of evaporation and condensation, tell the story of a drop of water named Wilbur who is terrified of heights.

- The story: Wilbur sits in a puddle (accumulation), feels the sun's warmth and starts to float (evaporation), meets his friends in a cold cloud (condensation) and eventually gets too heavy and falls (precipitation).
- The outcome: The children aren't memorising labels; they are remembering Wilbur's journey. When they sit their assessment, they don't look for a diagram in their head; they look for Wilbur.

Maths: The Greedy King

The abstract concept of place value can be notoriously difficult for Year 2.

Personifying the process can help make it more concrete.

- The story: A King refuses to have more than nine items in any room of his castle. As soon as a tenth item arrives, it must be

bundled up and moved to the next ‘tower’ (the Tens tower).

- The outcome: This narrative provides a logical ‘why’ behind the ‘how’. It moves the concept from a worksheet into a physical, relatable world.

Reclaiming your time

Once you're comfortable with it, you can use this simple planning technique within a few minutes: 30 seconds to pick a story, two minutes to identify the links and two minutes to jot down a few ‘pause points’ to check for understanding. You are already an expert communicator and storyteller, spending your day managing pupils with many different personalities and navigating complex social dynamics. By leaning into that natural skill, you're not just teaching facts, you're reclaiming the human heart of the classroom and ensuring that when your pupils leave at home time, the learning goes with them.

So, next time you're staring at a lesson plan, remember – the most powerful tool in your kit might just be four simple words: “*Once upon a time...*”. **TP**



Sita Brand is the founder of Settle Stories and a performance storyteller.



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settlestories.org.uk/schools

 settlestories.org.uk/schools



Published by
HarperCollins, 2025

The Lone Husky

Traverse the breathtaking Arctic Circle and learn about the power of nature – and friendship – with Hannah Gold’s latest northern installation

KATE HEAP

Return to the frozen north in Hannah Gold’s fifth environmental animal adventure for readers aged eight and up. *The Lone Husky* follows on from April Wood’s epic quest to find ‘Bear’, her polar bear friend, and rescue his cub, Peanut, in Svalbard, Norway, deep within the Arctic Circle. April and her dad have finally found happiness and their true home in the north. As Polar Night descends, the magic of the dark

season and the majesty of the pure, unbroken wilderness draw readers in with a powerful connection. Within this darkness, the light of community and friendship proves stronger than all else.

April longs for another adventure – which is never very far away in the north. Hedda is training for the Polar Race (a long-distance dog sled race across the frozen tundra) and allows April to help with the huskies. She meets Blaze, a new dog with a troubled past. April must help Blaze

learn to be strong, inside and out, and find his inner fire.

But April’s fate changes when she has the opportunity to join the race herself. She steps out in courage, ready to face the adventure of a lifetime and challenges she could never imagine. What follows is a celebration of the relationship between animals and humans, respect for the raw power of nature, and the message that anything is possible.





Activities

The Lone Husky is a thrilling book, perfect for KS2 classes exploring environmental issues, our responsibility in nature and teamwork. It will work well as a shared, group or independent read from Year 3 onwards. If children have already read *The Last Bear* and *Finding Bear*, they will enjoy the familiarity of characters and setting, but it is also a fantastic stand-alone story.

Understanding huskies

A husky is a type of dog usually found in the Arctic region of northern countries. Bred to work as sled dogs, they are strong, resilient and energetic. In modern times, they are still used as essential transportation in remote communities but also in dog-sled racing, adventure trekking and as pets.

Over time, huskies have adapted to survive in their environment. This includes a thick double coat to keep them warm and waterproof, dense fur between their toes to prevent ice buildup, specially adapted metabolism and digestion that creates additional body heat, and almond-shaped eyes to prevent squinting when the sun reflects off the snow.

Work in groups to research different aspects of these fascinating animals. Topics could include adaptations, the life of sled dogs, sled dogs around the world (Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Norway/Sweden/Finland & Russia) and the history of sled dogs. Findings could be shared with the rest of the class on a poster, PowerPoint or video.

Everyone has a role

In *The Lone Husky*, readers learn about how huskies work together as a team to pull sleds over long distances in harsh conditions. Each member of the team must do their job or there's a risk of accident and danger.

Consider the different roles in a dog sled team: the musher, the wheel dogs, the team dogs, the swing dogs and the lead dogs. You can read about these roles on pages 6-7 of the book. You might want to watch a video of a dog sled team in action, too, such as this one from a Minnesotan news channel: tinyurl.com/tp-SledDogs

Next, in the centre of a large piece of paper, pupils can draw a diagram of a dog sled team like the one found on pages 6-7 of *The Lone Husky*. Guide them to label each team member and write a short description of their



role in their own words, including key vocabulary such as *navigate*, *pull*, *turn*, *direct*, *lead* and *encourage*.

Ask children to think about how they work together with others in the classroom or outside school. They should each choose an example of a time they needed to co-operate with others. Ask: *Which dog were you most like? Did you give commands, help decide where to go, give encouragement or provide the power to get things done?* They should then write a short paragraph explaining which dog they are most like and why.

You may wish to organise the class into groups based on the type of dog each child chooses. Encourage the groups to talk about how they can build on the skills they have, and what they can do to help develop the skills of other roles.

Map of the race

The Polar Race takes racers and readers across the vast Svalbard tundra along a 500-kilometre trail.

Take it further → → →

GLOBAL WARMING

Hannah Gold's arctic stories focus on the impact of humans on the far north. Global warming and the resulting melting of polar ice caps threatens arctic animals – and polar bears are experiencing loss of their habitat and ability to hunt for seals from the ice. Without these stable hunting platforms, they are finding less food and face starvation. Additionally, less ice forces polar bears onto land where they have limited access to prey and struggle to find food, and where interactions with humans increase, which is dangerous for both people and bears. Having to swim or walk further to find food burns off essential energy and reduces

fat stores, and malnourished female bears are less likely to produce cubs. Those that are born are smaller and less resilient. Some polar bears are adapting to their changing circumstances, but many polar bear populations are declining.

Write and present a persuasive speech compelling your audience to take action on climate change to protect polar bears. Focus on human actions that cause global warming and the melting of polar ice caps (e.g. deforestation, burning fossil fuels, industrial processes). Try to include features of persuasive writing such as a clear argument, engaging

sentence starters, rhetorical questions, statistics, quotes from experts, factual evidence and emotive language.

SPIRIT ANIMALS

Gold's readers learn about themselves and their own connection to the world around them through her writing. Her special animals include polar bears, whales, sea turtles and huskies.

Some people call these types of animals a 'spirit animal' or 'totem animal' – a kind of spiritual guardian or guide to protect, teach or help a person through life. Based on indigenous cultures, a spirit animal might be chosen based on personality traits or an emotional connection.



Marked out by red flags and birch poles, each of the five stages of the race presents unique challenges that test skill, reflexes, inner strength and relationships within the team. Musher (dog sled drivers) race for up to 14 hours before resting the dogs and themselves at a checkpoint for a minimum of six hours. Only then can they set off on the next stage.

Working in groups, create a story map by sketching an outline of the Svalbard archipelago (group of islands) on a large piece of paper. Wikipedia has a good enlargeable map at wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_Svalbard. Label Longyearbyen. Using information from the text, mark out each stage of the race in a different colour (the key points are outlined below). Add significant landmarks and features for each stage. Around the map, draw and number five large boxes. Fill each box with key words and phrases to describe each stage, including the challenges teams faced. You may wish to include April's

emotions as she completed each stage (e.g. *nervous, hopeful, peaceful*, etc).

The race begins in Longyearbyen, heading east towards the coast following a frozen riverbed (described in chapter 26). Stage 2 continues east before turning northwards along the coast then inland through towering mountains (chapter 28). Stage 3 is one of the most challenging, taking the teams across the Høybreen glacier (chapters 29-30). Stage 4 is the northernmost section with the trail looping back towards Longyearbyen over frozen lakes (chapter 31). Stage 5 takes teams up and over Shadowtop Mountain before finishing in Longyearbyen (chapters 34-38).

Sketches

In *The Lone Husky*, Levi Pinfold's illustrations show us the unique appearance of these striking dogs with coats the colour of snow, silver and starlight; piercing blue, brown or amber eyes (sometimes eyes of different colours); and fine facial

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *Beyond the Frozen Horizon* by Nicola Penfold
- ❖ *The Arctic Railway Assassin* by MG Leonard, Sam Sedgman & Elisa Paganelli
- ❖ *Mammoth Rider* by S.J. Poyton
- ❖ *The Arctic Fox* by Holly Webb & David Dean
- ❖ *Two Bears* by Patricia Hegarty & Rotem Teplow

features. Look at the illustration of Blaze on page 69 and other images of huskies. Using coloured pencils, create a drawing of your own husky – it could be just head and neck or the whole body of the dog. Start with a light pencil outline then colour it in using shading and layering of colour. Don't rush, but build up the colour bit by bit.

Think about different coloured patches of fur, features on the face, ears, neck, body or tail, and be sure to include striking eye colour. **TP**



Kate Heap is a primary English consultant, author and children's book reviewer. Her Developing Reading Comprehension

Skills series provides teachers with high-quality, engaging texts and thought-provoking questions that will inspire young readers.

scopeforimagination.co.uk

Find your spirit animal: draw a vertical line down the centre of a piece of paper. On the left, list as many of your personal characteristics as possible. Are you kind, patient, energetic, thoughtful or quick-tempered? Looking at a list of character traits might help. Split the right side of the page into three sections with horizontal lines. Think of three animals that might match your personal characteristics (a kitten is curious, an owl is thoughtful, an eagle is strong, for example). In each box, write the name of the animal, draw a sketch and list the characteristics that match your own. Ask friends for suggestions if you're not sure which animals to choose.

Get to know your spirit animal: choose

the animal you feel closest to. Find out more about it by reading informational texts and watching videos. Share what you learn in a leaflet, report, poster or an adventure story like Hannah Gold's.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

'Then she tilted her gaze upwards to where the northern lights danced overhead. The aurora borealis. April had seen many colours caused by solar storms – greens, pinks, oranges, but today was the rarest hue of all. Red.' (*The Lone Husky*, p84).

Have you ever seen the northern lights? Caused by solar flares interacting with the Earth's atmosphere, these

beautiful lights are most commonly seen in the far north.

Create northern lights of your own using oil pastels. Start by building up a night sky across the top half of the page. Deep blues and a little bit of black will blend to create the background you need. Fill the dark sky with swirls of light. Green and white are the most common, with pinks, purples, blues and reds moving among them. Add layers of colour and blend in an upward direction. Add a snowy scene in the foreground. You might want to include snow drifts, pine trees, mountains and even some small animals. There are lots of images to look at online to give you some ideas, such as this one from space.com: tinyurl.com/tp-spaceNL

Take control of SENTENCE STRUCTURE



Pie Corbett shares engaging activities for perfecting short-burst, non-fiction paragraphs

The new writing framework highlights the importance of children being able to swiftly, accurately and effectively create sentences. This then leads to creating links between sentences to create paragraphs. Children benefit from ‘boxing up’ texts so that they think about how writers organise writing into chunks, considering the function of paragraphs.

In *Fig. 1*, you can see how the reader has ‘worked out’ what each paragraph is about, when writing about sharks:

Title – to interest the reader	Sharks – the deadly fish?
Opening – to draw in the reader.	Have you ever stepped into the sea and wondered whether a shark will attack you? Most people live in fear of sharks and believe that they are cold-blooded killers. However, you are more likely to be struck by lightning than killed by a shark.
Description – what they look like	The large majority of sharks are easily recognisable because they have pointed snouts, staring eyes and sharp teeth. Amazingly, they range in size from the tiny Lantern Shark to the Whale Shark, often longer than 12 metres. During its lifetime, a shark grows and loses thousands of teeth. In addition, their skin is made of rough scales.
Habitat – where they live	Sharks live in the sea and are found around the world. Some sharks live on the seabed and tend to have flattened bodies. These have what are known as ‘barbels’, which they use to disturb sand in order to find food. However, the majority live near the surface and their fins can be seen as they glide through water.
Feeding habits – what they eat	Everyone knows that sharks are meat-eating fish. Many hunt fish and squid whilst those who feed on the seabed eat lobsters, crabs, shrimps, mussels and sea urchins. Amazingly, sharks have been found with cows, horses, dogs and chickens in their stomachs. However, it is worth remembering that they very rarely attack humans.

Fig. 1

Use this pattern when writing texts about a different deadly creature. For example, let us imagine that we were going to write about an adder. Pupils could use the basic pattern and add extra paragraphs (see *Fig. 2*).

Title – to interest the reader
Opening – to draw in the reader
Description – what they look like
Habitat – where they live
Feeding habits – what they eat
How to avoid being attacked
What to do if you are bitten
Why adders need protection

Fig. 2

Beginning, middle, end

A simple way to organise information paragraphs is to gather facts that go together and put them into chunks. Use sub-headings:

What cats eat

Most cats are fed on a diet of wet and dry cat food. In the main, wet cat food is a mixture of either fish or animal meat. Temptingly, the meat is covered in a flavoured jelly. Also, domestic cats may be fed dry food, which is rather like crunchy biscuits. If cats eat dry food, they should drink plenty of water. Additionally, cats supplement the diet that their owners feed them by eating things like insects and spiders. Furthermore, some may even catch mice and birds.

The subheading can be turned into a ‘topic sentence’. The topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about. It introduces the other sentences:

Cats eat a range of food. Most of them are fed on a diet of wet and dry cat food. Wet cat food is a mixture of either fish or animal meat...

When teaching topic sentences, decide the sub-heading first and turn it into a topic sentence. Read examples and imitate them. For instance, many non-chronological reports begin with some sort of definition (*A palomino is a type of horse which...*). This type of opening can be imitated (*A whale is a type of mammal which...*).

“Children benefit from ‘boxing up’ texts so they can organise writing into chunks”

Here are some topic sentences from different types of writing (Fig. 3). It should be obvious what the rest of the paragraph is going to be about.

When a question is used, the rest of the paragraph answers the question. In non-fiction, paragraph changes are made when a new topic or section of information is started or to make a new point or argument.

Linking sentences

Most non-fiction paragraphs begin with topic sentences that introduce the subject of that paragraph. So, if a paragraph begins with the words *Lions are mainly found in Africa*, one would expect that the rest of the paragraph would be about their location.

A close look at non-fiction will soon help children begin to build different strategies for adding in more facts to each paragraph. In some cases, the writer needs to organise the information by order and will therefore need temporal language, e.g. *first, next, later, after that, finally*. These terms are useful in writing recounts, instructions and explanations where a logical order may be important.

On other occasions the writer may need to add in extra facts: *also, additionally, furthermore, moreover, as well as, that...*

Reasons may need to be organised or explained: *some people think that, another reason, it could also be argued that, another key fact is that, so, because, therefore, if.*

Other views or ideas may need to be introduced: *on the other hand, however, although, in contrast, whereas, similarly.*

Use fronted adverbs to intrigue the reader: *amazingly, strangely, weirdly, bizarrely, interestingly, intriguingly...*

Topic sentence used to start the paragraph	Subject of the paragraph
<i>In the village, there is a school.</i>	Information about the school
<i>Otters are hard to find.</i>	Where otters are found
<i>Next, you will need to assemble the tent.</i>	How to assemble the tent
<i>Lions have a limited diet.</i>	The lion’s diet
<i>There are many reasons why a new supermarket should not be built.</i>	The reasons why the supermarket should not be built
<i>Not much equipment is needed to be a scuba diver.</i>	Equipment needed for scuba diving
<i>Bicycling makes a good activity.</i>	Reasons for bicycling being a good activity
<i>After lunch, we visited the butterfly house.</i>	What we saw in the butterfly house
<i>Have you ever wondered what a blue whale looks like?</i>	Description of the blue whale

Fig. 3



Most are born in nests that can be found in trees. **For instance**, rooks build their nests right at the very top of tall trees.

Using adverbials, practise linking sentences. Using invented creatures makes this easier:

Most dragons live in dark places. **For instance**, fire dragons are found in caves on mountain tops.

To become skilled at writing non-fiction paragraphs, children need:

- plenty of information, ideas and views;
- model texts to look at structure and paragraphing;
- to create subheadings to create topic sentences;
- to use adverbials to thread information sentences together.

Plenty of practice pays off! **TP**

Non-fiction is often about specific events, creatures or objects. However, it may also be written in a more general fashion about a subject such as *whales* or *foxes* or *baby birds*. For example:

Baby birds are born in all kinds of places. Most are born in nests that can be found in trees. For instance, all rooks build their nests right at the very top of tall trees. Some birds build their nests inside trees.

Intriguingly, woodpeckers use their sharp beaks to drill holes into the tree trunks where they lay their eggs.

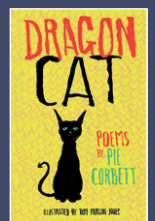
A few baby birds live on the ground.

In fact, skylarks tend to disguise their nests in tall grass so that predators do not find them.

In this example, the writer has used generalising words and phrases such as *most*, *all*, *some*, *a few*, and *tend to* to talk about places birds may nest. This allows the writer to refer ‘in general’. These words and phrases may be very handy in such writing, e.g. *the majority*, *the minority*, *most*, *many*, *nearly all*, *all*, *some*, *generally*, *a few*, *a handful*, *several*, *a small number*, *they tend to*, *they*, *their*. Notice too how the fronted adverbial *for instance* creates a link between sentences:



Pie's latest book of poems, *Dragon Cat*, illustrated by Tom Morgan-Jones, (£9.99, Otter Barry Books) is out now.



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4

Take on The Fiver Challenge!

Running from 1–26 June, The Fiver Challenge, supported by HSBC UK, is a free, national enterprise programme that teachers can run with pupils aged 5–11 to build confidence, creativity and essential life skills, with the chance for schools to win up to £1,000 through competitions running across the four weeks.

Pupils receive £5 and create and run their own microbusiness, gaining hands-on experience in planning, budgeting, marketing and selling. Teachers are supported with flexible, ready-to-use downloadable resources that link across the curriculum. Skills Builder Level 3 accredited and available in Welsh, register at fiverchallenge.org.uk to get started.



3

Boost reading in your school

Pageticker is the UK's top-rated digital reading diary for primary schools, encouraging children to read more. Teachers can see every pupil's progress at a glance, celebrate achievements with badges and rewards, and set easy-to-monitor reading challenges over the holidays. Children get tailored book recommendations and parents can log reading at home with a free app. Senior leaders get clear whole-school insight, plus seamless MIS integration. Enjoy free whole-school access to all features until September 2026, and see how Pageticker boosts reading in your school. Visit pageticker.com

5

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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Ofsted can sometimes feel too much to tackle on your own – with the Ofsted risk assessment, you don't have to. Get started on your Ofsted risk assessment today.

Visit healthandsafety@neu.org.uk and tinyurl.com/tp-NEUAbolishOfsted

Book CLUB



We review five new titles that your class will love

REVIEWS BY KATE HEAP

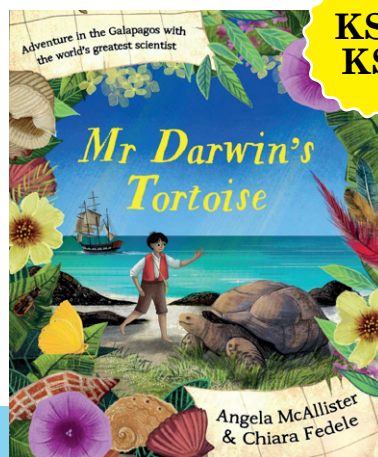


KS1/
LKS2

The Adventures of Portly the Otter

by MG Leonard, ill. Polly Dunbar

(£14.99HB, Farshore)



KS1/
KS2

Mr Darwin's Tortoise

by Angela McAllister
& Chiara Fedele

(£12.99HB, Zephyr)



KS2

Wild Apprentice

by Sarah Roberts

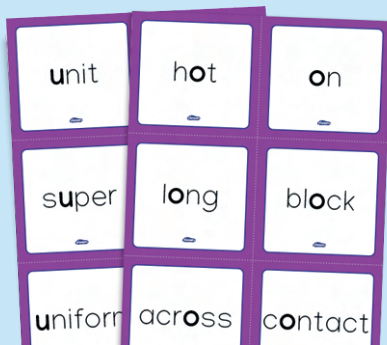
(£12.99HB, Scholastic)

This charming return to E.H. Shepard's *The Wind in the Willows* will captivate new readers and fill adults with warmth. Told through four seasons, old friends Ratty, Mole, Badger and Mr Toad join Portly on a new adventure along the river. Polly Dunbar's gorgeous illustrations refresh familiar characters while giving the book a classic feel. As young Portly the otter explores the river, growing in strength and confidence, readers come to understand the importance of relationships, loyalty and how to tell right from wrong. This beautiful celebration of nature, the British countryside and those stories that stay with us even after we've long grown up will inspire the next generation and encourage them to get lost in adventure by the river.

This beautiful historical fiction picturebook introduces us to Antonio, who lives on the Galápagos Islands and meets Charles Darwin when he arrives on his ship, *The Beagle*. Antonio is curious and loves exploring his island home and learning about the unique creatures that live there. He's thrilled to discover Mr Darwin loves asking questions too. Antonio introduces Darwin to the creatures of the island, teaching him everything he knows. In return, Darwin shares his research and encourages Antonio to continue exploring and asking questions. The story encourages readers to be curious themselves, looking at the world more closely and celebrating the wonders of nature, while Chiara Fedele's colourful – and accurate – illustrations bring the Galápagos flora and fauna (and Darwin's cabin) to life.

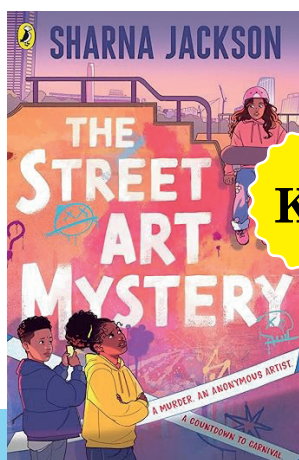
This is a career guide like no other, with the outdoors, adventure and exploration at its heart. Introducing readers to the wildest jobs around the world, *Wild Apprentice* focuses on our essential responsibility to protect the planet, and challenges us all to look at the world in a new way, keeping it healthy and fighting climate change. Readers are introduced to exciting and fulfilling careers such as eco-journalist, wildlife filmmaker, marine biologist, climatologist and wilderness medic. Brightly illustrated pages and short sections of text create an accessible resource that will be useful across KS2. Quotes from experts already doing the job bring it to life in a practical way, while details about the skills required, encourage real connections between humans and the earth.

→→→ **RECOMMENDED**
RESOURCES



BOOST CORE PHONICS SKILLS

Enhance your phonics teaching with these bright and engaging resources from Plazoom. They include word mats, flashcards and games, as well as comprehension worksheets, so your youngest readers can use their blending skills to understand sentences and craft responses in a range of ways, including drawing and writing. Browse resources at tinyurl.com/tp-plz-phonics



The Street Art Mystery

by Sharna Jackson

(£8.99, Penguin)

Margot and her friends call themselves the ‘Copseys’ – a mystery solving trio who’ve had a lot of success in Luton. Now Margot’s mum has moved back to London, meaning Margot has to move there too. Wesley and Josephine come to help her get settled and enjoy the iconic Notting Hill Carnival, but when there’s a murder in the art gallery, the mood changes and everyone’s a suspect.

On the trail of super secretive street artist TRIK, the Copseys must use their intuition and assertiveness, racing through skate parks, tower blocks and canal tow paths, asking the right questions to keep themselves safe and identify the murderer before anyone else gets hurt. Along the way, they gain insight into the art world, the unique West London culture and how being creative is what truly makes us human.



The House with Chicken Legs Runs Away

by Sophie Anderson

(£8.99, Usborne)

Marinka and her Yaga house have returned in this long-awaited sequel, and this time, the Yaga House is behaving strangely. When a guiding goes wrong and the gate to the afterlife becomes uncontrollable, the house runs away. Marinka and her best friend Benjamin chase after it and find themselves on the most incredible quest. Layered with authentic experiences of morality, relationships and truth, the depth and challenge of the themes in *The House With Chicken Legs Runs Away* draw readers into this magical world and encourage them to think about what’s truly important in their own lives. Love this book? Check out our exclusive WAGOLL for Sophie’s insight into how she created the tale, along with a fully-resourced teaching pack, at tinyurl.com/trw-chicken

Meet the
author

SOPHIE ANDERSON
ON THE CIRCLE OF LIFE, AND
FINDING YOUR TRUE SELF



This book deals beautifully with death and loss. What’s your favourite folklore

story about this part of life?

In the Brothers Grimm version of *Cinderella*, an enchanted tree grows on Cinderella’s mother’s grave that houses a bird who helps Cinderella in times of need. I love how this visually represents the circle of life and shows how loved ones can continue to guide and comfort us even after death (although of course they do this in a very different way to when they were alive).

What advice would you love to give your younger self about accepting your place in the world?

When you are young (and even when you are older!) it can be easy to be swept along by other people’s ideas of what we should do and how we should be, what we should accept and what paths we should follow. So I would try to express how important it is to be yourself, truly, to define your own place in the world, and follow your own dream!

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

I would love teachers and students to read the book together, have rich and open discussions about some of the themes, and be inspired creatively too. What would students one day take to the stars? What magical object would they like to fly in, and to where? What might they see in their gate to the soul? And how would they care for a house with chicken legs in trouble?



The House with Chicken Legs Runs Away, by Sophie Anderson, is out now.

Geography



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- To locate countries and continents using atlases, globes, and maps, using geographical vocabulary to describe position
- How to identify and distinguish between human and physical geographical features
 - How to ask and answer geographical enquiry questions using evidence from maps, images, and texts
- To compare another country's environment and culture with their own, using appropriate geographical language

Let storytelling take you around the world...



Use the power of stories to help pupils explore countries and cultures far beyond their front doors, with **Sharika Chauhan**

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Explore the globe with your class through an engaging narrative... no plane ticket required!

This lesson uses a short story extract as the spark for real geographical enquiry, guiding pupils from imagination to investigation through maps, images, and discussion. Whether you're a geography specialist or teaching it for the first time, the activities here are straightforward to run and genuinely engaging. Pupils develop locational knowledge, explore human and physical features, and reflect on how environment shapes the way people live, all anchored in a story they want to hear.



START HERE

Pick a short extract from any story set in another country. It doesn't have to be a geography book. The key is vivid, sensory details (the Book Trust has a great list of recommendations at tinyurl.com/tp-BTcultures).



Compare these two portrayals of the same scene:

Dry: They walked through the forest. It was hot and there were lots of trees.

Vivid: The air was thick and wet, pressing in from every side. Insects clicked and whirred above the canopy, and the smell of damp earth rose up with every step.

The second version gives pupils something to work with. Clues about climate, vegetation and landscape lead naturally into geographical thinking. Read your chosen extract aloud and ask pupils to listen for those sensory clues.

What do they notice? Can they describe what the place looks, feels, or smells like?

MAIN LESSON

1 | MAPPING THE JOURNEY

Hand out atlases or printed world maps. Show pupils how to use the index to find the focus country, modelling each step, as it's a skill many children find tricky. Once they've located it, challenge them to identify the continent, neighbouring countries and any nearby oceans or seas.

Next, ask children to sketch a simple map showing both the UK and the focus country, connecting them with a line to visualise the journey. Here's an example of what a pupil might record: *The country is Kenya, in East*

Africa. It borders the Indian Ocean to the southeast. To get there from the UK, you would travel south, crossing Europe and the Mediterranean Sea.

Encourage pupils to describe the country's position using terms like *north*, *south*, *coastal*, *mountainous* or *near the equator*. This builds spatial awareness and helps children understand that the world's places relate to one another in ways that matter. Distance affects climate, trade and culture.

You can provide a simple worksheet for pupils to label the country, continent and surrounding geographical features. You can make your own, or download a 'map journey' worksheet at the link in the panel on the right.



“Prompt the children to support their answers with evidence from the photos or story extract”

2 | INVESTIGATING PLACE

Show photographs of the country – its landscapes, cities, homes, or cultural landmarks. Model how to read visual evidence by thinking aloud. For example:

I can see very little tree cover and a flat, dry landscape. That tells me the rainfall here is probably low. Locals might need to travel long distances to find water.

Then invite pupils to explore three prompts in pairs before sharing with the class:

- What is the physical environment like?
- How do people live there?
- How might daily life compare to ours in the UK?

Prompt the children to support their answers with evidence from the photos or story extract.

Consider these more natural sentence starters to get discussion flowing: ‘I think... because I can see...’ or ‘The photo shows... so that means...’ or ‘This is a human feature because people built it.’ Encourage vocabulary like *climate*, *vegetation*, *urban*, *rural*, *transport*, and *landscape*. Don’t worry if pupils use these terms imperfectly at first. Using them in context is how they become confident with them.

Find a worksheet to complement this section of the lesson in the linked resources on the right.

3 | CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND FOOD

Geography isn’t just about maps. It’s about people. This section helps pupils connect the environment to everyday life, and it’s often a class favourite.

Ask children to consider how language and food might differ in the country you’re exploring. For example, if the focus country is Japan, pupils might learn to say ‘konnichiwa’ (hello) and ‘sayonara’ (goodbye), and discover that steaming bowls of rice or ramen, rich with salty broth and soft noodles, appear frequently. If it’s Brazil, ‘olá’ (hello in Portuguese) and ‘tchau’ (goodbye) are good vocab starting points, and pupils could discuss why sweet tropical fruits like mango and guava are everyday staples rather than occasional treats.

Show photographs of traditional dishes and ask: What ingredients can you spot? What does this tell us about the country’s climate or farming? How does this compare to the food we eat at home?

This discussion helps pupils understand that geography, culture and environment are deeply connected. The land shapes what people grow, eat, build and celebrate.

Sharika Chauhan is the author of Maya’s Worldly Wonders®, delivering interactive storytelling and geography workshops in primary schools across the UK, exploring cultures and places through narrative and enquiry.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Ask pupils to write a postcard from the country describing what they might see, hear, and eat there.
- Create a ‘country passport,’ where pupils record the country name, continent, capital city, one physical feature, one human feature, and a comparative sentence about how it differs from the UK (worksheet link below). Offer two levels of example to support different writers: For LKS2: *‘Brazil is hot and rainy, but the UK has four seasons.’* For UKS2: *‘Brazil has a tropical climate that supports dense rainforest, whereas the UK has a temperate climate with more varied, seasonal landscapes.’*

tw teachwire



Download your FREE worksheets at

tinyurl.com/tp-WorldStories

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Can you locate this country on the world map and describe where it is?
- What physical features can you identify from the images or story?
- How do people live in this environment, and what shapes those choices?
- In what ways is daily life here similar to life in the UK, and where does it differ?



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SCHOOL SESSIONS AT



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roalddahlmuseum.org/schools

5 WAYS... Academy21 can support primary transition

Provide specialised and nurturing provision for pupils making the move up to secondary school



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Academy21 is the UK's first DfE-accredited online alternative provision. We deliver live, teacher-led Key Stage 2–5 education, providing a broad curriculum and unparalleled wellbeing support to help students overcome barriers and succeed.

1 HOLISTIC ORACY AND PSHE

Academy21 doesn't treat oracy as an 'extra' - it is woven into a holistic Key Stage 2 curriculum that combines reading, writing, and maths with pastoral development. In our live virtual classrooms, students engage in 'Circle Time', teamwork, and speaking tasks designed to build foundational communication skills. By practising subject-specific vocabulary and verbal reasoning in a safe, small-group setting (maximum 15 students), Year 6 pupils develop the 'voice' and self-advocacy they need to thrive in the more talk-heavy environment of secondary school.

2 WELLBEING AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Our provision features dedicated 'Reading & Wellbeing' and 'Maths & Social Skills' sessions, specifically designed to prepare students for the emotional milestones of transition. These courses address everything from cyber safety and relationships to mindfulness and bullying. By integrating wellbeing into the daily timetable, we help anxious or vulnerable learners build the resilience and emotional regulation required to navigate the social complexities of a new school, ensuring they are 'secondary-ready' both academically and emotionally.



Academy 21
The Online Alternative Provision Experts

Contact:
Web: academy21.co.uk

3 LIVE LESSONS WITH SPECIALISTS

We bridge the 'curriculum dip' between Year 6 and 7 through 100 per cent live, interactive lessons taught by fully qualified subject specialists. Our KS2 and KS3 programmes use state-of-the-art virtual tools to mirror the structure of a traditional classroom while offering the comfort of a remote setting. With no pressure to use webcams, students can participate via typed or

4 ADJUSTABLE SUPPORT

Flexibility is vital during this critical time. Academy21 offers a responsive service, with students able to access live lessons within 48 hours of referral. Our provision is completely adjustable; placements can be as short as one week to bridge a gap or provide a 'reintegration boost'. With no long-term contracts and the ability to scale support up or down as a student's confidence grows, we offer schools a truly responsive partner for managing fluctuating needs.

5 REAL-TIME EUI DATA

Effective transition planning requires more than just attendance figures. Through our Mentor Portal, school leaders see real-time EUI scores (Effort, Understanding, and Interaction) for every single lesson. This granular data, alongside weekly attendance summaries and termly academic reports, provides a clear 'map' of a student's progress. It would allow Year 7 tutors to identify what the student needs or struggles with when they come to them in September, and allows Year 6 teachers to put additional support in place as part of the overall support plan.

KEY POINTS

DfE-accredited quality

As the first accredited online AP, we meet rigorous national standards for safeguarding, teaching quality, and student outcomes, giving schools total peace of mind.

Rapid onboarding

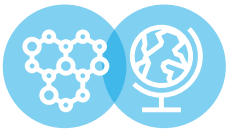
Our 48-hour enrolment and 24/7 Mentor Portal access ensure that no student suffers a break in their education during critical transition periods.

Relational teaching

Students work with the same specialist teachers at the same time each day, fostering the stable, trusting relationships essential for vulnerable learners.

Granular reporting

Track more than just attendance; our unique EUI scoring system gives you a live window into every student's effort, understanding, and classroom interaction.



How to carry out a biodiversity survey at school



See the natural world from a new perspective and monitor the changes around you, with **Julie Whelan**

[wakehurst_kew](#) [kew.org/wakehurst](#)

A biodiversity survey creates a snapshot of the variety of life in a small natural area, encouraging budding ecologists to map out the landscape around them. At Wakehurst, our scientists have transformed the landscape into a living laboratory, continuously recording species abundance and diversity, habitat change, weather data and much more. In this lesson, pupils become field scientists, taking stock of the plants and animals that make up the natural tapestry of their chosen habitat – anywhere from the school playing field to a local green space or back garden.



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to use a range of field equipment recording field conditions, plant and pollinator species
- How to interpret data
- The importance of biodiverse habitats and how to protect them
- The positive impacts of connecting to nature

START HERE

Begin by introducing the concept of biodiversity and the immense variety of all living things on Earth. There is an engaging animated

introduction at tinyurl.com/tp-biodiversity that you could watch together. Children can start reflecting on what biodiversity they've noticed around them, or even by looking out a nearby window. To get their brains active, set a timer and challenge pupils to name as many species of bird or flower as they can. These could then become targets for them to spot once you're outside doing the survey.



MAIN LESSON

1 | PREPARE YOUR EQUIPMENT

Kit will vary depending on what you want the groups to monitor. Choose from the list below to suit:

- 50 cm by 50 cm quadrats (these can be created with wood, bamboo sticks or string)
- Biodiversity recording sheets (tinyurl.com/tp-record-sheets)
- Beaufort wind scale card (tinyurl.com/tp-beaufort)
- Wind flag
- Bubbles
- Compass
- Thermometers for air and soil
- Plant ID sheets – Kew Endeavour's site (endeavour.kew.org) is

home to lots of useful ID resources

- Magnifiers
- Insect ID charts – head to Wakehurst's Trees for Bees page (tinyurl.com/tp-trees-for-bees) for a pollinator ID guide

Once you've got your kit, divide pupils into small groups and explain that they will be field scientists for the day, carrying out counts of different plants, trees and insects. As it's not possible to count every single blade of grass or insect, they will each be concentrating on a 50cm square, tracking the number of different species rather than every single instance. (Or if you prefer, the children could count how many of several species appear in their quadrat and create tally charts.)



“It’s important to decide the variables you want to record, depending on the equipment available”

2 | CARRY OUT YOUR SURVEYS

Next, pupils can head out into their chosen plots, lay down the quadrats and take note of the climate and conditions on the day.

It’s important to decide the variables you want to record, depending on the equipment available: whether this is wind speed or direction using the Beaufort scale, bubbles or a streamer and compass; or measuring air or soil temperature using thermometers.

Pupils should always record the date, time, weather and location of their plot, as this will enable them to measure change over time. Location can be noted by laying out tape measures at the edges of the plot and recording a two-digit number – representing a grid of square metres. Once the grid

has been plotted, set the timer and start recording.

There are a few different ways you can approach this task. You could ask the children to identify all the different species in the plot – i.e. how many individual species appear in total; or you might want to create a tally chart for several pre-decided species. Species ID sheets suitable for younger pupils are widely available online. Pupils could also record species cover by shading in a square on their recording sheets, representing the percentage cover of plants in the quadrat.

For pollinators, a FIT (Flower-Insect Timed) count is a great way to carry out a survey, and is a technique employed by many pollinator scientists. In the quadrat, select a handful of target flowers and spend 10 minutes

counting insects that are already sitting on the flowers when you start, or land on target flowers during your allocated time. You could break this tally down into bumblebees, honeybees, flies and butterflies.

Once again, make sure you’ve noted the time of day and weather conditions as important factors.

3 | NEXT STEPS

So, what does the biodiversity data mean? Take time to look through the results together and spot any patterns. Note down any correlations between the species found, the temperature and time of day or the location. Decide how you will record the data, whether that’s using graphs, charts or other methods. This is also a great opportunity for pupils to build their IT and computing skills.

Pupils could look for patterns such as whether certain bees prefer certain flowers, or whether there was more of a plant species in sunlight or shade. If you’re carrying out regular surveys over a period of time, is there an increase or decrease in any species? Can the children suggest why and what could they do to ensure an increase? Every small bit of data helps towards the wider story of why biodiverse landscapes are important.

Julie Whelan is learning manager at Wakehurst, overseeing the 14,000+ school pupils and teachers using the landscape as their outdoor classroom. She also leads on nature connectedness research.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Now it’s time to add the ‘people layer’ to your data. Following the biodiversity survey, you could lead a ‘nature connectedness’ sensory walk with your pupils, stopping periodically to tune in to the different sights, sounds, smells and textures of the natural world. How does tuning in to nature make them feel?
- Ask pupils to close their eyes and count how many different natural sounds they can hear.
- Using a colour wheel, how many different colours in nature can the children find?
- Have pupils use tablets or cameras to record one thing that made them smile, something soft, something spiky and something that smells nice.

Find out more about Nature Connectedness at kew.org/wakehurst/connecting-with-nature

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- How does biodiversity compare in different locations?
- What could you do to protect or increase biodiversity?
- What could you do to bring more pollinators into your garden or school grounds?
- Where and how do you feel most connected to nature?



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- Consolidate recent learning of a new concept through low-stakes but purposeful practice
- Think about how data is presented and how this can be made more or less useful
- Work in an organised, systematic manner, recording ideas clearly

Inspire curiosity with open-goal learning



Extend existing maths knowledge – and generate LOTS of correct answers – with **Jo Austen**

in joausten

As with so many elements of teaching, there isn't a silver bullet for the challenge of mixed-attainment learning, but for some maths topics, goal-free problems can really help. In short, we're going to give the class a rich, high-quality example of whatever we're focusing on, along with the prompt, "What can you work out?". There is no specific answer or 'goal' to the problem – just the opportunity for children to practise and extend their work as far as they can. The goal-free problem in this lesson looks at two-way tables, but the same idea can work well for many maths topics.



START HERE

Goal-free lessons work best as further application and practice of a topic the class knows well. It's therefore best to start with a quick teacher-led recap of the concept you'll be covering – checking for understanding, and ironing out any misconceptions before moving on to the goal-free tasks. (In this instance we are working with two-way tables.) Goal-free problems should not be used when introducing new knowledge and new concepts; children can't drive their own practice or extend their thinking with content that they haven't already understood securely.



MAIN LESSON

1 | GET STUCK IN!

Show the children Table 1*, and present them with the following problem: *Children in Year 4, 5 and 6 were asked about the number of pets in their home. Look at the results in the two-way table below. What can you work out?* Allow the children to take a

look at both the table and the question, and have an initial discussion.

Give the class a few more minutes to work independently, circulating and watching closely. This assessment will help you judge where to go next.

Perhaps the biggest strength of a goal-free problem is that it's very low-stakes. There's a relatively complex chain of

	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
No pets	23		18	
1 or 2 pets	14	8		
3 or more pets	21		20	59
Total		57		174

Table 1.



“Goal-free lessons work best as further application and practice of a topic the class knows well”

few sentence starters to model the type of data analysis you are looking for:

In total, _____ children don't have any pets. _____ more Year 6s than Year 5s have 3 or more pets We can't work out _____ because...

- What is the minimum total number of pets owned by each year group? If all of the '1 or 2 pets' children had just 1, and all of the '3 or more pets' children had 3...

3 | BRING IT TOGETHER

Build in some time at the end of the lesson for children to share findings. Do this as talk partners initially, perhaps in different pairs if children have already been working in twos at their table. Choose a variety of pupils to briefly share with the whole class, exposing everyone to the range of directions in which the problem has been taken.

It's also a good moment to develop children's metacognitive skills, reflecting on how the goal-free task can support their thinking when they are faced with a regular maths problem, where the goal is made clear at the start. Frequently, these can be accessed and unlocked by taking a 'get stuck in and see what you can work out' approach, even if the route forward isn't immediately clear.

*Jo Austen is an assistant headteacher in Leyton, East London. His book, **Small Numbers, Big Ideas: Essential Concepts for Teaching Early Maths**, was published by Hachette in 2024.*

reasoning required to complete the whole thing and a command to "Complete the table" could well be overwhelming for some. The softer, goal-free question, "What can you work out?" is a lot more inviting and gives a more supportive nudge to get stuck in.

*Note: you can find a completed table at tinyurl.com/tp-OpenGoalMaths

2 | NUDGE IT ALONG

Although it's certainly a more open-ended task, a goal-free problem doesn't mean we simply sit back and see where things go. It's important to have various pre-prepared avenues we want this to go down.

Then nudge the whole class, or groups of children, down those avenues, depending on how it's going. For our two-way table problem, I'd consider these possibilities:

- After a while, when many children might have already completed the table, display a chain of questions that will scaffold that process for any who are struggling:

What is the total number of children in Year 4? Now find the total in Year 6.

Yes, we're diverting from the goal-free-ness a bit here, but if it turns out some children don't have the basics secured, we need to intervene.

- Ask "What can you tell me from this data?". Put up a

EXTENDING THE LESSON

• This goal-free problem has been carefully designed to get children thinking about how data is presented and how useful (or not!) that choice is. Here, the design of the two-way table leaves plenty to be desired due to the lack of specificity in the '1 or 2' and '3 or more' options. Challenge children to explain the shortcomings of the design, ideally in the context of a real-life scenario that couldn't be addressed with this data table.

• A further extension option would be to task children to reimagine the data set in a different two-way table that addresses the issues they've identified above. You could scaffold this by saying, for example, that the highest number of pets any child had was 5.

• Can pupils then reproduce their new complete data table as a problem for a partner to solve, working the reasoning chain backwards to leave as many blank boxes as possible, whilst ensuring completion remains achievable?

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What did you start with? Why? Were there any other ways you could have started?
- What would happen if X number was changed to Y? What else would have changed?
- What can't be worked out?
- How could you improve the table?

OUTDOOR LEARNING

Sparkyard Outdoor Classroom Collection



A flexible, song-led resource that brings music, creativity and cross-curricular learning outdoors while keeping planning simple for busy teachers

AT A GLANCE

- Subscription-based platform with songs and teaching resources
- Outdoor Classroom Collection for ages four to seven
- Catchy, curriculum-linked songs and activities
- Ready-to-use lesson ideas with minimal preparation
- Strong links to EYFS and Key Stage 1 learning



REVIEWED BY: EMMA CATE THOMPSON

Out of the Ark has long been a go-to for high-quality musical resources, and Sparkyard feels like a natural next step. It takes everything teachers already value and pulls it into one place in a way that just works. Sparkyard is a subscription platform packed with songs, lesson ideas and teaching resources, and within that, the Outdoor Classroom Collection focuses on taking learning beyond the four walls of the classroom. It is practical, well thought through and, quite honestly, they have knocked it out of the park with how easy it is to use.

The songs are, as always, a real highlight. They are catchy in a way that stays with you long after the lesson ends, but still simple enough for younger children to pick up quickly. *Walk to School* is one of those songs you can immediately imagine being sung around the classroom, and probably long after as well. *Please Don't Squish Me* is another standout, and what I particularly like is how it reinforces understanding of minibeasts in a very natural, organic way. It links clearly to EYFS Understanding the World and carries through into Key Stage 1 science without ever feeling forced.

What Sparkyard does so well is to make those cross-curricular links feel effortless. Making music outdoors guidance is a great example. This is not just about taking a lesson outside for the sake of it; it is about helping children really tune into their environment, listen closely, and respond creatively. Activities such as building soundscapes or exploring natural materials give pupils the

freedom to experiment, but still keep the learning purposeful and grounded.

The same can be said for composition. The Graphic Score Composition (*The World Around Me*) activity is brilliant in how it breaks things down. It takes something that could feel quite complex and makes it accessible, structured and genuinely enjoyable. Children are creating, performing and responding to music in a way that feels achievable, and for teachers, everything is clearly laid out. You are not left figuring things out yourself; it is all there, ready to go, which makes a real difference in a busy classroom.

The platform itself deserves a mention too, because this is often where things can fall down, but not here. It is quick to navigate, easy to search, and genuinely helpful in how it supports teachers. You can find what you need fast, save favourites and build playlists for different classes or topics. Over time, it becomes a space where you can build your own bank of go-to resources. The ability to share songs beyond the classroom is also a big plus, giving children the chance to revisit learning at home without any extra effort on your part. What stands out most is how considered everything feels. Nothing is over-complicated, nothing feels like an add-on, and everything has a clear purpose. It is one of those resources that quietly does a lot of heavy lifting for you, and does it really well.



VERDICT

- ✓ Songs that children will genuinely want to keep singing
- ✓ Strong, natural links to EYFS and Key Stage 1 curriculum
- ✓ Clear, structured activities that remove unnecessary workload
- ✓ Excellent support for outdoor learning and creativity
- ✓ A platform that is intuitive and easy to use

UPGRADE IF...

You want a music resource that is engaging, easy to deliver and packed with ideas that actually work in the classroom without adding to your workload.

MUSICALS 

The School Musicals Company: Grimm

A crowd-pleasing musical that provides an interesting twist on the Grimm brothers and some of their most familiar tales



AT A GLANCE

- Suitable for ages 9 – 11
- Comprehensive booklet providing a full script, song lyrics and sheet music
- Includes detailed staging and casting notes
- Audio files featuring vocal and non-vocal versions of each song
- Provides a positive finale to primary school life

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



You don't need me to tell you that the transition from primary to secondary school is a significant milestone for children. Behind them lie the days of innocence and magical tales. Ahead lie the challenges and triumphs of the teenage years and adulthood. Added together, they make the core theme of this new musical by the wonderful School Musicals Company particularly astute, as it combines nostalgia for fairytales with the idea of being able to write the ending to your own story.

'Imagine a world where the villains always win...' begins the synopsis (right now, it doesn't feel like that takes much imagination, but do go on!). The premise of this musical is that the famous Grimm brothers – the collectors and creators of so many of the most familiar stories in the European tradition – have not yet embraced the concept of happy endings. But that is about to change thanks to the intervention of a magic quill, some well-known characters and the brothers' independent-minded assistant.

In essence, the Grimms indulge the villains of their pieces by writing stories in which the bad guys get all the breaks: Prince Charming marries an ugly sister, Hansel gets devoured by the witch, and Rumpelstiltskin runs off with the Queen's baby. However, some of the characters of their stories, especially the peripheral ones, join forces to confront the writers. Somewhat reluctantly, they give joyful endings a go and embrace the idea of happy-ever-afters.

This production will present Upper Key Stage 2 children with something a little more challenging than they might be used to. Then again, as they will have likely just finished SATs, they may well be

feeling fairly invincible. What's more, the script is packed with lively dialogue and good gags, including the sort of digs at staff that only those who are about to leave the school could get away with. And, as you might expect, the Grimm-grim homophone gets plenty of punishment – if Jack had milked his cow as exhaustively, she wouldn't have been worth a bean.

But, let's face it, what really brings a sappy smile to the faces of the proud parents is the sight of their no-longer-so-little treasures singing their hearts out. And, as fans of The School Musicals Company will be well aware, they do have an admirable knack of writing bespoke songs that hit that sweet spot where originality meets accessibility and a vague sense of familiarity (I'm still trying to remember what the music to *Believe in Yourself* reminds me of). Tastes differ and everyone will have their own favourites – I was particularly taken by *We're Cooked* – but these tunes are bound to get feet tapping and hearts glowing.

Busy and no-doubt-exhausted Year 6 teachers will be delighted to know that the production pack includes sheet music and three recorded versions of each song: one performed by children, one as a backing track and the other as incidental music. There is also a comprehensive booklet packed full of handy support materials such as a scene breakdown, character profiles and staging suggestions, as well as a full script (an editable version of which can be obtained for a small charge). All that's left for you to do is get them to remember their lines and SPEAK UP in order to earn a happy ending of your own.

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Lively script
- ✓ Catchy, original songs
- ✓ Named parts for 42 children
- ✓ Well resourced
- ✓ Reduces the stress of staging a show

UPGRADE IF...

You want to put on a triumphant production to celebrate the culmination of the pupil's primary journey.

Book and downloads – £39.95; books and CD – £39.95; performance licence – £38.00; editable script – £9.95
theschoolmusicalscompany.com

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?

It is the fortune/personal choice of teaching art and picturebook-inspired PSHE to every child in KS2. Just let me sit down to model a technique and then witness the confidence grow as children express themselves; it is magical. I asked a group of children how I should answer this question and their answer was 'reading picturebooks'. I must have rattled on about them enough!

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

With a limited number of teaching years left, I have flirted with social media for inspiration and validation, and shared many aspects of learning in our school, but having stepped back a little from that – namely deleting X – I feel a little distant. This adds to my self-diagnosed imposter syndrome. How I've managed a quarter of a century in this job without anyone pointing out that I'm not cut out for it I'll never know.

3 What is your current state of mind?

We've just entered the final term, so my mind is swimming back and forth between upcoming events and my holiday to Mallorca in August! We have the usual summer events and our own BcL 500 Words Competition soon; I usually take the lead with that one, so my mind is buzzing. Authors and illustrators like Shaun Tan, Jennifer Killick and Bethany Walker have all been involved in some capacity in the past so I really want this year's competition to fire the same spark. Before I hit the beach, that is!

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

Seriousness. I've found that developing a relationship with a class using a balance of humour and consistency of expectation creates a classroom of warmth, trust and engagement. Enabling children to be themselves, but to be aware of where the line is, hits the mark. Honestly, I'm far better at what I do when I'm inspired by children thriving in a positive space.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

I enjoy storytelling. With little prior thought I take children on a journey towards a key message; it's a challenge but keeps the brain ticking over. Stories usually link to growing up in Barnsley, my old friends and foes, and the trials and tribulations of a 70s and 80s childhood; I think it is important that children know that we were once children too and made mistakes. So, lying? There *may* have been occasions when those stories were enhanced a touch. I say *may*... it probably happens more often than not. Sorry, children.

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

For some reason 'awesome sauce' creeps in a lot, which is definitely not awesome, and embarrassing for anyone in their 50s to be saying. Or anyone for that matter.

7 What is your greatest teaching achievement?

Still being here. I was dangerously close to failing my PGCE and scraped through my first year by the skin of my teeth. More recently, it's writing our

reading-inspired curriculum.

We have chosen fantastic books to inspire learning (and teaching) and had a blast doing it! It is an extensive piece of work and one of which I am incredibly proud.

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

My office full of children's books. They are my happy place, my inspiration, and my go-to after one of those *everything-thrown-at-you-and-the-world-is-falling-apart* days. I'll read Jon Klassen's *We Found a Hat* and smile, or I'll pick up something by Beatrice Alemagna and get dizzily giddy with her chaotic, energetic style. I reach for a David Litchfield and enjoy linking his genius to learning. Brian Selznick's *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* will jump out for a gorgeous pencil-grey reminder of why I love teaching. Or I might look for the millionth time (only a slight lie!) at Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* and realise that everything is ok and I love what I do.



NAME: Karl Duke

JOB ROLE: Headteacher (and head reader), Blyton cum Laughton Church of England Primary School

EXTRA INFO: Karl enjoys working with schools to link books to learning and keeping up to date with the latest children's picture books, non-fiction and middle-grade novels.



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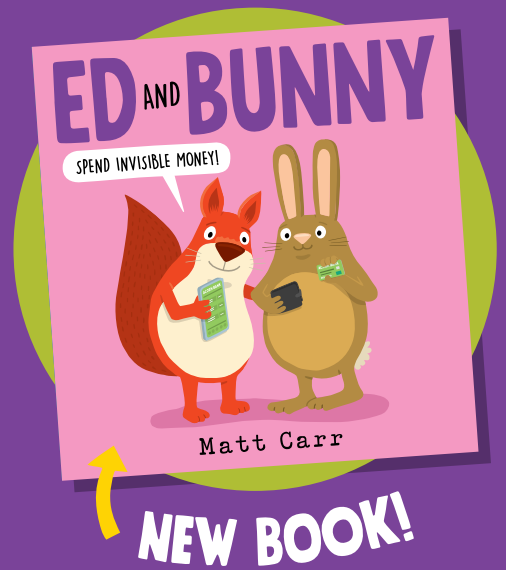
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