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# teach SECONDARY

Outstanding advice from the UK's top education experts 

INTERVIEW



**ZAHARA CHOWDHURY**

*"Inclusion isn't  
just an add-on"*

## GOOD JOB, EVERYONE!

Is your school playing  
up the positives?

## CHOICE PARALYSIS

Why lessons need  
clarity, not options

## MISSING THE MARK

The case for  
ditching GCSEs

## BRILLIANT CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR...

...in just 5  
steps

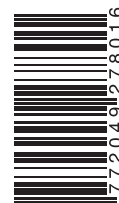
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## FROM THE EDITOR

### “Welcome...”



So, how was your summer break? Yes, we’re once again at that point in the year when everyone at your school will – theoretically, at least – be operating with as much energy and clear-eyed determination as they’re ever going to have between now and next summer.

Your wide-eyed Y7s will be frantically trying to commit your school’s various routes and locations to memory. The Y8s will be gaining a newfound appreciation for how *young* they must have looked the year before. The Y11s will be reconciling themselves to the fact that yep, this is when things start getting *properly serious*. And your Y9s will inevitably be the odd ones out, having comfortably slipped into the role of KS3 top dogs, looking on with wry amusement at how wired everyone else seems to be, secure in the knowledge that their own GCSE exams are still *years* away.

All being well, you and your colleagues may be grateful for September’s sense of untapped possibility and as yet unpopulated to-do lists – though it won’t last, of course...

As we all know, there are many facets of the job that set teaching apart from other professions, but a big one are those fixed points throughout the academic year, and the unconscious rhythms that develop around them. For many workers in other sectors, the year to come will just be a lengthy span of time waiting to be filled with some variation of the set tasks they’re employed to perform. One month will be much like any other. Often, the only variation will be the seasonal changes in the weather.

Teachers, on the other hand, will advance through months mapped out with half term breaks, mocks, INSETs, parents’ evenings, the spinning up of extra revision sessions, exam preparations, inter-school sporting fixtures, the leavers’ prom, the big school theatre production, the departure of students they’ve seen change and grow over the past five years...

Given the often unpredictable, emotionally draining and volatile nature of the job, there’s perhaps something to be said for those reassuringly familiar routines and milestones. That said, 2025/26 will see the government finally unveil its new curriculum and assessment priorities, and there’s the distant possibility of news that may see the six-week summer holiday broken up and spread more evenly throughout the year. But for now, at least, welcome back – and here’s to hoping that this academic year treats you well.

Enjoy the issue,

Callum Fauser  
callum.fauser@theteachco.com

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Bhamika Bhudia is a head of English



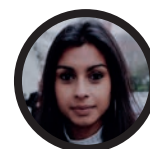
Ed Carlin is a deputy headteacher



Helen Tierney is a freelance music teacher and consultant



Dr. Nikos Savvas is CEO of Eastern Education Group



Meera Chudasama is an English, media and film studies teacher



Dr Chris Wilson is the co-founder and director of ImpactEd Group

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Sign up for the weekly TS newsletter at [teachwire.net/newsletter](https://teachwire.net/newsletter)

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teach  
SECONDARY

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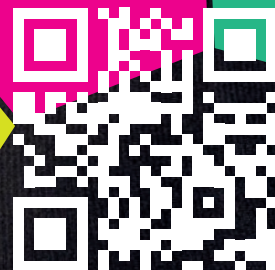
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# The newsletter

Teach Secondary's digest of the latest goings-on in the profession...

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



### JET2HOLIDAYS

Back in my day, the playground would thrum to the sound of fellow classmates singing 'The red car and the blue car had a race' and outrageous pronunciations of the words 'Accrington Stanley' ('Akkkkkkkkhrington Sssstanleh!').

Happily, it seems that the grand old tradition of young teens playfully quoting ads and warping the sales pitch to their own mirthful ends has continued well into the 21st century. Thanks to the ubiquity of Jet2Holidays' commercials for package trips across YouTube and elsewhere – you know, the ones soundtracked by Jess Glynne's 2015 chart smash 'Hold My Hand' with the slogan 'Nothing beats a Jet2Holiday' – the company seems to have been trending on TikTok of late.

Of course, because kids these days are all video editing ninjas, the end results typically see that audio accompaniment being placed atop footage of spectacular holiday accidents, disasters and disappointments. At their best, the end results depict gloriously surreal juxtapositions of breezy optimism with all-out chaos.

As you might expect, Jet2Holidays' own social media stewards are very much in on the joke at this point, posting new ads specifically tailored to their now improbably scaled-up audience – but we all know that somewhere out there, somebody's making Jess Glynne serenade footage of a hotel barbecue tipping over while a middle-aged tourist attempts to lamp a sous chef.

**DO SAY**  
"Darling, hold my hand..."



**DON'T SAY**

"Is this for Butlins?"

## BEAT THE BUDGET



**Who is it for?**  
KS3 students

**What's on offer?**

A range of interactive challenges and trivia quizzes for the Kahoot! learning platform produced in partnership with the bodies overseeing the men's and women's Tour de France. Topics covered include the history of the race, the geography of the modern Tour de France course and STEM-related material focusing on the bikes used by competitors.

**What are we talking about?**  
Tour de France on Kahoot!



**Where is it available?**  
kahoot.com/tourdefrance

## WHAT THEY SAID...

"The latest projections suggest a larger decline in state-funded pupil numbers than expected last year, with 85,000 fewer pupils expected by 2028."

– Michael Scott, senior economist at the National Foundation for Educational Research

## Think of a number...

# 638,745

The number of children and young people with education, health and care plans

Source: DfE

57%

of the UK's low-income families state that their children struggle to access capable devices or reliable internet outside of school

Source: Censuswide research commissioned by RM and The Digital Poverty Alliance

45%

of school leaders report seeing increases in suspensions and exclusions between 2024 and 2025

Source: Summer 2025 School Leaders Survey carried out by Browne Jacobson

## ONE FOR THE WALL

"We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer





## What the pupils say

As the profession awaits the final report of the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review led by Professor Becky Francis, the shadow Curriculum and Assessment Review (sCAR) has now completed its own process of surveying how England's education system can be improved. Overseen by the Youth Shadow Panel, comprising a coalition of young people and youth organisations, the sCAR has sought to canvas the views of children and young people via a series of public outreach events, school assemblies and focus groups, effectively mirroring the activities of Professor Francis' review panel.

The final sCAR report sets out a series of recommendations, including introducing more enrichment opportunities, a greater emphasis on critical thinking and more in the way of practical 'life skills' (e.g. financial management and digital literacy) across the wider curriculum. The report also calls for reducing the length and volume of GCSE exams, ending SATs tests at primary and placing more weight on assessments led by teacher observation at the secondary phase.

There's also an explicit call for climate and sustainability education to 'Not be considered a stand-alone subject or siloed into science and geography', but to rather 'be integrated across all parts of the curriculum.' Finally, there's an appeal for a National Curriculum that 'represents the full diversity of society, throughout history and at present', combined with a more adaptable system of assessment readily able to meet the needs of disabled and neurodiverse students, instead of relying on reasonable adjustments implemented in response to parental advocacy.

The download the final sCAR report in full, visit [shadowpanel.uk](https://shadowpanel.uk)

SAVE THE DATE

## SPEECHES AND CORRESPONDENCE

Forget the media-friendly soundbites – what else was in those announcements and letters you missed?



THE SPEECH:

### Ofsted HMCI addresses Festival of Education

**WHO?** Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted HMCI

**WHERE?** Festival of Education, Wellington College

**WHEN?** 3rd July 2025

"Cynics sometimes decry the norms of education. Exams are 'gradgrindian' in their eyes, the 3 R's are no longer preparing children for the 'jobs of tomorrow'. And Ofsted are accused of being enforcers for this 'out-of-date', 'joyless' system – forcing schools to jump through these hoops.

Well, let me tell you how it looks from where I'm standing. For Ofsted, teaching a full, rich range of subjects isn't just a nice to have; it's fundamental to a great education. Music and art and sports aren't add-ons to the core curriculum, they are some of the most important subjects to study, in terms of developing a child's awareness of the world around them. And in a more macro sense, feeding into the cultural evolution of our country and pushing civilisation on.

It often surprises people when I say that I started out as an art teacher in 1995. Art was my passion then, and it's still my passion now. When I have the time, I love to paint. I find that it forces me to slow down and deeply observe the world around me. But I feel that temptation to pick up my smartphone and check my emails far too often, breaking the observational trance-like state. I can only imagine how difficult and tempting this is for children.

It's quite a common refrain that children should be taught 'creativity' – but creativity relies upon a deep understanding of knowledge and facts; it comes from pushing at the limits of knowledge, and first you need to be taught where those limits are.

The rounded classroom experience – a broad and rich curriculum, structured carefully by expert teachers and taught within a safe and welcoming environment – is fundamental to the intellectual growth of individuals, and the development of society."

THE RESPONSE:

### Children's Society reacts to lowering of voting age to 16

**FROM?** Mark Russell, chief executive of The Children's Society

**WHEN?** 17th July 2025

"This is a landmark step in recognising that young people care deeply about the issues facing our country and deserve to be heard not just at the ballot box, but throughout the political process."

**The Children's Society**

18-19 OCTOBER 2025 Battle of Ideas Festival | 19-20 NOVEMBER 2025 Schools & Academies Show | 21-23 JANUARY 2026 Bett

#### 18-19 OCTOBER 2025

**Battle of Ideas Festival**  
Church House, London  
[battleofideas.org.uk](https://battleofideas.org.uk)

Some details are yet to be confirmed by the Academy of Ideas, organisers of this annual debating and networking event, but we can reasonably expect another two days of bold, impassioned and at times provocative rhetorical jousting on a range of topical subjects across a series of panels – including a number of topics likely to be of particular interest to educators and older students.

#### 19-20 NOVEMBER 2025

**Schools & Academies Show**  
The NEC, Birmingham  
[schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk](https://schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk)

The '#SAASHOW' will be once again be setting up shop at the NEC, Birmingham this autumn for another two days of CPD centred on strategy and school improvement, and opportunities to meet with and learn from fellow leaders across the country. As always, there'll also be a sizeable and thoughtfully curated exhibition floor hosting numerous suppliers and solution providers.

#### 21-23 JANUARY 2026

**Bett**  
ExCeL London  
[uk.bettshow.com](https://uk.bettshow.com)

A must for any intrepid explorers of cutting-edge edtech, Bett is a two-day exhibition of the most advanced products, solutions and services the sector has to offer. Beyond the extensive show floor you'll also find an array of informative presentations addressing a wide spectrum of topics (both tech-related and otherwise), CPD opportunities aplenty and a series of thought-provoking keynote talks.

# Collins

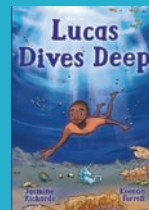
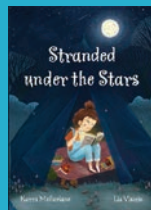
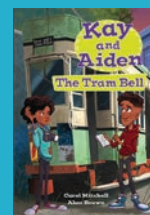
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## TEACHER TALES

True stories from the education chalkface

### Heathrow calling

One of the most difficult and dangerous athletic activities one can teach at school is pole vaulting.

Following a prolonged period of disuse, it was decided that our large landing pit on the school field should be converted into an additional long jump area - which meant that our foam chip landing needed disposing of. The catch? There was a lot of it...

Our on-site industrial bins were no use at all for the quantity involved, so talk turned to 'burying it all' or 'sinking it' into a gravel pit adjacent to school field - but this wasn't feasible either, due to the fact that foam floats, to say nothing of the ecological implications. Cue plan B - *burn the foam*.

Early next morning, before students' arrival at school, I duly set out with a large can of

petrol and carefully proceeded to set the foam alight - and the result was spectacular. So thick was the resulting plume of acrid smoke that the school received a telephone call from the authorities at nearby Heathrow Airport, asking us to extinguish the conflagration at once, for fear that it might present a visibility hazard for aircraft.

Easier said than done. It continued burning for some 24 hours, and was only eventually extinguished with assistance from the local Fire Brigade - to the accompaniment of safety alerts on local radio warning of a 'thick, dense smoke over Heathrow' presenting a flight risk...

**Have a memorable true school tale or anecdote of your own? Share the details, and find more amusing stories, at [schoolhumour.co.uk](http://schoolhumour.co.uk)**

## A FEW MINUTES OF DESIGN

### #37 EXTENDED FAMILY

Look at this family of symbols. How have the pictures been simplified to make symbols? Are they made of solid shapes or lines? What visual features does each one use? What makes them a family?

Draw your own symbols to continue the series, keeping the same visual 'language' of simplification, line, shape and style as the original members. Then draw a symbol that does not belong to the family.

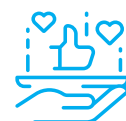
A Few Minutes of Design **EXTENDED FAMILY**

What would the following look like?

Sad boy  
Angry girl  
Shouting boy  
Surprised girl  
Cat



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**Who's been saying what on the socials of late?**

**SonofRodney** (via Reddit)

I recently heard about a teacher who, instead of trying to circumvent students using AI (which is impossible), she made assignments by going 'Ask ChatGPT to write a report on this subject, and then research how and why it's wrong.'

**Josiah Mortimer** @josiah.writes.news

The number of private schools [in the UK] has actually increased from 2,421 to 2,456" since VAT was put on their fees. No calamitous shift of pupils from private schools to state schools, either. In other words, the scaremongering from vested interests was wrong.

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*Phillip Hedger (Cheam Park Farm Junior).*

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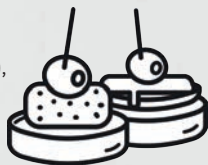
David Voisin is a head of MFL

# DICTIONARY DEEP DIVE

Join **David Voisin** on a rich, and sometimes surprising journey through the points at which literacy, language and vocabulary intersect...

## PARDON MY FRENCH

If you're a guest at a *soirée* (French for 'evening'), the host of said social gathering may have organised for some '*amuse-bouche*' to be served. Literally meaning 'mouth amusers', these little one-bite delights may include a variety of sweet or savoury canapés to showcase the chef's skills and creativity. *Petit fours* ('little ovens'), meanwhile, tend to be mini pastries, while the French for 'baked' is the word '*cuit*' – which is present in the word *biscuit*, meaning 'baked twice'.



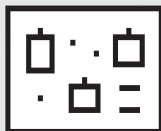
## TEACHING TIP: ROTATION OF THE PROPS

At the heart of 'imagination' lies the word '*image*'. Despite there being areas in the brain dedicated to language (such as Broca's area), the visual cortex plays a preponderant part in language – not just for reading, but also in the visual representation of objects, concepts, events and scenes.

A well-decorated classroom can present many advantages, and carefully curated displays can certainly assist with learning. Pictures can help with the teaching of words, dual coding being a powerful didactic tool.

A picture of Yoda can illustrate what a 'sagacious' Jedi is. An image of Scrooge in Disney's *A Christmas Carol* perfectly encapsulates the meaning of the adjective 'irascible'. Will Smith plays a 'jovial' genie. It doesn't have to be just words – useful prefixes, suffixes and root words are also worth displaying for reference. But what about a rotation?

Once a set of adjectives or sceneries have been fully exploited for a topic, or once classes start studying a novel from a very different setting, it only makes sense to replace those displayed illustrations and key words, even if just temporarily, until they're covered again or require revisiting. Just like a curriculum, with a little planning you can maximise the potential impact of your classroom displays and props.



## LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

Recent studies show that morphology plays a crucial role in reading comprehension, given the ubiquity of morphologically complex words in children's books.

Morphology is the study of word architecture. Contrary to what some people think, it's not independent from grammar; it's a branch of it. While syntax examines how words are *organised* to convey meaning, morphology helps us understand how the words' building blocks *interact*, both grammatically and semantically.

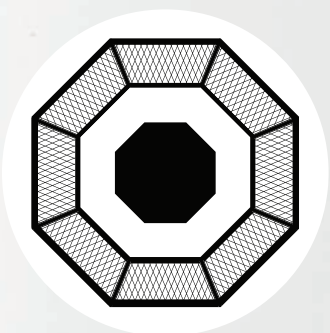
There are two categories in morphology – inflectional and derivational. The former is about changing words using affixes to modify a word grammatically, without altering its core meaning (e.g. by adding '*...ing*' or '*...ed*' to a verb, or '*s*' to a noun). The latter is more about changing the lexical category of the word – changing 'construct' to 'deconstruction', for instance.

In English, inflectional morphology is usually assimilated early, around the age of 4. Derivational morphology, being cognitively more challenging, tends to only become accessible much later.

There are, however, some problems and exceptions – among them, 'false' affixes, such as '*antiquated*', which doesn't feature the prefix [*anti*] but is rather related to *antique*.

Another issue is that many 'bound stems' are meaningless in isolation, such as [*a*][*mnesia*]. This is why reading alone isn't sufficient to properly understand morphology – it needs to be taught explicitly, and in a judicious sequence.

## SAME ROOT, DIFFERENT WORDS



MMA fighters fight in the '*octagon*' – an 8-sided ring



*Octogenarians* are between 80 and 89 years old



An *octopus* is a cephalopod with 8 limbs

# Supply and DEMANDS

One anonymous supply teacher shares their recent experiences of the classroom, and explains why school leaders should pay closer attention to a student-driven culture shift taking place right in front of them...

Over the several decades of my teaching career, there have been a number of times when I've wanted to move on from a school but not found a suitable replacement. It's during these periods that I've taken up supply teaching for a time, until a suitable and more appealing vacancy comes along.

I've got to admit, this isn't a decision for the faint-hearted. It takes some chutzpah. The sweet spot – a short-term contract – doesn't come along overnight, so in the meantime, you'll have to put up with a fair amount of uncertainty. Waking up not knowing if you're going to get any work that day. Or, if you do, where it might be. If you're to get there before morning registration, should you have already left by now? And will it turn out be a day in heaven or hell?

## Negotiating the minefields

To misquote an old blues song, nobody knows you when you're on supply. Nor will you know where to find the toilets, or the staff room, or the removal room. You won't always be able to spot the troublemaker kids hiding among the angels, be aware of whether loo trips are allowed during lessons, or know if a pupil really *was* seeing their form tutor, instead of just skiving.

Then there are the minefields involved with taking a register blind, negotiating the sanctions

ladder as a noob and dealing with that old chestnut of 'We did this last week!'

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to assume control and start building positive relationships within 15 seconds of entering a room containing that most deadly foe – *schoolkids hunting supply prey*.

## "Parachuted into the unknown and expected to function instantly, you're a teaching commando"

Parachuted into the unknown and expected to function instantly, you're a teaching commando. Just like the SAS, you have to think flexibly and improvise under pressure, or else you won't stay standing. It's all about making rapid decisions in highly unpredictable situations, minute-by-minute, for eight hours.

That demands reserves of resilience, mental toughness and emotional regulation, without losing your professionalism or letting your standards of excellence slip. Or your senses of humour and humility, for that matter. All while remembering to hydrate. I guess what I'm saying is *it's not for everybody...*

## Life in academic No Man's Land

Another similarity with the SAS is that you have to 'go equipped'. Your kit bag will require a survival pack

consisting of reams of paper, board markers and wipers, pens, tissues, notebooks, a selection of printed worksheets and a USB stick stuffed with subject content.

You'll also need to be sufficiently literate in about a dozen or so subjects in order to get any given lesson started with complete confidence, while you wait

for the set cover work to arrive – if indeed it ever does...

You'll further need instant recall of access codes to a menagerie of learning websites, so that you can get something interactive up on the board while simultaneously dealing with multiple attempts at fleeing your classroom by well-practised escape artists.

Doing a stint on daily supply every few years is to be highly commended, as it's an acid test of your own raw skills. Sure, we all believe we're really good teachers when surveying the intricacies of our latest seating plan, with well-crafted lesson plans to hand, in the cosy familiarity of our own classroom. It's a whole other ball game when you're out there getting shelled to bits in academic No Man's Land, with nought but an expired Kahoot! login for backup...

## Being the bellwether

As Morpheus says to Neo in *The Matrix*, 'Don't think you are. Know you are.'

There's nothing quite like the validation, not to mention the thrill, of turning a zoo-like free-for-all in the drama studio into a quiet, but engaging lesson. Especially if it ends with students and departmental staff alike warmly asking if you'll be coming back in again tomorrow.

It's more than an ego boost, though. You get to travel comprehensively outside of a single school's echo chamber or MAT silo. You get to see how the other half lives, in settings that perhaps you wouldn't have gone to, if you'd had the choice. Travel broadens the mind, and traversing a wider educational terrain can open up your knowledge of what's *really* going on out there, while firing your imagination for how things could be done differently.

The humble supply teacher is a bellwether for the wider education system. You can always judge a school's systems, curriculum and behaviour policies by the experiences of its supply teachers.

Morpheus' injunction applies equally to headteachers. You can't really say that your school's doing well until a complete outsider – someone who actually has to use your



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routines – finds them sound and working well, and experiences respect in every interaction. It's a bit more authentic than an Ofsted judgement, at least.

### In-school refusers

Alternatively, we could see the supply teacher as the canary in the coalmine. Their work routines, involving stints at school after school after school, gives them a unique vantage point and a chance to assay where the education system may be headed as a whole.

I was on supply when COVID struck, necessitating that I take a permanent position until last year. Since then I've been back on supply, working in dozens of schools across London, of all

types and in all circumstances. And between my recent experiences and those of six years ago, one thing has really stood out – the dramatic increase in what I'd call 'in-school refusers'.

We're all familiar with the huge rise in school non-attendance over the last few years, but those statistics may be masking an even more insidious trend, which is a similar kind of weakening inside schools.

Being a seasoned supply teacher, I've seen significantly more *defiance* – as opposed to mere poor behaviour – this time round. Of course, supply teachers are always going to encounter hard pushback from kids, but the scale and determination of it seems to be far greater and more widespread than when I last was supply teaching.

And it's not just for me, either. I've seen permanent staff encountering it just as often when walking the corridors of the many schools I've worked in. It's not just 'pushback' any more, but a trenchant resistance to the *very idea of school*.

### Breaking the taboo

Since time immemorial, outside the small percentage of genuinely antisocial pupils every school has, the majority of pupils have

unconsciously accepted education's social contract. They habitually show up for school, since it's just part of 'what you do' and 'how life works'. They may enjoy it or merely endure it. Usually it's a bit of both. But it's hitherto been an unquestioned, grounding routine – at least until now.

From what I've seen this year, in many different places, I'm starting to doubt that unquestioned acceptance. It feels like the taboo against not playing the school game is gradually being broken by the children themselves. A growing number seemingly don't want to put up with the normalities of the school any longer. It's as if the jaundiced animus of Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in The Wall' has acquired some real force.

This resistance manifests as multiple examples of poor behaviour becoming routine and going unchallenged. Extreme talking back and open refusals to work. Pointed swearing at staff. Violence, major uniform violations or flat-out rejection. Wandering the corridors during lessons. If there's one motivating sentiment behind it all, it would be *'You're not going to tell me what to do.'*

Do other teachers out there see the same picture I do? We saw school non-attendance figures shoot up in the aftermath of the COVID lockdowns, which is maybe when this taboo-breaking first began. At the time, it was met with a relatively muted response from education authorities, with this rising defiance now perhaps the inevitable consequence. Or it could be that my own experiences are broadly unrepresentative. In any case, when you next meet a supply teacher, ask them if they've noticed anything interesting lately. You might find that you get some surprising responses.

## IN BRIEF

### WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

School absence rates have increased significantly in recent years, but what's been less widely acknowledged is a growing disengagement among those students actually at school, accompanied by a gradual intensifying of challenging behaviours.

### WHAT'S BEING SAID?

From the vantage point of a regular supply teacher, schools in different locations and circumstances are hearing similar testimonies from staff of students actively defying instructions, using abusive language, not complying in lessons and behaving in other ways characteristic of 'in-school refusers'.

### WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING?

One reason for these issues may be that the rupture in standard routines and scheduling experienced during the COVID lockdowns were even more profound than initially thought, and that the caution exercised by some school leaders and authorities when attempting to restore order and discipline following the pandemic has caused a permanent shift in students' perceptions of their schools' rules and expectations.

### THE TAKEAWAY

Further data and research is needed, but if you're a regular visitor to multiple schools, there's a good chance that you'll speak with staff who can share similar experiences of their own. Supply teachers are uniquely well-positioned to raise awareness when something doesn't seem right – and right now, there's definitely something wrong.





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The government has been dealt a difficult hand when it comes to funding vital SEND support – but consigning Education, Health and Care Plans to history isn't necessarily the answer...

# Melissa Benn



A fresh twist on the growing SEND crisis in our schools looks set to develop this autumn – except this time, it threatens to engulf all of Westminster.

Many policymakers, officials and members of the public broadly agree that the current system – based on the provision of individual Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) – is on its knees. First introduced in 2014, EHCPs are tailor-made programmes that identify, and then seek to meet the specific health, communication and/or emotional needs of a child up to the age of 25.

Since then, EHCP applications, which are agreed and funded through local authorities, have skyrocketed. With LAs buckling under myriad financial pressures, however, these costs are fast becoming unsustainable. As of January this year, nearly 650,000 children were on an EHCP, with thousands more yet to be processed.

## Piling on the pressure

Many EHCP applicants are refused. In 2024, there were 154,500 requests for an EHCP assessment, 11.8% higher than 2023 (see [tiny.cc/ts146-MB2](https://tiny.cc/ts146-MB2)). LAs proceeded to an assessment in only 65.4% of those requests. Better resourced and more articulate parents have increasingly resorted to tribunals (see [tiny.cc/ts146-MB1](https://tiny.cc/ts146-MB1)) when their EHCP application is rejected by their local authority. According to the most recent figures, 93% of such appeals have been successful.

Even then, those who do receive an EHCP will often encounter a lack of specialist support at their school and general teacher shortages, among other issues. There are some clear parallels here with the welfare system, in that it's a mechanism intended to support some of the most vulnerable in society, but one beset with spiralling costs and opaque, over-complex

application processes.

Many of the problems affecting children and young people today spring from the disruptions of the pandemic, alongside rising levels of child and family poverty. In terms of both welfare and education, the state remains the last resort.

The Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, now finds herself caught between a stern Treasury, a Prime Minister determined not to be bounced into further expenditure by restive backbenchers, and an increasingly well-organised SEND lobby – including some impressively articulate young people able to sharply critique the current system's limitations and shortcomings.

The Education Select Committee has also held hearings on the SEND system since the start of this year. The government isn't obliged to implement the Committee's recommendations, but the proposals will pile on further pressure once they're published.

## Treading carefully

In contrast to the welfare issue, however – where Labour's reforms were rushed

through – Phillipson and her ministers are treading more carefully. They have talked about the importance of widespread early language intervention, mooting plans that guarantee SEND support to every child who needs it via more extensive in-school provision.

However, the DfE has thus far not confirmed whether it will preserve what it sees as the costly and unwieldy EHCP model. This evasion hasn't gone unnoticed by families and campaigners, who are already mounting a fightback. In July over a hundred figures – including academics, heads of charities and celebrity SEND parents – signed a letter urging the government to retain the legal protection that EHCPs represent (see [tiny.cc/ts146-MB3](https://tiny.cc/ts146-MB3)).

There's also a pressing national context to the current debate. After their embarrassing U-turns on Winter Fuel Allowance and disability benefits, the Treasury and Prime Minister's office have made it clear that one consequence of the late spring rebellions will be less money for SEND reform.

Can the government win this battle? The stubborn beauty of the British Parliamentary system is that MPs aren't just directly accountable to their constituents – an accountability that's somewhat sharpened by the fragile majorities secured by many of the 2024 intake – but that they're also sensitive to the steadily mounting pressures on those they represent.

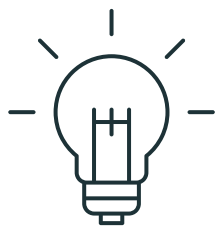
To be frank, I don't envy the position that Bridget Phillipson and her department have found themselves in.

They're having to resolve one of the most complex problems in English education, at a time of acute fragility for the Labour government that seems to afford little room for manoeuvre. Nevertheless, I predict that EHCPs will indeed be scrapped. Whereupon all hell – or at least something close to it – will inevitably break loose.



Melissa Benn (@Melissa\_Benn) is the author of *Life Lessons: The Case for a National Education Service*, and is a Visiting Professor at York St John university

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Data from pilot studies of Hachette Learning Academy's short course on Using Questioning for Impact showed that on average, teachers who completed this course improved their conscious competence by 33%. All the teachers ultimately achieved 100% conscious competency, demonstrating that the course succeeded in upskilling all participants.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

Hachette Learning Academy's next courses focus mainly on supporting EAL learners and wellbeing for teachers and learners. Developed by experts, these courses aim for teachers to increase their confidence in embedding strategies to help EAL and multilingual learners build confidence. The new short online courses on student and teacher wellbeing focus on implementing wellbeing practices into everyday teaching to improve learner engagement, emotional security and academic resilience, as well as wider participation in school life.

MySmartRevision is meanwhile being released in stages; visit [hachettelearning.com/contact-us](https://hachettelearning.com/contact-us) to find out more about what is available from Hachette Learning Adaptive and Academy.

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Like it or not, the online future now being shaped by AI will eventually force us to reassess the fundamental aims and values of the National Curriculum...

# Natasha Devon



The AI revolution is coming, if it isn't here already. Experts are warning that we need to dedicate serious time and effort to anticipating the consequences for society, and fixing the glitches in AI if humanity is going to survive it unscathed.

The ramifications for education have certainly been discussed, though so far mostly at surface level, regarding how pupils are using ChatGPT to do their homework. A notable exception has been Laura Bates' (brilliant) book, *The New Age of Sexism*, which tackles the important issue of how AI has become a tool of sexual harassment that's helping to foster misogyny among young people.

## Balancing act

There is another area that more people are starting to think about, however, which is whether AI may finally prompt the total redesign of the curriculum that many believe is long overdue.

Despite decades of endless policy changes and adjustments that have driven educators to distraction, the actual core of the National Curriculum has barely changed since its introduction in 1988. Once you understand how much schools are doing with limited time and resources, the parade of celebrities, entrepreneurs and influencers declaring that this or that thing 'should be taught in schools' can be annoying – but they aren't necessarily wrong.

Instilling a life-long love of learning, while giving pupils the skills they need to survive and navigate the world, has always involved a delicate balancing act. Yet following Michael Gove's education reforms of the early 2010s – which slashed coursework, placed more weight on examinations and prioritised so-called 'core

academic' subjects – it's felt like young people are now expected to memorise and regurgitate fairly arbitrary facts much of the time.

The majority of us have long had super-computers in our pockets linking us to all the information in the world. While there are some (valid) concerns to be had over our worsening ability to recall information as a result, the bigger worry for me is that only a certain proportion of the information we have access to is of good quality.

## Information hygiene

On paper, AI embodies the totality of human knowledge of a subject as it exists on the internet – which thus means that said knowledge is *not neutral*. AI has many biases; it's sexist, ageist, racist and homophobic, just as many human beings are. Crucially, AI doesn't distinguish between information that's been voiced or input frequently, versus verifiable facts.

This is the new reality young people will need to steer themselves through.

The skills that will matter most to their generation won't be memory and recall, but more the ability to decipher what, from the wealth of content flowing their way each day, is *worth remembering* – a concept often described as 'information hygiene'.

Information was once scarce, and often frightening. During early human evolution, situational intelligence was crucial for our very survival, leading us to develop a 'negativity bias'. Nowadays, we're bombarded with infinite content that competes fiercely for our attention, often by evoking feelings of fear or anxiety.

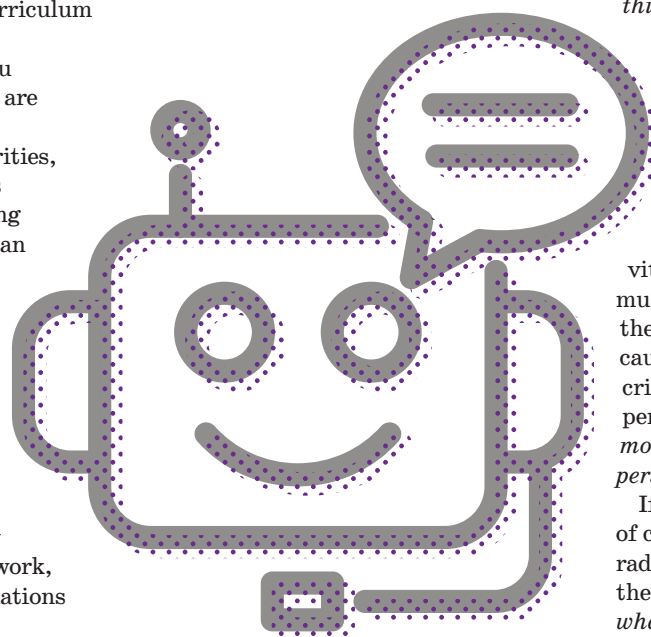
## Online interrogation

Adapting to this will involve training ourselves to interrogate everything we encounter online: 'Is this true?' 'Can I authenticate this against a trustworthy and transparent source?' 'Is it important for me to have an opinion about this?' 'Can I sit with this for a while?' 'What consequences will sharing this have within my online community?'

This is especially true in light of emerging evidence that young people are developing parasocial relationships with online influencers, on whom they're increasingly reliant for the majority of their life advice.

Scientific literacy skills are more vital than they've ever been. Pupils must leave school having fully absorbed the difference between correlation and causation, for example, and internalised critical thinking skills in other areas – perhaps by asking 'Who is making money out of this?' or 'How does this person possess expertise in this area?'

If we're to avoid creating generations of conspiracy theorists prone to radicalisation and vulnerable to scams, then what becomes paramount is not *what* they learn, but *how* they learn...



Natasha Devon is a writer, broadcaster and campaigner on issues relating to education and mental health; to find out more, visit [natashadevон.com](http://natashadevон.com) or follow @NatashaDevon

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# Rewrite the rules

**Andy Hargreaves** contemplates the future of the teaching profession, and why teachers should stop trying to get better at a bad game...

Our schools are facing two crises. There's a crisis of pupil attendance, especially in secondary schools. Post-pandemic rates of persistent absenteeism have shot up. There's also a crisis of teacher recruitment and retention. Job vacancies and leaving rates are rising and recruitment is down.

These two crises aren't unrelated. In fact, they're the same crisis. And they're not just national in scale – they're global.

## Walking away

I currently advise the governments of Scotland and New Brunswick in Canada.

Their responses to the attendance crisis have been okay – reminding parents why school matters, providing more support, making family interventions – but they're not enough.

In his final interview before he died in 2021, Harvard professor Richard Elmore recanted his belief in top-down reform of the basics. The world had changed, he realised, and so had the kids. Unless schools become profoundly different, he said, the kids will just walk away. Since COVID, they already have been.

It's the same with the crisis affecting the teaching profession. Globally, it's become such a massive problem that in 2023, the UN Secretary General convened a high level panel of former Ministers and union leaders to make recommendations on the future of the profession. The panel commissioned six expert papers, one of which was mine.

The others focused on the usual suspects – better pay, higher status, easier workload, less stress. The Westminster government has been following this playbook, while adding more flexible working arrangements, and there's nothing wrong with those policies – but they're not enough, either.

## “Unless schools become profoundly different, the kids will just walk away”

My paper took a different tack. *Let's change how the job feels*, I wrote. *Let's make it more innovative, engaging, and inspiring – for the teachers, as well as the kids.*

## Play-based teaching

In 2022, I secured a grant from the LEGO Foundation to build a national network of 40 school teams in Canada to develop play-based innovations in the middle years to improve engagement and wellbeing for pupils made vulnerable by the pandemic.

These teacher teams focused on learning experiences that were green- (outdoor or indoor nature-based initiatives), screen- (digital play, coding, editing) or machine-based (maker-oriented teaching and learning, design thinking and construction). Many teams combined them. The schools then networked with each other in person and online to share strategies.

Educators were extremely positive about the impact.

According to one, pupils who *‘Traditionally struggle with pencil and paper tasks often become the leaders when hands-on activities are provided.’* They also waxed lyrical about the merits of play-based teaching. *‘It's invigorating to work in an environment where what's fun for the students is also*

*fun for teachers’*, said another. *‘Even though I had a nasty flu’*, someone else remarked, *‘I'm motivated to come to school so the students can enjoy activities I've planned.’*

## Bringing teachers back

Drawing on this experience, I present here five ideas on how to bring teachers back in, by changing how their work feels:

1. Cut the required curriculum by 10-20%. Let teachers use the time to design their own inspiring innovations.
2. Offer ‘mini-course’ options kids can sign up for, based on teachers’ interests. Examples from three project schools included knitting, building forts, *Minecraft*, cooking and magic tricks.
3. Move more learning outdoors (including professional learning) – it improves physical and emotional health, as well as mental cognition.



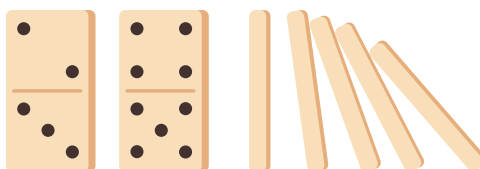
4. Embrace an idea from Canadian educators: *‘Essential for some; good for all’*. Individual learning plans are good for all kids, not just those in SEND. Introducing skills of making and fixing for all pupils rather than just some, for example, can turn persistent absentees or previously suspended pupils into leaders of their peers.
5. Transform learning and assessment with edtech and AI; don't just use it to make existing tasks (e.g. marking and feedback) easier.

Let's stop trying to get better at a bad game. Let's pull back on the testing, overcrowded curriculum and three-part lessons. Schools need more innovation. It's time to transform the learning and teaching experience so that everyone looks forward to arriving at school each day.



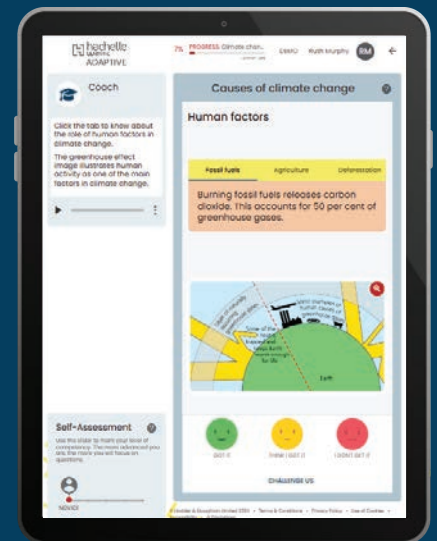
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Hargreaves is Emeritus Professor at Boston College in the US and an Adviser to the Scottish Government. His book, *The Making of an Educator: Living Through and Learning from the Great Education Shift*, is available now (Crown House Publishing, £16.99)



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# Stop wasting our time

If it feels like you're being pulled into one too many staff meetings, it may be because someone's trying to conceal a lack of vision, dynamism and clarity...

**Y**ou've probably heard it in the staffroom: "*This meeting could have been an email.*" Maybe you've said it yourself – muttered under your breath while watching another hour disappear as someone reads out a PowerPoint you skimmed days ago...

What used to be an occasional frustration is now a recurring symptom of something deeper infecting school culture. Let's call it what it is – a trust issue.

## Stuck in the loop

Leadership doesn't trust staff to read emails, or follow through unless they're rounded up and spoon-fed instructions. They don't trust that teachers will pay the tiniest bit of attention to their grand schemes and plans unless they've heard the details whilst packed like sardines in a boiling hall.

And actually, to some extent, they're not wrong. But here's the catch – staff don't follow every directive, because experience has taught them that Monday's policy may well be reversed by Friday. So why invest time and energy in something that's so volatile?

And thus begins the cycle. Leaders panic when staff

'don't act' and call more meetings to compensate. In turn, staff disengage because the messaging is constantly shifting, and back around we go. It's the illusion of action – being *seen* to do something – over actually doing something meaningful. As such, meetings are the go-to tool for performative productivity, where outcomes take a back seat to optics.

Teachers, stuck in this loop, are burning out. Old initiatives are recycled, rebranded and presented as 'revolutionary'. Everything old is new again (at least until the next version comes along). Through it all, we're expected to nod, take notes and pretend this is the silver bullet we've been waiting for.

## Box-ticking theatre

But here's the truth – *we are not powerless*. This isn't a call for walkouts or rebellion, though; it's a call for questions. Thoughtful, direct, professional questions that cut through the noise and demand clarity.

I once sat in a meeting where a head of department proudly shared her solution for raising challenge while reducing workload: every Y11 class would be taught the exact same lesson, at the

same pace, using the same resources, regardless of what individual teachers thought their students needed. This system was introduced just six weeks before exam leave, the day after students had completed their mock exams.

The real aim of this initiative? To cover for underperforming teachers and silence complaints about inconsistency. It looked neat on paper, but required skilled teachers to suppress their judgement and teach to the lowest common denominator.

I looked around at the staff, everyone thinking the same thing: *What was the point of marking mocks if we couldn't act on what they showed us?* But no one spoke up. So I did: "*What's your success criteria?*"

It's a deceptively simple question, but it stops nonsense in its tracks. A credible plan should have measurable goals, clear metrics and a grasp of variables. The answer? A shrug: "*Their grades will increase.*" Right. And the Easter Bunny will be marking their mocks.

So I asked again: "*Why should your staff do this?*"

Another empty response: "*It's in the Teaching Standards.*" Which, roughly translated, means: '*Because*

*I said so.*' Or, more honestly – '*Because I want to be seen as doing something.*' That's not leadership. It's box-ticking theatre.

## Trust is mutual

So here's my plea to teachers – *ask questions*. Don't be rude or confrontational, but do ask for clarity. If you're expected to implement a new policy, change your teaching or sit through yet another hour-long meeting, you have the right to understand why. If the answer is vague or circular, don't drop it. Ask again.

And to leaders, if your answer to '*Why are we doing this?*' can't withstand basic scrutiny, if your response leans on buzzwords or tired phrases – maybe don't do it. Teachers are professionals. They deserve policies driven by evidence, not fear. And *please*, stop scheduling meetings just to be seen as active. We're all busy. Respect our time.

One final note – *trust is mutual*. If you want staff to act on emails, then make those emails matter. Keep your messaging consistent, your intent clear and your policies rooted in reason. You might be surprised at how much work can get done when people aren't stuck in endless meetings...



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

'I, Teacher' is a secondary teacher, teacher trainer and writer challenging binary teaching narratives. For more information, visit [theteacherfiles.exposed.wordpress.com](https://theteacherfiles.exposed.wordpress.com) or follow @i-teacher.bsky.social

# 5 tips for brilliant BEHAVIOUR

**Robin Launder** unveils his ‘Super Tips’ for ensuring your lessons don’t get derailed by challenging behaviour...

I’ve just written a book, *Brilliant Behaviour in 60 Seconds or Less*. It’s a tips-based work that pares behaviour management down into nuggets of practical wisdom. Essentially, they’re the approaches that those teachers who are best at behaviour management will use, and just as importantly, the ones they *don’t*.

There are over 100 tips in total, the first five of which I’m going to share with you here – the Super Tips.

## Tip 1. Be a behaviour practitioner

The teachers who are best at behaviour management fully embrace their role as behaviour management practitioners. For them, it’s as integral to teaching as being well-versed in pedagogy and possessing in-depth subject knowledge. Consequently, they give it equal attention.

They never simply hope that their students will behave for them, because their understanding of human behaviour is much more grounded than that. Rather, they proactively and deliberately set up the conditions for a calm, safe and respectful classroom. They convey clear expectations, set firm boundaries and embed routines. In effect, they teach their students *how to behave* – and once taught, ensure they maintain that same level of behaviour.

Further, when misbehaviour starts – because even for these teachers, it still will – they

employ quick, efficient and fuss-free strategies to get their students back on track. (I’ll be sharing these strategies from the book with *Teach Secondary* readers over the coming months).

They also learn from past mistakes. They ask themselves *what* went wrong, *why* it went wrong, and what do they need to *do* differently so it doesn’t go wrong again. Hence, they become their own best critical friend, developing and refining their behaviour management skills over time.

## Tip 2. Maintain high expectations

The teachers who are best at behaviour management will also have consistently high academic, behavioural and social expectations (the latter being how the students interact with each other and the teacher).

They know that an expectation is one half of a self-fulfilling prophecy, the other half being its consistency. In other words, they know that behaviour moves in the direction of an expectation when that expectation is unrelenting – but how do they know if their expectations are genuinely high? After all, every teacher would say they have ‘high expectations’, yet between teachers, those expectations can vary wildly.

Here’s what they do. In any given situation, they’ll imagine what the best possible student behaviour looks like, and make that their expectation. Whether it’s students entering the classroom, following instructions, paying attention, answering questions, working in pairs, working in fours, doing homework, asking for help or any other required behaviour, they’ll visualise the best and aim squarely for that. And they’ll do that consistently – lesson in, lesson out, day in, day out.

## Tip 3. Follow the 100% Rule

The teachers who are best at behaviour management aim for maximum engagement from their students. This is the 100% rule. In other words, they’ll make it their constant aspirational target that 100% of their students will working 100% of the time, with 100% engagement.

They understand that the closer they get to meeting this rule, the better behaved their students will be. Firstly, because it’s not possible to work hard and misbehave at the same time. Brains simply can’t multitask in such a way. Secondly, because when most students are engaged in work, the social

opportunities for misbehaviour diminish. Simply put, there are fewer students to misbehave with.

A third reason is that the 100% rule encourages conformity through social proof. When students see their peers working hard, they’ll tend to work hard too – or, to put it another way, the behaviour of the group cues the behaviours of the individuals within that group.

Most importantly of all, the 100% rule can embed, as a social norm, an expected and accepted standard of behaviour that *all students default to*. This normalising effect won’t happen overnight, but it can happen over time, and often more quickly than you think. When it does happen, appropriate behaviour becomes self-reinforcing. The students work hard with that teacher, because with that teacher, *they always work hard*.

## Tip 4. Adopt ‘Withitness’

The teachers who are best at behaviour management are ‘with-it’ teachers. ‘Withitness’, a term coined by Jacob Kounin in the late 1960s, refers to teacher awareness in three specific areas. The with-it teacher:

- Knows (or has a good idea) what their students are doing at any given time
- Knows (or has a good idea) what their students will do in any given context
- Conveys this dual awareness to their students

**“Behaviour moves in the direction of an expectation when that expectation is unrelenting”**



Withitness stems from keen observation and the recognition of behavioural patterns, both within the whole class and for individual students. It's about reading the room and proactively spotting potential problems.

This allows the withit teacher to prevent or quickly address issues before they escalate. By knowing what's going on and actively managing the classroom, the withit teacher significantly reduces the likelihood of misbehaviour even starting.

The opposite of withitness is 'withoutitness'. In this instance, the teacher will have a *poor* idea of what their students are doing or might do, and the students know it. As you might expect, this unfortunately puts the teacher on the behaviour

management back foot.

Consequently, these teachers tend to be reactive, rather than proactive – responding to misbehaviour in the moment, rather than taking a preventative or strategic approach. They're also slow to intervene, which means the misbehaviour invariably worsens and thus becomes even more difficult to deal with.

### Tip 5. Follow the policy

The teachers who are best at behaviour management will further know their school's behaviour management policy in exhaustive detail – inside out, upside down and back to front.

This gives them a detailed knowledge of the school

rules, standards of expected behaviour, criteria for warnings and consequences, and the forms of support available to them, including on-call. When they act in accordance with their school's behaviour policy, they will do so decisively and with confidence.

Teachers who are shaky about its content won't. Inevitably, they'll tend to misapply the policy – both under- and overusing it, and wielding it incorrectly. Moreover, because they have a poor understanding of this crucial document, they may begin to doubt themselves when challenged by a student. They might start thinking, "*Well, maybe the student's right. Maybe it's not a C3. Maybe it is a C2...*" This will only further deplete their confidence and effectiveness.

There's an interesting paradox here, too. Those teachers who apply the policy correctly will tend to use its formal elements (warnings, consequences, on-call measures) far less. This is because the students are seeing the teacher consistently apply the policy, thus prompting them to modify their behaviour accordingly. Put simply, there's less motivation for them to misbehave if any and all incidents of misbehaviour are promptly dealt with.

Behaviour management is a team sport that requires all teachers to pull in the same direction and do things in the same way. The behaviour policy is the school's way of achieving that end.

If teachers don't follow the policy – either because they don't know it, or because they're inclined to act on the parts they agree with and ignore the bits they don't – then they risk weakening the document and undermining their colleagues. Consequently, the whole team loses.

So there you have it – the 5 Super Tips. The remaining tips in the book are equally impactful, and are intended to help you create a calm, safe and respectful learning environment.

They also go into much greater detail, breaking down the approaches that the best teachers use step-by-step – so over the coming months, look out for them appearing in *Teach Secondary's* regular Learning Lab section.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robin Launder is a behaviour management trainer and speaker; this article is based on an extract from his book, *Brilliant Behaviour in 60 Seconds or Less* (Routledge, 2025); for more information, visit [behaviourbuddy.co.uk](http://behaviourbuddy.co.uk)

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# THE TS GUIDE TO... ASSESSMENT

What teachers can get wrong about ongoing assessment; the urgent case for giving the GCSE model a 21st century upgrade; and why those charged with assessing the performance of teaching staff need to worry less about holding them up to externally imposed standards...

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## IN FIGURES:

### HOW ARE TEACHERS' ROLES BEING AFFECTED BY MARKING DEMANDS?

# 8.2

hours per week are spent by teachers on marking assignments

# 87%

of teachers feel that they're forced to take marking work home with them

Source: Online survey carried out in January 2025 by Perspectus Global on behalf of Learnosity

# 46%

of teachers believe they spend too much of their professional time on marking pupils' work

Source: DfE 'Working lives of teachers and leaders 2023' survey

# 3

TEACHWIRE ARTICLES FROM THE ARCHIVES

### WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

Ongoing school assessment can help keep outcomes on track, notes Daniel Harvey, but do your colleagues know what 'on track' looks like?

[tiny.cc/146special1](https://tiny.cc/146special1)

### RIGOUR WITHOUT THE WORKLOAD

Finding out what our students know at any point in time should be a rigorous process – but not, insists Mark Lehain, a burdensome one...

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### ASSISTANCE FROM THE ASSESSED

Jackie Beere OBE sets out several ways in which assessment can become a productive collaboration between teachers and students

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# Driving improvement

If you want to see just how misplaced our approach to ongoing assessment can be, compare what we ask of students to what's expected in a standard driving lesson, observes **Matt Hallam**...

**“I**t's an easy start to the year, and good for getting to know the kids. Give them a GCSE paper and see what they can do.”

That's how one senior leader responded when I asked how best to start the year. I was an ECT (or NQT, as we were called in 2010) at a new school, preparing to teach new students, and I needed to know how ready my Y8 class were going to be for their GCSE in four years' time. So what better way of finding out...?

A week later, I sat down to reflect. Had it been an 'Easy start to the year'? Absolutely not. Deliver a fresh-faced teacher to a lively bunch of Y8s, and trust that they'll sit in silence to complete a test... they must have smelt the naivety as soon as I walked through the door.

Had I at least 'got to know the kids'? Well, I did now know they couldn't sit in silence, and (un)surprisingly, couldn't complete a GCSE exam paper at the grand old age of 12. Of course, I would be reassured in time that this was due to some of them being 'kinaesthetic learners' – perhaps they were going to somehow communicate written language features through mimetic dance when the time came...?

## Showing progress

So, what had *they* learnt from the experience? That English was boring? Probably. That they were a failure? Likely. That I was moody? Definitely!

Naturally, the torture wasn't yet over for me, or them, as for the next six weeks, they'd spend hours 'developing' the skills for

this exam, while I'd spend even more hours keeping stationery manufacturers in business by covering the students' books in red pen. This whole ordeal would then repeat every six weeks to 'show progress'. The formative had shown they couldn't do it – so any progress they made at all, I could be proud of...right?

## “Ongoing feedback is about preventing errors from becoming embedded”

At the time, it hadn't been that long since I'd passed my driving test, and I couldn't help but compare my experiences of that with what my Y8s were going through. What would we say if driving instructors got their learners to take a full driving test in lesson one, simply in order to 'see what they can do'?

School assessment may have come a long way in the 15 years since then, but the question remains – *is our ongoing assessment practice getting full marks?* Are we actually 'ready for the road'? What follows below are a few missed opportunities that I still encounter regularly, along with some potential quick wins.

## Getting the 'formative' right

In 2010, I was an ill-informed educator. Not just when it came to the process of assessment, but also with respect to the considerable wealth of data and expertise that could have prevented such a highly inappropriate 'formative' from happening in the first place.

Today, before meeting a new class, I'll aim to have acquired as much formative information about them as possible. This starts with speaking to their previous teachers and TAs, but also involves gathering other academic information beyond just that related to my subject of English.

It's common practice for

reading age, but crucially, their *reading needs and strengths*. Once identified, this important information should be reflected in seating plans, to allow for ongoing cross-curricular assessment. Ensuring that strong comprehenders and decoders are seated alongside one peer of similar strength and another requiring support will help students develop their own subject skill, while also providing a living, breathing scaffold of support for those who need it.

This can also empower educators to target their questioning in a way that develops and constantly assesses the vocabulary, fluency and comprehension of select students – something that research has shown is a crucial factor in securing cross-curricular knowledge. After all, there's a reason as to why learner drivers aren't allowed on roads with passengers who are also learning to drive themselves...





## Daily assessment

In 2010, my full-page lesson plans (which nobody read, of course), included sections for ‘Assessment for Learning’ (AfL) and ‘Assessment of Learning’ (AoL). While this was a good reminder that assessment should be ongoing, getting students to complete ‘Two stars and a wish’ during a 3-minute plenary was never going to deliver a robust measurement of either.

Today, my ongoing assessment of students really is that – *ongoing*. This comes with precision, and through knowing our students well.

Mini-whiteboards and finger voting strategies\* are the quickest ways of obtaining whole-class knowledge. This approach – as opposed to cold-calling individual students – informs us how many have understood the concept and are now ready to progress. If a few aren’t ready, then we can quickly provide scaffolds without the majority having to wait. If the *majority* aren’t ready, we can adapt to address the gap. Either way, our assessment becomes more robust than when we treat one voice as a spokesperson for everyone.

If my driving instructor had based our next lessons on the needs of another learner entirely, I’d have never made it to the road...

## Ongoing feedback and ‘live marking’

This is pivotal for addressing misconceptions early on. Educators will often ask, “*How do you get round a full class in a lesson?*”. The answer lies in thinking about *strategy*. What incremental gains are you looking for from each student? What section of their work do you need to target? What misconceptions did they have before, and what guidance will they need?

Ongoing feedback is about preventing misconceptions and errors from becoming embedded. Had my driving instructor waited until week five to get me to check my mirrors, it would’ve been far more difficult for me to embed than if I’d been shown that in lesson 2, followed by constant reminders until that particular behaviour became habitual.

## Summative assessment

In 2010, my assessment goals were foggy at best. It’s important that we’re all clear

as to what we want to discover about student progression before assessing them – because often, formative assessments will fail to identify the differences between gaps in **content** and **skill**.

When my Y8s initially sat their formative/summative assessment, I didn’t know whether they lacked knowledge of language features (content), or how to write about them (skill). Assessments need to test both content *and* skill separately to diagnose the gap. Yes, by the end of Y11 they’ll need to apply both together – but we still need to know the precise gaps in order to get them there.

My first few driving lessons were less about the skill of driving, and more about the content of what everything did and how it worked. It was only after I’d mastered this that I could consider speed, perception and accuracy. Yes, the final test checked to see if and how I could put it all together to drive safely – but had my instructor not identified much earlier that I didn’t understand how the clutch worked, I’d have continued to stall when trying to start the car.

Overall, I’ve come a long way since those early experiences with assessment. Through intergenerational learning, assessment practice continues to be strengthened. Gone are the days (hopefully) of repeating the same test to get an unclear outcome, and we now have a broader field of research around which we can shape our practice.

‘Improvement’ means dedicating ourselves to true ongoing assessment. It’s with this vision that we’ll get all of our students safely ‘on the road’.

Oh, and just to add – my first driving test was anything but seamless. In fact, I hit a wheelie bin with my wing mirror, which – surprisingly – wasn’t even the reason for me failing. I think we can agree, though, that those who pass on their second attempt are typically better drivers... right?



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Hallam is a Trust literacy leader, English/literacy SLE and senior examiner based in Oldham and Rochdale



\*Providing the scaffold of multiple-choice answers and getting all students to vote by holding up the number of fingers that match to the corresponding answer.

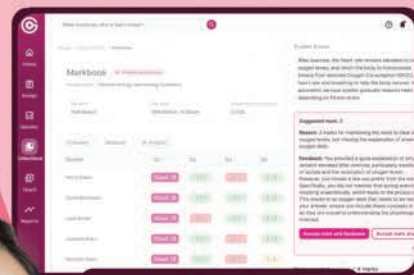


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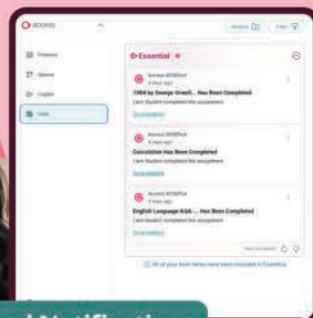
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# WHOSE PRACTICE *is it, anyway?*

When assessing teacher performance, we'd be better off evaluating the practice that suits them, rather than comparing them to a proscribed standard that could be holding them back, advises **Aaron Swan**

**W**e all have to be observed. It's part of the quality assurance process that helps us evolve new and ever-improving practice.

Observation roots out weak or substandard performance, but it should also identify and celebrate best practice. Observation is a quality assurance tool, whether applied directly through observation of lessons, or indirectly, via the assigning of grades, marking or student voice.

Most teachers aren't against observation in principle, but most teachers will also know of cases where observation has been used in ways that could be classed as unprofessional – partly because observation often comes accompanied by a prescribed set of 'standards' that define what 'best practice' looks like.

But what if observation was the reverse? What if it was purely *descriptive*?

## Meeting the standard

Expectations placed upon teaching and learning can be as benign as directing the colour of pen we mark in. Some directives – like three-part lessons, the expectation of whole class feedback methods, incorporation of standardised lesson resources, etc. – can end up distancing teachers from the planning stage, replacing planning with doctrine. In highly controlled environments, teachers can have very little to do with the actual planning of lessons.

Observations in these kinds of environments come down to checking that prescribed standards are being met in lessons. Some standards will always be mandated, of course. Are teachers undertaking the right module for the discipline? Are teachers following safeguarding procedures? Are we teaching as per the specifications, or in accordance with the National Curriculum?

Yet the experience that teachers give to students is something that many

detailing the main teaching styles exhibited by teachers and then attempt to describe the practitioner, rather than mark whether the teacher is satisfactorily performing in a particular directed style.

A (self-assessed) radar for my own practice might reveal that I'm highly facilitative- and humanist-orientated as a teacher, frequently creating resources students can navigate at their own pace in my absence, whilst talking to students about wellbeing.

My lessons don't seem compatible with

having a different pedagogical profile.

## Mix and match

Matching two teachers with distinctly different styles may provide solutions for some teachers experiencing issues with behaviour and progress. Someone very strong on Behaviourism and Cognitivism might greatly benefit from meeting with a Humanist-Facilitator. This would be a comparative system, in which teachers are encouraged to think about the kind of practice they can utilise successfully.

A system such as this would certainly have helped me during the early years of my career, when I was modelling my teaching on the highly authoritarian styles of much more experienced staff, which one could describe as being strongly Behaviourist and Cognitivist. It would have been hugely beneficial for my development if my radar were plotted by someone able to advocate for my strengths, and help me recognise how my moments of Facilitation or Humanism were those moments with the most promise – what I know now to be my teaching character – after many struggling years as a new teacher.

An observation framed in such a way may have subsequently led to me being paired with superior professional role models than those I had access to. Doing this, however, would require that schools both acknowledge and value difference in their staff's professionalism.

**“We're not merely here to enact the practice designed by someone else, but to be an individual in a classroom”**

teachers will want to own, as it's closely aligned with our autonomy. We're not merely here to enact the practice designed by someone else, but to be an individual in a classroom, possibly with our own idiosyncratic style.

What's needed instead are some variables, or language through which to describe a teacher's practice. Individual teachers tend to deploy a few specific teaching styles that can be described through existing pedagogical language. A basic summary of the main ones might resemble those found in the panel opposite (see 'Types of teacher practice').

## Description, not prescription

Under this model, an outside observer would come to the lesson with an agreed map

Behaviourism, as success in my lessons isn't about immediate reward, but rather the satisfaction to be had from exercising autonomy in pursuit of a singular purpose.

My resources are less project-based (thus scoring low on Constructivism), and since I'm arguably not supplying mnemonics or short cycles of 'learn > test', neither would I perform well as a Cognitivist.

What I *am* doing, however, seems to be working well for me and my students – for the most part.

With a system such as this, we might use descriptivism to pair complimentary teaching styles, so that one can support the other. We could pair one teacher struggling to manage a class with another described as



## Celebrating difference

The aim of a descriptive system like the one I'm setting out here wouldn't be to actually fill the radar, since diametrically opposing styles will always be difficult to reconcile, whereas shouldered styles will have some elements in common.

The Facilitator granting autonomy of workload to their students would pair well with the Humanist providing their students with the autonomy to decide what's most emotionally critical to them.

Conversely, a Behaviourist could pair well with the Constructivist or the Cognitivist, since both seek to create environments where success can be more easily measured and rewarded. That said, the Constructivist would be placed opposite the Cognitivist, as the former provides independence through project work, whilst the latter's students will be highly teacher-directed.

What we need to ask ourselves is why one combination of practice should be preferable to another. I've known teachers who are strongly Behaviourist and have secured a

great deal of success, where I've failed. A prescriptive style runs the risk of pressurising teachers into being something they're not.

Is it possible to even have *no* style? I believe so, but teachers scoring low across all styles will likely be struggling a great deal, utilising practice that won't be fitting into styles known to work.

These will be teachers who need to see others that are strongly aligned one way or another so that best practice can be shared around, encouraging us to find our own character.

A descriptive and comparative environment would be one that celebrates difference, while nurturing others to be comfortable with a teaching style they can sustain. And I suspect that such an environment may well have a part to play in addressing the teacher retention issue, too...



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Swan is an English teacher, Language For Learning, and has been a head of department

## TYPES OF TEACHER PRACTICE



**THE BEHAVIOURIST** will create learning environments focused on routine and giving students a high number of rewards, thus conditioning them to focus on behaviours that produce immediate benefits. Their activities will be more drill-based, repeated over multiple lessons and likely to be driven by direct instruction.



**THE COGNITIVIST** will operate in a teaching and learning environment that's designed around how the brain moves cognition from working memory into long term memory. The core principles at play in their practice will include recall strategies, cycles of learning and testing, and mnemonics.



**THE CONSTRUCTIVIST** will foster environments driven by the development of knowledge acquired first-hand via practical experience and problem solving. What these environments might lack in direct instruction will be made up for by the abstract problems students are presented with, and then tasked with overcoming in ways unique to them. Success will often depend on students demonstrating self-motivation and soft skills, such as teamwork.



**THE FACILITATOR** is focused on not becoming the font of all knowledge. A facilitator works to provide an independent learning experience by gathering all the learning materials the students will be accessing, and then assisting them in overcoming their barriers to learning. A facilitator gives all of the learning to students and then helps them to navigate the material.



**THE HUMANIST** prioritises students' emotional states, allowing them to direct or lead the conversations they have with their teachers. Humanists work on the assumption that life experiences can create emotional hang-ups that will inhibit learning, until the student has worked through the issue(s) in question. In these environments, teachers behave like counsellors before the learning occurs.



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- > Baseline new learners or benchmark attainment before a period of intervention/targeted teaching.
- > Easily spot knowledge gaps among groups and individuals to inform your planning.

Section	Raw score	Subject scores
Section 1: Literal comprehension		Section 1: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 2: Inference		Section 2: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 3: Vocabulary		Section 3: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 4: Analysis		Section 4: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 5: Literal comprehension		Section 5: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 6: Inference		Section 6: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 7: Vocabulary		Section 7: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 8: Inference		Section 8: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 9: Literal comprehension		Section 9: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 10: Inference		Section 10: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 11: Vocabulary		Section 11: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 12: Inference		Section 12: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Total raw score		

## Test B to track progress and measure intervention impact.

- > Use the parallel assessment after a period of targeted teaching or interventions to compare assessment outcomes against Test A results.
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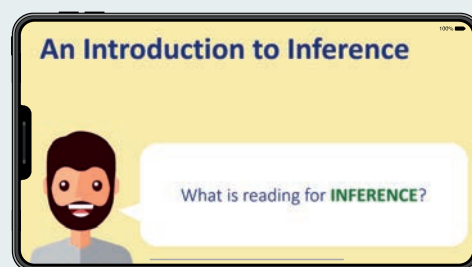
Section	Raw score	Subject scores
Section 1: Number		Section 1: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 2: Place value		Section 2: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 3: Addition and subtraction		Section 3: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 4: Multiplication and division		Section 4: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 5: Fractions, decimals and percentages		Section 5: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 6: Measures		Section 6: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 7: Geometry		Section 7: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 8: Statistics		Section 8: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Section 9: Problem solving		Section 9: 1 = 5 x 5 =
Total raw score		



# NEXT-STEP INTERVENTIONS

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# FAILING

## *to make the grade*

Without rapid reforms to the existing GCSEs system, we risk failing to prepare our children for the future, says **Dr Nikos Savvas**

**T**his summer, another 650,000 students across the country underwent the most stressful time in their lives so far, by sitting their GCSE exams and experiencing the subsequent results day.

According to multiple studies, the mental health impact of these examinations on our young people is bad, and getting worse. Last year, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) found that more than three quarters of teachers and school leaders reported seeing mental health issues related to exam anxiety among their Y11s (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-G1](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-G1)).

In light of this, politicians have promised to ‘reduce assessment volume’ – but these reforms miss the fundamental problem. We’re using an assessment method that actively undermines everything we know about learning, development and what young people actually need to succeed in the modern economy.

### Fear of failure

In the world of work, you’re rarely required to sit an exam. Instead, most employers will typically want their employees to be capable of problem-solving, collaborating well with others and thinking creatively and critically.

These skills are highly sought after, with 61% of senior figures and talent acquisition specialists at the UK’s FTSE350 listed companies stating that more creative thinkers are needed

in their businesses (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-G2](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-G2)).

This is because businesses are rapidly changing, with the world of work having undergone a fundamental transformation, particularly in the last few years. Technological advancement, globalisation and shifts across the wider culture have changed the game, meaning our education system is now assessing 16-year-olds in entirely the wrong way. Rather than living in a world where information is scarce

and access to knowledge is limited, students now carry the world’s information in their pockets.

Why, then, have the cognitive demands, logistics and timings of GCSE exams changed so little since their introduction in 1988? The answer lies in the fact that no government in the intervening years has been bold or brave enough to make the significant reforms that the secondary curriculum so desperately needs, for fear of failing in the task.

It’s an uncomfortable truth that GCSE examinations, in their current format, remain one of the cheapest assessment methods we have available to us. With a written examination, there’s no

requirement to fund tailored one-to-one feedback provided by experienced and qualified assessors, nor any need to assess students’ ability to engage in collaborative processes when appraising their progress.

However, it doesn’t take an experienced educator to realise that students learn best when they collaborate with others, receive meaningful feedback and find themselves part of a supportive learning environment – none of which

swimming quite literally puts one in a life or death situation. As such, students only get to progress to the next level if they’re completely ready. My message to our government would be, *why can’t learning in school be the same?*

All educators recognise that we need some sort of assessment method. How else will universities be able to identify the highest performing students? But when considering what that assessment method should be, we ought to look at how it’s been done elsewhere in the education system for guidance and inspiration, rather than back to our own history as an industry.

### Restricted to silence

Take PhDs – the pinnacle of academic education, for which students will usually be assessed via a combination of written work and an oral examination. Some universities may also require their students to reflectively track their own skills

can be achieved by simply tasking students with recalling facts in isolation.

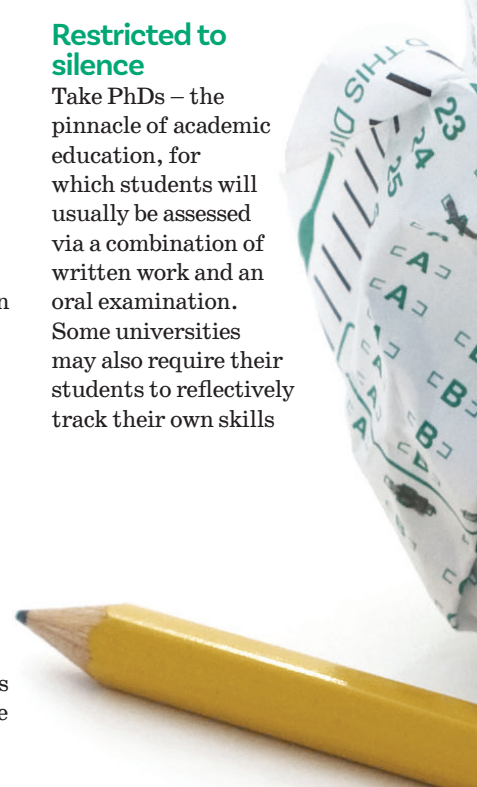
### Next level learning

What, then, would a solution that genuinely suits the needs of 21st-century learners look like? I firmly believe that we first need to *completely redesign* the current assessment system.

Let’s consider for a moment what’s involved in learning how to swim. Swimming instructors will seek to teach swimming techniques over a series of gradual stages, with learners having the chance to practise the skills they’re developing in a safe, controlled environment before applying them independently.

This is because the act of

**“Do we honestly believe that high-stakes, memory-based assessment serves any educational purpose in the 21st century?”**





development throughout the course of their study.

This methodology is much more closely aligned to how adults are expected to manage their professional development in the workplace, where – all being well – they will be seen as equally motivated partners in their own growth and development. And yet, we persist in restricting young people to sitting in absolute silence, pen and paper in hand, while they answer questions that reward rote memorisation.

We can look to other good examples from across our contemporary education system. We have been

running Extended Project Qualification (EPQs), at our One Sixth Form College and Abbeygate Sixth Form College centres for several years at this point, which allow students to engage in extended project work, collaborate on real-world problems and access ongoing feedback, instead of only receiving summative judgements. The evidence gathered by our colleges so far indicates that students who engage in these projects don't just perform better academically; they build resilience, get to exercise their creativity and develop the kind of deep learning that traditional exams explicitly inhibit.

Another of our centres,

West Suffolk College, meanwhile supports over 900 employers in the Eastern region, with over 2,000 apprentices in training. Here too, the training in question makes use of multiple assessment methods, including practical assessments, interviews and project-based work.

This way, we can ensure that students are able to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours they've acquired throughout their apprenticeship, all while helping to prepare them more appropriately for the modern workplace.

### Trusted judgements

Another issue is that teachers are typically trusted to assess students from Y7 through to Y11 – but when young people are due to progress to Y12, their judgements are suddenly viewed as flawed for some reason, with external bodies needing to be called upon to 'validate' their results.

Surely secondary teachers – trained and dedicated professionals specialising in their chosen subject – are trustworthy enough to assess whether students are ready to progress to the next level?

When students were unable to sit in exam halls due to COVID-19, we collectively trusted our educators' judgements via the teacher-assessed grades that temporarily supplemented formal exams. While I readily acknowledge

that there were teething problems with this process – understandably so, given that it was an incredibly stressful time – it conclusively demonstrated that schools were, in fact, capable of self-regulated assessment, and that teachers will indeed behave with all the professional integrity we know they possess when required.

The government's upcoming Curriculum and Assessment Review therefore represents an opportunity to ask significantly smarter questions beyond 'How can we reduce assessment volume?' Will the new approach finally let go of our increasingly outdated and uninspiring system? And do we honestly believe that high-stakes, non-referenced, memory-based assessment serves any legitimate educational purpose in the 21st century? The answer is clear – it doesn't.

Our government should instead have the courage to redesign assessments around the capabilities young people need to develop, using methods that support, rather than undermine their learning and wellbeing.

Such a system would help every young person discover and develop their own unique potential. Given the mounting evidence of harm from our current approach, change is needed urgently. Otherwise, we'll be failing our future citizens at the very beginning of their journeys through our ever-changing world.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Nikos Savvas is CEO of Eastern Education Group, responsible for the organisation's strategic direction, quality and financial stability, and also the principal of Abbeygate Sixth Form College; for more information, visit [easterneducationgroup.ac.uk](http://easterneducationgroup.ac.uk)



THAT'S NOT...



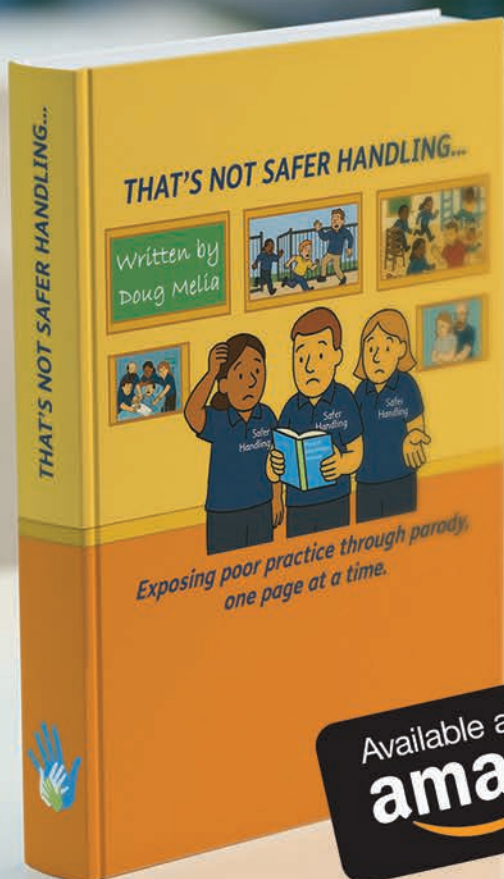
A bold, honest,  
and eye-opening  
book that  
challenges  
outdated physical  
intervention

This powerful, illustrated book invites readers to reflect on real-world scenarios with fresh eyes. Rooted in lived experience and professional insight, it uses humour and simplicity to expose poor practice and spark meaningful conversations in training, education, and care settings.

Whether you're a frontline practitioner, trainer, or leader, this book encourages critical thinking, challenges the status quo, and promotes safer, trauma-informed approaches.

Written by...  
Doug Melia

Available soon  
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**UPDATED FOR  
2025 /2026**

Now paired with our updated, CPD accredited online course; This IS Safer-handling- a guide to understanding reasonable force & reducing incidents in your workplace. This book serves as the perfect companion for anyone working with children or vulnerable people, helping staff apply the lessons from each page directly in their reducing restrictive practices plans.



# The Inside Story

## DOUG MELIA

is the founder and director of Safer Handling

From playground to policy, find out how Safer Handling became a national standard...



**Safer Handling equips staff and volunteers across multiple sectors with legally-informed training to safely manage the distressed, displaced and deregulated. From incident prevention to post-incident support, the organisation helps embed strategies that are lawful, ethical and trauma-aware.**



**Contact:**  
+44 033 0023 5636  
info@safer-handling.co.uk  
safer-handling.co.uk



**ABOUT DOUG:**  
Doug Melia is the founder and director of Safer Handling

What began in classrooms and hospitals has become a national benchmark in restraint reduction and the safer handling of incidents.

In 1997, Safer Handling's founder Doug Melia was teaching martial arts as a GCSE option at inner-city schools, encountering first-hand the limitations of no-restraint policies. Outside the classroom, he was working as a door supervisor – before regulations revealed the dangers of excessive force.

This dual perspective revealed to him the urgent need for safer

handling alternatives. In 1999 he launched Safer Handling, and began working with the Lancashire Partnership against Crime and the NHS, teaching personal safety and positive behaviour support strategies to teachers.

From 2001 to 2006, Doug was regularly teaching school staff, whilst simultaneously serving as a High Court enforcement officer. These roles highlighted for him how poorly designed intervention systems could escalate risk, rather than reduce it. This became the primary focus of Safer Handling – to develop respectful, legally defensible systems rooted in lived experience.

From 2006 to 2009, Safer Handling began investing in sector-wide research and professional training, focusing on trauma-informed alternatives to prolonged physical restraint and chemical intervention.

In 2010, Safer Handling launched a suite of DVD resources to help schools meet their statutory annual refresher training requirements. The goal was to make essential knowledge accessible; empower schools to embed safer practices internally; and reduce schools' dependency on external courses.

The company expanded its expert advisory group in 2012, bringing in Julie Wiggs, formerly of HM Customs & Excise, to support clients with post-incident documentation, investigation reports and evidential clarity. Her background and diligence

strengthened our ability to assist settings with internal reviews, regulatory responses and general accountability processes.

By 2015, the business had acquired the Soft Restraint Kit brand and re-engineered it as a new solution for preventing restraint-related deaths. Other new tools were developed to aid clinical interventions and movement, particularly for vulnerable individuals, for whom 'hands on' interventions simply aren't an option.

In 2020, while many providers paused their operations in response to the pandemic, Safer Handling launched a full suite of digital learning resources so that frontline staff in schools, care homes and custody environments could continue to receive vital training. There have been over 50,000 signups to date, from as far afield as Nigeria and Texas.

In 2021, Safer Handling collaborated with the Ministry of Justice to design a fabric alternative to archaic mechanical restraints. The result – Safetycuff – provides a trauma-informed alternative to relying on prolonged holding or use of metal devices.

While there are no plans to utilise Safetycuff devices in schools, their use has now been formally mandated across all UK young offender Institutions and secure children's homes – a landmark moment in terms of lawful and ethical solutions being embedded within national frameworks.

2025 has seen the company launch brand new online courses and unveil a genuine first – a bold, accessible guide called 'That's Not Safer Handling' inspired by the 'That's Not My...' book series for children. The resource will help frontline staff spot signs of poor practice, challenge unsafe routines, and initiate essential conversations around restraint reduction spanning a range of age groups and sectors.

## Unique selling points

### Flexibility

Flexible training options intended to support busy staff with accessible, time-efficient online and blended learning formats

### Organisational experience

Benefit from organisational experience spanning education, healthcare and justice, as well as direct access to our suite of instructional clips and regular workshops.

### External reviews

Safer Handling's services are all independently reviewed by external legal, medical and movement professionals



# Unlock the power of plants for your students

## WITH THE RHS SCHOOL GARDENING AWARDS

- Earn **free** seeds, books and vouchers
- Develop new skills for life
- Improve student mental health and wellbeing
- Increase environmental awareness and nature connectedness
- Celebrate growing success

START  
GROWING  
TODAY



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# 5 REASONS TO TRY... The RHS School Gardening Awards

Free support to help your students get growing



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

This free, five-level awards scheme offers achievable goals to help students experience the many benefits of gardening – from boosting wellbeing and developing new skills, to supporting the environment and forging community links. Fully flexible, the Awards are for all ages, abilities and settings.

### 1 FREE GROWING RESOURCES

As you complete each of the five School Gardening Award levels, you will receive free resources – including seeds, books and National Garden Gift Vouchers to help you continue your school's gardening journey. You'll also receive a certificate and digital award logo to help share your achievements.

### 2 BOOST WELLBEING

Connecting with plants and nature has a powerful impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing. A recent RHS report found that 96% of teachers observed a positive effect on young people's wellbeing through gardening. Taking part in the Awards will support students to connect with others and feel more in tune with the natural world. Schools tell us that they see a real difference as children smile, breathe and relax when they are in the garden spaces.

### 3 DEVELOP SKILLS

The Awards are designed to build and grow a wide range of skills that young people can carry into their lives. As well as learning hand-on gardening skills – such as sowing seeds, nurturing seedlings and taking cuttings – they will also develop teamwork, communication, leadership and problem-solving skills. Gardening can additionally help to build confidence, patience and resilience.

### 4 SUPPORT THE ENVIRONMENT

Through the School Gardening Awards, students will learn how small, simple actions can help protect the planet.



**RHS**

#### Contact:

[schoolgardening@rhs.org.uk](mailto:schoolgardening@rhs.org.uk)

From collecting rainwater and growing food, to creating habitats for wildlife, with schools transforming grey spaces by growing plants that will flower, fruit and seed through the year. The Award criteria will help empower young people to take environmental action, no matter the size of your school's growing space.

### 5 CULTIVATE COMMUNITY LINKS

The final Award level includes a focus on building connections beyond the school gates. Whether it's gardening with family members or past (or future) students, or by welcoming community volunteers, gardening can unite people of all ages.

## Key Points

Start your school's gardening journey today at [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/awards](https://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/awards)

100 percent of schools that have taken part in previous years stated in a recent survey (July 2025), that they would recommend the awards to other schools.

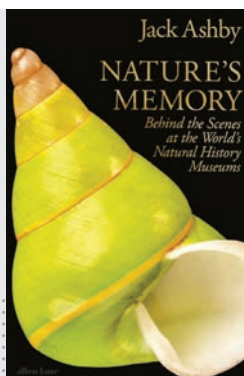
Grow your teaching with free eLearning - build confidence, skills, and plant power in your classroom. Start today: [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/training](https://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/training)

Sign up to receive our monthly newsletter packed with tips, advice and school case studies at [rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/signup](https://rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/signup)



# Off the Shelves

Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore



## **Nature's Memory** (Jack Ashby, Allen Lane, £25)

One would think that the stories told by the exhibits in natural history museums are reasonably objective and factual, but apparently not. Reconstructing the skeletons of long-dead species, for example, can often be a matter of guesswork based on our knowledge of the human skeleton. That might seem reasonable enough, but as Ashby details here – amid interesting discussions of acquisition and animatronics – problems can set in when scientific assumptions affect public perceptions. To illustrate this, he cites one case where female pronouns were automatically bestowed upon the fossils of two prehistoric creatures apparently preserved in the act of looking after their eggs, raising questions about how objectively true natural history museum exhibitions actually are – when even the preponderance of mammals in such locations can present a misleading picture. Recommended.

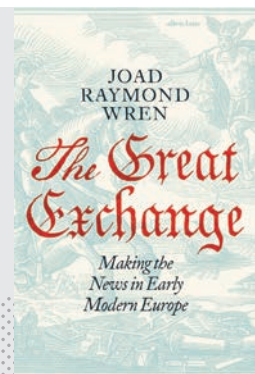
**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**  
(see [bit.ly/Eclecticism](http://bit.ly/Eclecticism) for more details)

Stranger  
than Fiction  
Lives of the  
Twentieth-  
Century  
Novel  
Edwin Frank

## **Stranger than Fiction: Lives of the Twentieth Century Novel** (Edwin Frank, Fern Press, £25)

At first glance, this book's table of contents seems puzzling. Despite running to nearly 500 pages, Frank seems to be using fewer than 50 different novels to represent a hundred years of literary evolution – but appearances can be deceptive. Each chapter is rich with connections between the main work under discussion and many other earlier and later novels by other writers. We also get detailed dives into the biographical details of the featured author, and careful consideration of prevailing social and political context in which the book was first published. Be advised, though – this is no dry, dusty academic tome, but rather a highly readable romp through some of the 20th century's key literary milestones. Comes highly recommended as both a reference book, and an enjoyable read in its own right.

**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**



## **The Great Exchange: Making the News in Early Modern Europe**

(Joad Raymond Wren, Allen Lane, £40)

This isn't a book about the history of newspapers, but of news itself, and the many ways in which it has manifested over time – from pamphlets and personal diaries to chronicles. Wren's key point is that what we think of as 'news' predated newspapers, which can be easily overlooked in the media-saturated present day. In Wren's telling, the real history of the news isn't just a chronology of technological inventions, but one that encompasses the development of early postal services and establishment of trading routes. It's also fascinating to read how our conception of an 'editor' began centuries ago, with individuals collating bits and pieces of news from different sources and writers – with no regard for copyright or editorial stances – in order to produce the first 'news' pamphlets.

**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**



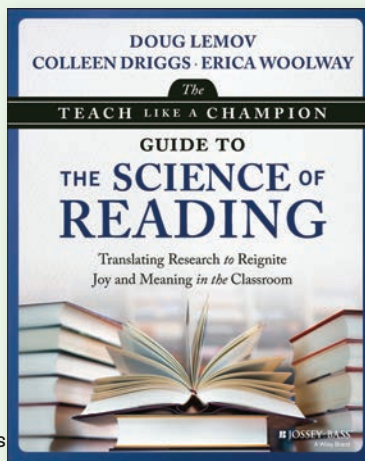
## ON THE RADAR

**The Teach Like a Champion Guide to the Science of Reading****(Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs & Erica Woolway, Jossey-Bass, £22.99)**

For more than a decade, the organisation Teach Like a Champion has scoured the globe, uncovering the best teachers working today, learning what makes their practice so effective and feeding those findings into an ever-growing pool of teaching resources.

As the title suggests, this book takes the 'TLac' methodology and applies it specifically to reading. The first thing to note is that it's a creation of American authors, but contains wisdom that transcends national borders, and indeed directly cites teaching practice and education policy originating from both the US and the UK. The second thing is that the book's chapters include a series of links to Vimeo-hosted online videos showing actual reading instruction and teaching taking place in situ, the viewing of which are pretty much essential for following the advice and practical teaching suggestions given in each chapter.

Make no mistake, this is a dense work that covers the teaching of reading from a whole host of different angles spanning neuroscience, pedagogy, wider cultural concerns, personal behaviours and more besides. The authors are practised hands at this, however, as shown by the thoughtful way in which the book's material is organised, but above all, in the tone and language that's always drawing you in, making the formidable seem doable, and eager to convey what makes the teaching practice shown in those videos so great, so that you can see it too.

**Meet the author****ZAHARA CHOWDHURY****What were your reasons for writing the book, and why now?**

Several years ago, I was leading on equality, diversity and inclusion across two schools, and was often asked by colleagues about how to discuss issues of race, and the Black Lives Matter movement in the classroom. Conversations were also being had around our Pride clubs, and whether there should also be student clubs for Christianity and Islam – which, in my view, wasn't a big deal. The students could have those clubs if they wanted, so long as they were willing and able to enter into mature and honest conversations with their teachers as to why.

Even if students don't like having those kinds of conversations, they can still see that you're being honest and candid with them, which makes them feel like they belong. You're not hiding or masking anything. That's what really led to me writing the book – a wish to document the experiences I and my colleagues were having, and our conversations with students.

**Were you writing for a specific readership?**

I wasn't. EDI can be led from the top – I've been lucky enough to be in a senior position working directly with headship – and be embedded in the school's strategy and development plans. At other schools, it can be more a case of, 'We need to put something about race, representation and diversity in the curriculum – let's make it a project for that ECT who wants a promotion.'

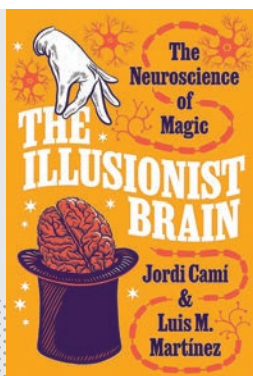
I had both scenarios in mind, having spoken to people across the spectrum, from leaderships who really 'get it', to teachers tasked with organising an anti-racism schools award but didn't know where to start. The book includes specific chapters on school culture and values for leadership teams, as well as chapters with what are hopefully helpful tips for ECTs, teachers and managers on creating belonging at a smaller scale, within their classrooms.

**What are your wider thoughts on how EDI is currently seen across the wider profession?**

I think the good intentions needed to build belonging and inclusion are there, though there are still systemic barriers regarding access to education, and socioeconomic issues outside of schools' control.

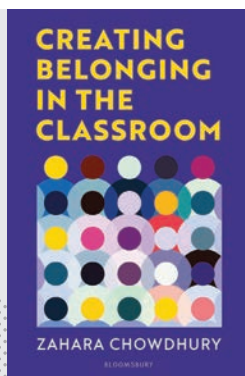
I'd say things are moving in the right direction. My only concern is whether schools are seeing inclusion and belonging as integral to the curriculum – because it needs to be within the fabric of your behaviour framework, your teaching and learning. It's not just an 'add-on'.

**Zahara Chowdhury is an English teacher, head of department and senior leader**

**The Illusionist Brain: The Neuroscience of Magic****(Jordi Cami & Luis M. Martinez, Princeton, £22)**

However closely I might watch the hands of a magician at work, I'll always miss what's actually going on. In *The Illusionist Brain*, Cami and Martinez examine how the brain works, and how practitioners of the ancient art of magic take advantage of these processes to make us see things that aren't there, or miss things that are. Needless to say, the main aim of the book isn't to lift the lid on how various magic tricks are conceived and performed, but to instead elucidate the intricacies of cognition and memory. I was surprised to read some of the clearest explanations of neuroscience I've yet come across, such as the key concept of framing, and how magicians will utilise it when preparing their audiences to ensure certain outcomes. Definitely a useful and highly readable book.

**Reviewed by Terry Freedman**

**Creating Belonging in the Classroom****(Zahara Chowdhury, Bloomsbury, £18)**

It's now widely accepted that schools aren't isolated bunkers, cut off from any engagement with the issues of the day, but rather spaces in which enquiry and debate of contemporary topics is often encouraged. At the same time, broader shifts in social attitudes have resulted in greater awareness and appreciation of students' differing backgrounds and identities, and how failures of inclusion can lead to alienation and disengagement. The process of ensuring that all students feel that they belong at school can be complicated and difficult to unpack – which is where this book comes in. Chowdhury's advice is rooted in personal experience (the intro vividly recounting her memories of how it felt to be an 'EAL student'), but wide in scope, taking in discussions of values, allyship, social media, behaviour audits and much more, in an admirably open, approachable and non-prescriptive way that should prove invaluable to both cautious ECTs and seasoned heads alike.

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# Could debate dissolve the manosphere?



**Louisa Searle**, Director of Education at the ESU, explains how oracy can help young people feel more connected and engaged with the wider world

*think that people sometimes don't realise that they're debating. Whether it's the new Ariana Grande album or foreign policy, if you're engaging with the other person's viewpoints, listening to them and countering with your own thoughts and arguments, then you're debating."*

## No 'right' or 'wrong'

Will AI-generated content (the topic of this year's grand final) weaken our critical thinking and creativity? Or is it, in fact, sharpening our thinking, liberating us from mundane work and providing a fast-track to innovation, advanced critical thinking and higher-level skills?

Are gene-edited embryos a good way of preventing suffering for thousands of people each year, or a dangerous step towards designer babies and 'othering'? Should mobile phones be banned for under-16s, or are they now vital for children's safety?

Such questions, and countless others like them, *matter*, with answers that will define our futures. Crucially, for teenagers who can struggle with school and writing, there's no essay-writing required, and no 'right' answer. I firmly believe that, when so much of the curriculum is geared towards 'right' and 'wrong' answers, simply understanding this concept can be transformational.

## It's okay to be clever

A good debate – whether in a club or in lesson time – offers

the chance to weigh up the pros and cons of an issue and talk them through from all angles. In most cases debaters are assigned a side. This prevents personal feelings from coming into it, while also building in empathy and reducing the possibility of any backlash.

As Simrah, a student and grand finalist from Woodcote High School told us, *"Through doing the research, you find out things that might be the opposite of what you originally thought. You get to understand a subject – it's a really interesting and enjoyable process."*

By its very nature, no debate will ever swing everybody – but then that's the whole point. In life, most things take place via compromise, persuasion and discussion, rather than by sticking to extremes.

Debate further encourages teamwork. This year's final featured competitors who would have been in Y7 or Y8 when COVID first struck, with two of the teams having had to self-organise in order to take part. Plus, as with any competitive activity, it enables young people to meet and mix with peers from other schools and areas, helping them discover that they have far more in common than they might have thought.

Most hearteningly of all, it can help students to 'find their people'. This was vividly brought home to me by a mother who was watching her son, a pupil at a state school in Grantham, Lincolnshire. She remarked, *"I think in a lot of schools,*



*it's not okay to be clever. Debating allows boys to say, 'Actually, I'm not really into rugby, or cricket, or football – I just like reading books and having an opinion on something.' It lets them embrace the fact that they're clever and shout about it."*

Now, more than ever, we must challenge the idea that debate is the preserve of the elite and encourage more young people to give it a go. Simply telling young boys that Andrew Tate and the like are wrong won't necessarily work – but giving them a voice, encouraging them to explore the issues themselves and having them talk about their thoughts and feelings, so that they realise they're not alone – well, that just might...



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louisa Searle is director of education at The English-Speaking Union; for more information, visit [esu.org](http://esu.org)

**T**hat headline poses a bold question, but as I watched the recent finals of the English-Speaking Union's Schools' Mace debating competition, I believed more than ever that debate can do just that.

Earlier this year, the hit Netflix series *Adolescence* – in which a 13-year-old boy violently kills a girl who had shunned him, much to his family's disbelief – got everyone talking about the pernicious effects of social media. More importantly, it prompted conversations over what to do about it.

When interviewed by CNN, the series' co-creator, Jack Thorne, said, *"There aren't simple answers to this, but the biggest answer is let [your children] talk, or find a way to get them talking, or get inside what they're worrying about."*

At its heart, debate is a great way of doing just that – getting young people talking about the things they care about. As one of this year's competitors put it, *"I*

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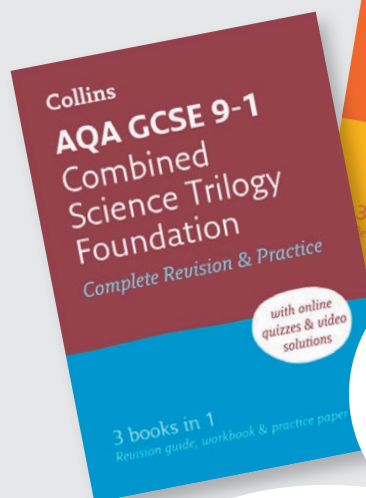
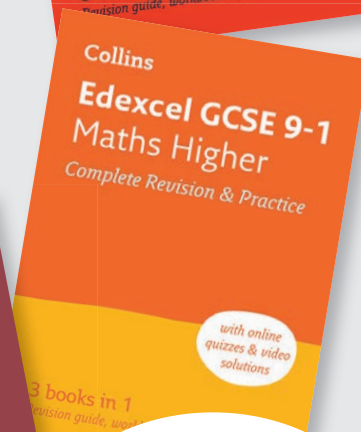
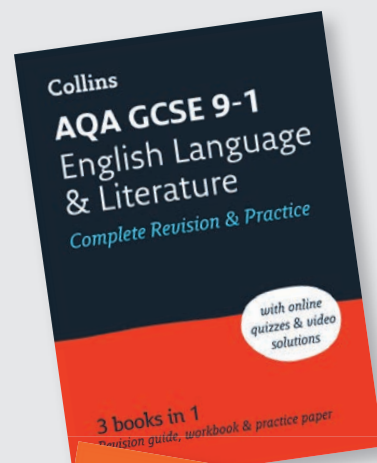
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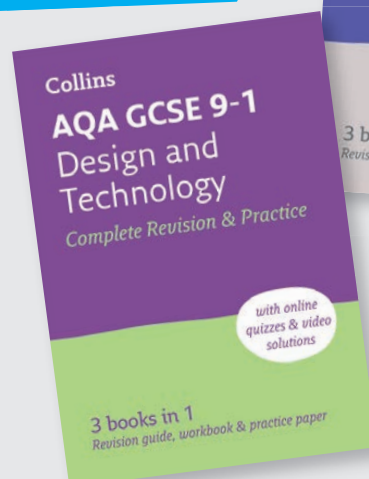
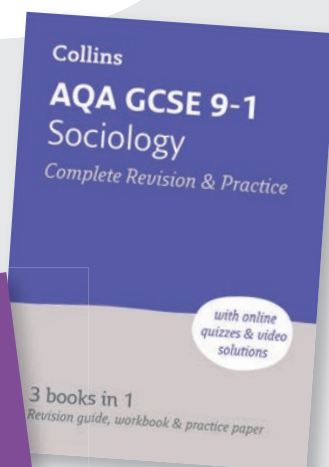
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## What real LEADERS DO

*Ed Carlin looks at how the morale of school staff can be improved and maintained via the careful application of some authentic leadership...*

**W**alk into almost any staffroom on a Friday afternoon, and you're bound to see the tell-tale signs of a school trying to boost morale. It might be a notice advertising the next staff bowling night, a poster for an optional yoga session, or a circular concerning the ever-popular 'wellbeing lunch' promised at the end of term.

While these gestures aren't inherently *bad* as such, they have become symbols of a deeper issue – attempts at fixing a leaking ship with colourful stickers.

The underlying reasons for low staff morale in schools extend far beyond the restorative powers of pizza and playlists. It's not that teachers don't appreciate small tokens of appreciation; it's that those tokens often come off as superficial, when the day-to-day realities of their jobs are ignored, or worse, exacerbated.

If school leaders *genuinely* want to make an impact on the motivation, engagement levels and commitment of their staff, then it's time to rethink this approach. Not from the top down, but from the inside out.

### Leadership and lived experience

In too many schools, the gap between SLT and classroom teachers is growing. Not because of policy changes, or even

performance targets, but for reasons of empathy – or a lack thereof.

The truth is that many of today's school leaders climbed the ladder not necessarily because they were the best teachers, but because they either had a natural affinity for leadership roles, or were simply burned out by the daily grind of teaching. And here lies the problem – how can someone lead a teaching team effectively if they've lost connection with what it actually means to teach?

Imagine the following scenario. A headteacher introduces a new data tracking system mid-year. It requires teachers to log weekly assessments and generate personalised pupil progress plans. When asked how long this might take, they respond confidently, *"Oh, just 30 minutes a week."*

The teachers know better. It's easily two to three hours, per class. Add that to the backlog of marking, lesson planning and parent communications, and you start to see the friction.

'Empathising' isn't sending a staff-wide email acknowledging the

stress and asking for ‘patience.’ It’s walking into those classrooms and helping out. It’s picking up a whiteboard marker and teaching. It’s understanding what 32 teenagers look like after lunch on a rainy Tuesday in November, and still finding joy in it.

### Morale is a culture

Many of us will have seen this play out in our schools’ policies. A new onboarding program is adopted, a wellbeing champion is appointed, and sometimes there’s even a fortnightly cake rota. Yet real morale comes from meaningful interaction, not manufactured celebration. When new staff join, they don’t just want to be welcomed with a branded mug and

lanyard; they want to know their leadership team will stand with them during hard times. There’s more to it than simply cheering from the sidelines.

Take the practice of onboarding, for example. Many schools will start strong, with induction days, mentor pairings and informative safeguarding briefings. But when a new teacher is left alone to manage a difficult Y9 class with no behaviour support in sight, that initial morale boost will quickly disappear. Staff morale isn’t maintained by having a great first week. It’s

built day after day, through consistent and visible support from leadership that sends a clear message of ‘*We’re in this together*’.

Many of us will have sat through those staff development sessions – all dimmed lights, soft music and montages of motivational quotes over images of mountain climbers, Olympic athletes and Oprah Winfrey. It’s not that inspiration has no place in schools, because it does. But motivation derived from performance art is fleeting.

Teachers don’t need reminding that their job matters. They need their leaders to show that *they* matter.

Here’s a common experience. Following a 90-minute session on

## THE END OF PERFORMANCE-RELATED PAY

In September 2024, it was announced that schools in England would no longer have to link teacher pay progression to performance outcomes. The change was formalised in the latest School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document (see [tiny.cc/ts146-TM1](https://tiny.cc/ts146-TM1)) and supported by non-statutory guidance from the DfE.

### Why was it removed?

People had long criticised the use of mandatory performance-related-pay (PRP) within the profession for its administrative burden, questionable impact on teaching quality and the stress it placed on staff.

The government’s Workload Reduction Taskforce and other subsequent reviews concluded that PRP often failed to deliver on its intended outcomes, while contributing to further teacher dissatisfaction and attrition.

### What’s changed?

While PRP is no longer mandatory, schools still have the discretion to retain it in full or in part. Crucially, the statutory requirement to appraise teachers remains in place.

Pay decisions must still follow the completion of this annual appraisal cycle. Schools must ensure that their pay policies clearly outline how progression decisions will be made, and whether or not these are linked to performance.

### Risks and opportunities

The removal of mandatory PRP doesn’t amount to an abandoning of accountability. If anything, it presents schools with opportunities for

reimagining their performance management processes, in ways that are more supportive, developmental and equitable than before.

Without careful planning, however, schools risk creating systems that are either too lax – leading to automatic pay progression without merit – or too opaque, which could invite challenges from staff and unions.

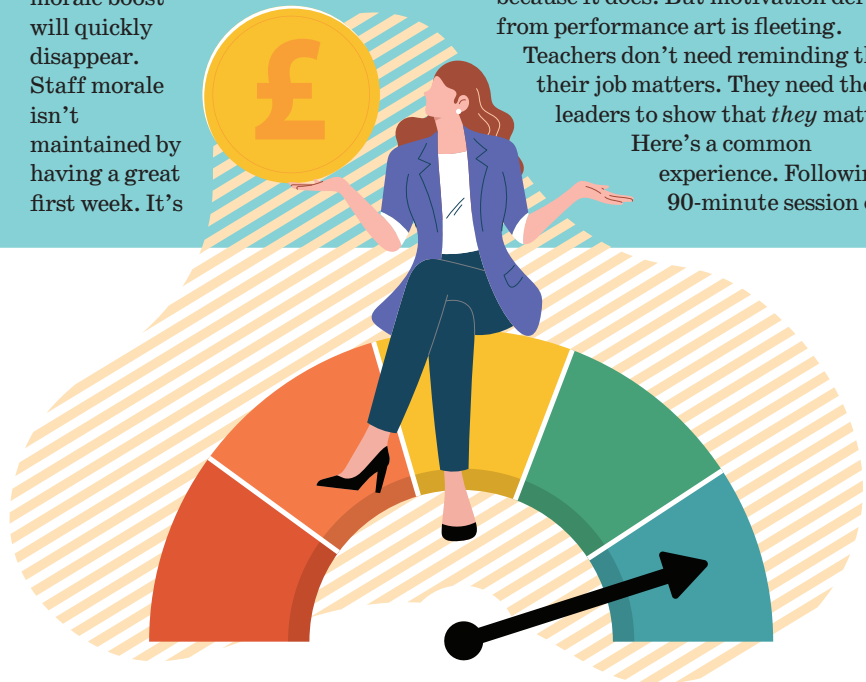
### Redefining appraisal systems

Schools must ensure that their appraisal processes remain robust, fair and focused on professional growth. This will involve setting clear, consistent and measurable objectives aligned with school priorities, and ensuring that appraisals are evidence-informed, but not overly bureaucratic.

### Pay progression criteria

Even without PRP, schools must still define how their teachers will move through different pay scales. This could include annual progression – assuming no documented performance concerns – or staggered increments, to manage budgets while still rewarding excellence.

Schools should also set transparent criteria for upper pay range applications and progression.



With the shift away from PRP, there ought to be a greater focus on providing CPD tailored to both school-wide and individual needs. Peer reviews, coaching and mentoring will additionally help to foster a culture of collaboration and improvement.

### Accountability without punishment

Schools should avoid replacing PRP with other punitive systems. Instead, they should use appraisal outcomes to identify support needs early, and use capability procedures only as a last resort, rather than the default.

The end of mandatory PRP presents schools with a chance to build accountability systems that are fairer, more supportive and better aligned with the realities of teaching. By focusing on clarity, consistency and development, schools can ensure that they maintain and even enhance standards in this new era.



Lirette Mill is head of HR advisory at the education and public sector support provider HR Connect; for more information, visit [hrconnect.org.uk](https://hrconnect.org.uk)



wellbeing and motivational theory, a school's teachers return to their classrooms to find a new marking policy waiting in their inboxes, another spreadsheet to complete and a reminder that progress reports are 'due by Friday'. The irony won't be lost on them.

## Present and accountable

Motivation is forged in the crucible of shared struggle and joint effort. When leaders step into the same arena to face the same obstacles as their staff – *that's* when morale shifts. Not because someone said the right thing, but because they *did* the right thing.

If you're a school leader reading this, ask yourself, honestly – do I want to actually improve staff morale, or do I just want to tick a box showing that I'm aware it's a problem? If it's the former, then the uncomfortable truth is that you need to teach more.

Teach classes. Cover lessons. Walk the corridors not just with a clipboard, but with intention. Sit down with your teachers after a tough period and acknowledge, *'That was hard – what could we try together next time?'* Share the marking. Team-teach. Moderate. Plan lessons together.

It's not about becoming 'one of the gang'. It's about being a present, accountable leader who knows what the job actually entails in 2025.

Senior leadership isn't exempt from the daily pressures of school life, of course, but at the same time, it can add to them. When school leaders roll up their sleeves and show that they're willing to share the burden, teachers take notice. More importantly, they begin to believe that their leaders understand them.

## From Words to Action

One of the most contentious areas in any school is behaviour. It's also one of the clearest indicators of how a school's leadership either supports or isolates its staff.

Far too often, teachers are told that 'behaviour is everyone's responsibility' – until that responsibility becomes unmanageable. Senior leaders can't expect classroom staff to 'pick up the slack' if they themselves are too busy in meetings to respond to corridor incidents or student referrals.

Behaviour policies must be led from the front, with leaders visible and

involved. Ask any teacher what boosts their morale the most during a tough week, and you may well hear something along the lines of, *'SLT came in and helped me with a tough class.'* This isn't revolutionary, it's relational.

There is immense power in words, but only when those words are backed by action. A school where the leadership team regularly teaches, shares the workload and stands shoulder to shoulder with teaching staff is a school where morale doesn't need to be artificially inflated, because it's already become self-sustaining.

Ironically, many leaders reading might well say, *'But I don't have the time!'* – and that's precisely the point. If you, with all the administrative and structural support your role entails, can't find the time to teach a lesson or support with behaviour, how can you expect your staff to perform the impossible every day?

So next time you're considering whether to launch a new initiative, take a moment to ask, *'Where will my teachers find the time?'* If the answer feels unclear, maybe reconsider. Morale doesn't rise because of one-off wellbeing gestures. It rises when staff feel seen, heard and genuinely supported.



Ed Carlin is a deputy headteacher at a Scottish secondary school, having previously held teaching roles at schools in Northern Ireland and England



## EMPATHY IS A SUPERPOWER

Empathy isn't filling out a staff survey. It's not nodding during INSETs when people raise concerns. It's doing the job. It's showing up. It's standing in the gap when the pressure mounts.

Staff morale is at a critical tipping point in many schools nationwide, but the solution doesn't lie in distributing a more colourful newsletter, or printing staff t-shirts emblazoned with the school motto. It lies in leadership that's human, honest and present.

To cultivate empathy in our school leaders, we must encourage them to embrace vulnerability. When leaders share their own challenges, fears or mistakes, they show staff that it's okay to be human. This openness fosters trust and authenticity – both key ingredients for strong morale. Vulnerability isn't weakness; it's courage in action.

By modelling empathy through personal stories, and acknowledging when they don't have all the answers, leaders create safe spaces in which others can be honest and grow. In doing so, they build deeper connections and more resilient, compassionate school communities.

So lock your office. Cancel your next non-essential meeting and step back into the classroom. The joy of teaching – the whole reason you first got into this, remember? – is still there. You'll never build the morale you want to see unless you go back to where it lives. Which is right there, in the thick of it, with your teachers.

# TROUBLED *transitions*

We take a closer look at an ambitious survey of pupil attitudes that seeks to pinpoint when and how pupils start to disengage with school from Y7 onwards...



According to a new national study (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-T1](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-T1)), over a quarter

of pupils start to disengage from school while in Y7. The research – led by ImpactEd Group, with backing from ASCL, the Confederation of School Trusts, Reach Foundation and Challenge Partners – involved over 100,000 pupils nationwide, with the resulting data made available to all schools taking part.

The findings seem to suggest that the point of transition between Y6 and Y7 may be even more of a critical juncture in pupils' school education than was already assumed, with levels of pupils' trust, sense of agency and perceived safety taking a hit upon starting secondary, and often never fully recovering.

Here, we talk to Dr Chris Wilson, ImpactEd Group Director and Co-Founder, on how the data was gathered, and why the emergence of those findings shouldn't be a cause for despair, but rather the starting point for a transformative approach to sharing knowledge and practice from which everyone can benefit.

**Was there anything especially innovative or unusual about how you acquired data for the study?**

We underpinned our research with a fixed question set informed by the academic literature. We worked with Professor John Jerrim of UCL, who devised a robust, overarching model for school engagement covering the concerns of both employees and pupils (and which we'll

be using to examine family engagement in future). The model posits that there are three types of school engagement – cognitive, emotional and behavioural. How you think, how you feel, and ultimately, how you act.

**“Boys were more likely than girls to report trusting teachers at their school, girls were more likely to say that they respected them”**

A key component of the research was wanting to ensure that schools, teachers and pupils wouldn't have to put huge efforts into sharing their data with us, only to then wait for months – or even years – before eventually receiving a report outlining national trends that they'd struggle to action locally, within their context.

We therefore developed The Engagement Platform [TEP] – an online platform that lets school leaders examine the findings as they pertain to their local context within a week of submitting their data, along with the ability to compare those local results to national benchmarks.

**What does TEP do, and how can it be used?**

When researching education issues at a national level, there's always a risk that the emphasis will end up being placed on these exciting, 'blockbuster' national findings. We're certainly interested in national trends – some of which can be rightfully concerning, or profound – but the worry is that school leaders aren't

necessarily equipped to understand how those trends relate to their local areas, and thus design actionable plans off the back of what the research shows.

By making the data much more granular, as TEP does,

time when pupils answer questions about themselves and their school can influence their answers. Ask pupils (or employees) questions about school in September, and the answers will be very different than if you were to ask them in April or May. We've tried mitigating for that by organising fixed census windows, so that school communities can trust that they're being benchmarked against other schools, pupils and employees responding to the same set of questions during that same two-week period.

Younger pupils tend to complete the research survey via tablet devices or in school computer rooms. Older students could opt to have the questions sent as a link via e-mail, or be assigned a

a school can potentially identify, say, how disengaged their Y9 girls, or students eligible for free school meals are compared to the national average. If provided with a sufficient level of detail, a school could look at the data and come up with a workable action plan.

**Do schools incur any costs for getting involved in the study and having access to the tools you describe?**

ImpactEd Group is currently sponsoring the research. Schools are required to make a financial contribution, but it's around 50% of the cost for a comparable service in most circumstances.

Our aim with TEP is to not just share data with individual schools, but to also start building communities of practice, around case studies showing how certain schools have done especially well in particular areas, or with specific groups.

**By what process did students submit their answers to the survey?**

A big challenge with this kind of research is that the





code that lets them use a dedicated computer room or similar. We're proud of how high the return rate has been, particularly at primary, when compared to many other currently running research studies.

### Has there been anything in the TEP findings thus far that you're particularly surprised by?

Many practitioners across the sector have long been aware that pupils' engagement with school drops noticeably from Y7 to Y8. The national picture presented by the research report is perhaps starker than we were expecting, though it's worth emphasising that the findings aren't just about schools, but clearly also encompass parental

engagement and other broader societal contexts.

I should also stress that since we're able to compare national and local data, we know that many schools out there are bucking national trends. What seems like a stark decline in engagement in England compared to the international picture isn't as profound in some schools as it is in others. By sharing best practice in this area, we might uncover practical steps that more schools can take to slow that decline.

However, it's also true that in individual schools, different demographic patterns will emerge. Engagement might fall off more dramatically in a particular context, for whatever reason, among different ethnic groups, different genders or pupils

from different economic backgrounds. It's at this level that schools can start to take action, rather than succumbing to a general council of despair. You can start to unpick where certain issues are occurring, the ages affected, and whether they're problems specific to your local context or part of broader national trends.

### Are there any other trends in the latest set of results that stand out for you?

The number of girls now feeling safe at school in secondary seems noteworthy, and interesting in that we seem to be observing a flip between primary and secondary. At primary, girls feel marginally safer than boys, but by the end of secondary, those sides will have been reversed.

There are also sizeable differences when pupils are asked if they trust their teachers. Boys were more likely than girls to report trusting teachers at their school, whereas girls were more likely to say that they respected them.

### Where would you like to see this research go next?

Beyond continuing to expand the sample size, it's been interesting to observe how some schools are using the data as a lead indicator. For example, rather than looking back and acknowledging '*an issue with Y9 boys because their attendance has dropped*', some school leaders are concluding that, '*The engagement rate of Y9 boys is dropping; let's address that before it becomes an attendance problem.*'

We'd also like to share TEP findings with policymakers and politicians, to help them understand how they might be able to address some of the challenges that seem unique to the English system when compared to the international context.

Of particular interest here would be those schools

## MIND THE ENGAGEMENT GAP - KEY FINDINGS

# 34%

of girls don't clearly express feeling safe at school, compared to 28% of boys.

# 32%

of white pupils disagree with the statement '*What I learn at school will help me in the future*' - compared to 21% of Asian and 20% of Black pupils

# 8.9

Average score out of 10 among girls when asked how strongly they agree with the statement '*I want to do well in school*' - for boys, the average score was 8.6

# 7.2

Average score among secondary pupils indicating agreement with the statement '*I do well in school if I try hard*'; for primary pupils, the average score is 8.8

consistently bucking broader trends. Do middle schools have a less, or more pronounced challenge with transitions? How do all-through schools fare with pupil engagement over time?

### How can schools get involved?

The TEP collection and uploading process can interface with schools' MIS systems, so engaging with TEP won't entail a large volume of manual uploads and other such tasks. Visit the TEP website ([tep.uk](http://tep.uk)), register your interest and we'll be in touch.



# The desk of shame

**Emily Spring** sets out what your school's seclusion and restraint policies may be inadvertently teaching students about their sense of self-worth...

**W**hen I was 13, I was sent to seclusion for two weeks by my head of year. I don't even remember exactly what for – maybe I'd skipped class, maybe I'd gotten 'lairy' with a teacher (that being circa-2002 Portsmouth slang for 'giving attitude'). What I remember most clearly wasn't the crime, but the punishment. We called it 'The Desk of Shame'.

## The trauma of seclusion

It was a single desk and chair, placed directly outside the head of year's office. I recall sitting there in silence every day, all day, for two weeks. No conversation. No schoolwork. No stimulation. Just me, my thoughts and the slow, interminable drag of time.

This wasn't an example of 'alternative provision'. It wasn't a *reflective space*. It was social isolation. A form of psychological punishment. Public humiliation, even – and it didn't help.

Those two weeks were among the worst of my life. At the time I was already struggling, in that I was truanting, withdrawing and self-harming. I had visible cuts up my arms. I was silently begging for help, but what I received instead was silence and shame.

No one asked me what was going on at home. No one questioned the adult who told them I was '*Just doing it for attention*.' And even if I *was* doing it for attention, shouldn't that have meant something? What if I was behaving like that because I

didn't know how else to ask for love, safety or care? Instead, I was gaslit. Punished. Simply left to rot at that desk.

## What are we teaching children?

As part of this punishment, I was also repeatedly denied access to the toilet, told to 'hold it in' and to stop being disruptive. I developed infections. I remember peeing blood. The experience

## A breach of rights and dignity

While I was never physically restrained at school, I now work in a setting where the use of restraint on children is something I've had to educate myself about, confront and reckon with.

For the avoidance of doubt, physical restraint is *deeply traumatic* for children. It doesn't teach 'emotional regulation', nor does it help a child 'understand their

and proportionate cause, we're breaching their human rights. It doesn't matter if we're in a classroom. It doesn't matter if it's deemed to be 'official school policy'. Children are people, and the law applies to them, too.

And yet, how often are these actions normalised as discipline? How often are they excused as being 'only what's necessary'?

## The quiet violation of toilet denial

When a teacher denies a child access to the toilet, they may think they're enforcing order or avoiding disruption, but it's a practice that crosses a dangerous line and can have legal and ethical implications – especially when it results in physical or emotional harm.

As noted above, the Human Rights Act 1998 means that children, just like everyone else, are entitled to freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment, and that their private and family life – which includes their bodily autonomy and physical integrity – have to be respected.

Preventing a child from using the toilet can amount to degrading treatment, especially if doing so will result in them suffering from infections or bladder damage, or emotional trauma – such as feelings of shame, anxiety, or fear of wetting themselves publicly. And that's before you even get to the accompanying social humiliation and potential for lasting psychological harm.

For children with SEND, a history of anxiety, trauma or other existing health needs, this isn't just unkind – it can be abusive. No adult has the right to override a child's basic physical needs in the

**“No adult has the right to override a child's basic physical needs in the name of classroom control”**

has affected my body ever since, to the point where I now suffer with an extremely weak and overactive bladder as an adult.

Back then *I was a child*, in the process of being permanently harmed by people who claimed they were 'teaching me discipline'. So let me put it as clearly as I can – when we ignore children's pain, what exactly are we teaching them?

What are we effectively saying when we force them to sit in isolation, in full view of their peers, for days on end? What behaviours are we modelling when we tell them 'no' to toilet breaks, and then look away when they suffer for it?

We're teaching them that their bodies are not their own, and that their emotions are wrong. That their needs are 'interruptions', and that they deserve punishment over understanding. Above all, we're teaching them that adults can't be trusted.

behaviour', and it doesn't make school a safer place.

What it *does* do is imprint fear. It conditions an individual's nervous system to expect violence, and serves to reinforce that same message I was given all those years ago – that your body is not yours.

In the UK, the restraint and seclusion of children – particularly those with SEND – risks raising serious concerns under the Human Rights Act 1998, specifically with regards to:

- Article 3, protection from inhuman or degrading treatment
- Article 5, protection against unlawful detention
- Article 8, the right to respect for private and family life – including physical and psychological integrity

When we isolate children, deny their bodily needs or restrain them without lawful



name of classroom control. Holding in your urine isn't a learning strategy.

### Let's talk about power

Too often, schools prioritise control over care. Adults can have a tendency to interpret emotional distress as defiance, with the result that children who are afraid, confused or overwhelmed can end up being labelled as disruptive, manipulative or non-compliant.

But what if we reframed those behaviours as communication? What if, instead of immediately reaching for punishment, we instead sought to offer regulation, connection and safety? What kind of positive shift might we see if every adult were to ask themselves:

- Am I helping this child feel safe right now?
- Am I treating them with the same dignity I'd expect for myself?

If the answer to either is no, then what are we actually doing here?

### A compassionate education

I now work in a charity SEN school that centres student wellbeing. It isn't always easy, but it's always intentional. We don't use seclusion, and we don't restrain. We do, however, reflect, repair and grow. There is another way.

Every child, but especially those with trauma, SEND or emotional challenges

deserves support, not suppression. They deserve teachers and staff who can see their full humanity, even in the hardest moments – because no child should ever have to bleed, break or beg to be believed.

### Choice theory

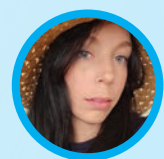
The harm caused by seclusion, restraint, and coercive schooling practices becomes even more stark when viewed through the lens of the Choice Theory model first developed by psychologist Dr. William Glasser. According to this model, all human behaviour is purposeful in that it attempts to meet one or more of our five basic needs:

1. Survival (safety, health, food, shelter)
2. Love and belonging (relationships, connection)
3. Power (a sense of competence, agency, achievement)
4. Freedom (autonomy, choice, independence)
5. Fun (joy, play, creativity)

When schools use seclusion or restraint, they often punish the very behaviours that are expressions of unmet needs. A child disrupting the class may be seeking power in a system that otherwise renders them powerless. A child begging to leave the room may be grasping for freedom. A child who lashes out might be crying out for love and belonging, or simply for safety.

Instead of seeing these behaviours as communications, adults will often treat them as threats to their control – and yet, the truth is that connection always precedes compliance, and that no real learning can take place until those five needs are honoured.

If we want children to thrive, rather than simply obey us, then we need to design environments that enable their academic goals while also meeting their psychological needs. A compassionate, trauma-informed education will prioritise dignity over discipline, support over seclusion. It will value understanding over restraint capacity, and see children not as problems to be fixed, but people to be understood.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Spring works for the education charity, Releasing Potential; for more information, visit [releasingpotential.com](https://releasingpotential.com)



## [ MATHS PROBLEM ]

# ESTIMATING VOLUME

Students often struggle with estimations involving volume and capacity, says Colin Foster

In this lesson, students tackle a variety of volume-based estimates.

## THE DIFFICULTY

*I don't want you to do any calculations yet – I just want your gut feeling about this question. Imagine a bath full of water. Now imagine you were going to drink this water! (Ugh!)*

On your whiteboard, write down how many glasses of water you think you would get from one bath full of water.

Students are likely to give wildly different estimates, which is fine. According to the idea of the 'wisdom of crowds', the average of these estimates might be close to the true value, so students could calculate the average of all of their estimates and compare this with their calculated estimates later on.

## THE SOLUTION

*What information would you need to have if you were going to do an approximate calculation for this problem?*

Students will likely ask about the size of the glass and the dimensions of the bath. You don't need to tell them these values though, because they should have enough experience from their lives to give reasonable values for these things.

Even if their home only has a shower and no bathtub, they will still know what a bathtub is.

Look out for students worrying too much about precision. If some students take a glass to be 200 ml and others 300 ml, it won't matter, as we are just doing an estimate. Students often find it hard to allow themselves this kind of latitude in a mathematics lesson!

Similarly, baths vary in size, but we are just looking for an order-of-magnitude estimate, so this doesn't matter. It might help when estimating to note that a person can usually (almost) fit inside a bath.

Taking a standard bathtub as 170 cm by 70 cm by 60 cm gives an approximate capacity of 714 litres. Dividing this value by 250 ml gives an answer of about 3000 glasses. Was this close to the average of the estimates that students gave earlier?

*What other volume estimation questions can you pose?*

Students might consider how many glasses of water or baths they could fill from a swimming pool, or how long a shower would have to run to fill a bath or a swimming pool. The exact question doesn't matter, because all of these questions provide opportunities to work on volume estimation.

### Checking for understanding

*Estimate how long it would take to empty a swimming pool using a standard 14-litre bucket.*

Taking a swimming pool as being 25 m by 15 m by 1.5 m gives a volume of about 500 m<sup>3</sup>, which is 500 000 litres. Dividing, we find that this would correspond to about 40 000 buckets.

Depending on how far you have to take each bucket to empty it, we could allow, say, 1 minute per bucket. This would give 40 000 minutes – or, working 24 hours a day, about a month of exhausting work!



Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Professor of Mathematics Education in the Department of Mathematics Education at Loughborough University. He has written many books and articles for mathematics teachers. [foster77.co.uk](mailto:foster77.co.uk), [blog.foster77.co.uk](http://blog.foster77.co.uk)



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Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education

1

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2

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3

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4



## Slumber support

Sleep Action (formerly Sleep Scotland) is the UK's oldest sleep charity. Sleep Action trains teachers to deliver sleep education as a key component of the health and wellbeing curriculum. Its Sound Sleep course provides educators with a comprehensive understanding of sleep, along with curriculum-aligned lesson plans and wellbeing resources to improve pupil focus, attendance and academic success, promoting a happier and healthier school experience.

Sleep Action's approach is based on the latest sleep science, supported by over 27 years of experience, making its guidance easy to understand and apply. Sleep education is vital – because there is no health and wellbeing without sleep. Find out more at [sleepaction.org](https://sleepaction.org) or by following [@sleepactionorg](https://twitter.com/sleepactionorg)

5



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9

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10

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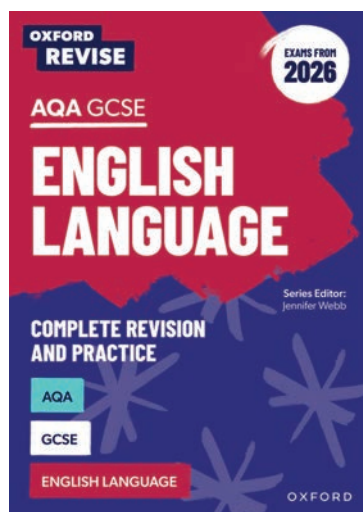
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## 8 Ready, get set - revise

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# Taboo to whom?

**Tia Fisher** explains why schools shouldn't shy away from open and honest discussions of agency, consent, abortion and other supposed 'taboo' topics...

**B**efore they even leave primary, today's children are subject to the manipulative algorithms of online content platforms that can direct them to sources of misinformation, misogyny and pornography.

As such, there's a growing disjunct between children's actual lives and their RSHE lessons, but it's hard to teach taboo topics without specialist training. In this context, then, are the DfE's latest guidelines for teaching RSHE (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-R1](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-R1)) actually helpful, or more of a hindrance?

## Parental pushback

For children unable to discuss sensitive subjects at home, their classroom can be a vital space. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all, or some of the sex education provided by their school's secondary RSHE lessons (though not from science lessons), unless the headteacher refuses their request due to safeguarding concerns or a pupil's specific vulnerability. That said, schools should make students aware that from three terms before they turn 16, they can opt themselves back in.

Given that the website Everyone's Invited ([everyonesinvited.uk](https://everyonesinvited.uk)) has received testimonies of sexual harassment, inappropriate touching and even *rape* from children as young as five, the government's rejection of a Tory-proposed age restriction on teaching about sex is to be welcomed. Schools should have the flexibility to decide what to teach and when – so that, for example, a primary school can discuss online sexual content if it's been confirmed that pupils have

viewed pornography.

Yet considering that the average age of sexual debut is between 16 and 17 (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-R2](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-R2)), why has RSHE not been made mandatory for all students up to the age of 18?

## Misogyny and incels

According to a recent DfE survey (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-R3](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-R3)), more than half of participating pupils aged 11 to 19 said they'd heard misogynistic comments in the previous week, with over a third concerned about the safety of girls.

A separate report by Women's Aid ([tinyurl.com/ts146-R4](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-R4)) meanwhile found that children who consumed misogynistic social media content were much more likely to view hurting someone physically as acceptable, 'If you say sorry afterwards'. The new guidelines' recommendation that incels and similar subcultures be discussed within school is therefore good to see.

## Complexities of consent

The new guidelines further state that, "Pupils should understand that [saying yes]

*doesn't automatically make it ethically ok.*" Peer pressure, coercion and cognitive impairment can all nullify consent. So does deceit. If you agree to sex with a condom, then stealthing – having unprotected sex without consent – is rape.

## Is LGBTQ+ still taboo?

*Hmm.* The guidelines state that children should learn about equality and respect for all protected characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender reassignment, but there are some worrying anti-rights overtones: "[Schools] should not teach as fact that all people have a gender identity." Nonsense. We all have a gender identity, even if it corresponds with our biological sex.

Schools are required to 'Avoid any suggestion that social transition is a simple solution to feelings of distress'. Granted, it may

not be a 'simple' solution, but my own non-binary child was desperately unhappy in their biological role at school. I continue to worry for the many obviously gender-non-

conforming children I see on my school visits.

## Don't forget the fun

With all this talk of disease and danger, though, where's the pleasure? The sex-positive message that sex is a natural, healthy, pleasurable and positive aspect of the human experience? Children should learn that masturbation – alone or with a partner – is normal, safe and a great way to get to learn what you like. SEN children may also need specialist teaching about when and where it's appropriate.

## Cross-curricular learning

RSHE resources are still limited, hence the guidelines' recommendation for cross-curricular reinforcement of teaching. Stories can present multiple topics with authenticity, context and nuance, while being entertaining and engaging, and can boost empathy by presenting multiple perspectives. An accessible, age-appropriate cohort read can be a great springboard to discussion. I'm certainly hoping my new verse novel, *Not Going to Plan*, will open up those conversations on consent, control and abortion. Who knows, it might even teach the teachers something, too...



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tia Fisher is an award-winning author and former teacher; *Not Going to Plan* is out now (£8.99, Hot Key Books); for more information, visit [tiafisher.com](https://tiafisher.com)



# SHIFT THE FOCUS

Leaders will often prioritise fixing negatives – but for more meaningful school improvement, we should also examine what’s working well, suggest **Professor Geoff Baker** and **Craig Lomas**...

Over the last century, teaching has moved from being a profession in which colleagues had huge levels of autonomy and little accountability, to one characterised by continuous measurement and judgement.

The ‘secret garden’ of teaching, as it was once known, is now more akin to a panopticon. Many studies note that a culture of performativity has meant that teachers feel under constant surveillance, in a way that inhibits creativity and innovation, narrows the curriculum and leads to a myopic focus on superficial metrics over learning.

During the 1980s, in response to similar approaches dominating organisations in different domains, academics focused on leadership in the United States established the ‘appreciative inquiry framework’, which sought to identify and build on strengths, rather than focus on negatives. In the years since, this leadership paradigm has increasingly found a place in school improvement, as an approach that’s empowering, ethical and sustainable.

## What is appreciative inquiry?

At a time when leaders are often under intense scrutiny, discussions around school improvement can quickly become deficit-focused, highlighting those areas that are lacking, rather than celebrating what’s working well. Appreciative inquiry offers an alternative approach to change that is

collaborative, centred on identifying the ‘positive core’ of a school and enhancing its impact. It’s an approach that seeks to explore past successes and existing strengths in order to create a vision for the future.

Appreciative inquiry is underpinned by the belief that organisations grow in the direction of what they study and talk about. If schools spend all their energy focusing only on problems, they can risk becoming disheartened or reactive, in turn creating a culture of blame as leaders search for answers with increasing frustration.

**“Those closest to the work often have the most valuable insights into what works and why”**

However, when teachers and leaders engage in dialogue about what is working and why, it can foster a culture of hope, creativity and collective responsibility. This isn’t a ‘soft’ or ‘naive’ approach; it’s a rigorous and structured framework for enabling change that harnesses the power of positive thinking, shared experiences and collaborative visioning.

It avoids the dangers inherent within a change process driven mainly by coercion or manipulation, instead focusing on those elements that can be observed when a school community is at its best. It can inspire meaningful, sustainable improvement that builds on the strengths of all involved.

## Professional affirmation

There are many advantages to adopting appreciative inquiry as a model for school improvement. One key benefit is how it can facilitate the building of trust and ownership among staff.

Traditional, top-down models of change can often lead to resistance or apathy. A fundamental tenet of appreciative inquiry is that *all* voices are valued – from teachers and support staff, through to students and parents. It acknowledges that those closest to the work often have the most valuable

insights into precisely what works and why.

For instance, providing opportunities for collaboration and observing practice outside of a classroom or faculty may lead to more frequent conversations and the sharing of good practice, both of which can often be overlooked in typical school structures. The benefits of this collaborative process go beyond purely pedagogical benefits, to providing practical and emotional support for teachers, reducing stress and providing affirmation as professionals.

Appreciative inquiry closely aligns with what we know about effective professional development. It encourages reflective





dialogue, shared problem-solving and the recognition of expertise already present within the school. A school will be more effective when good practice is shared and utilised in a more consistent way. Utilising the expert teachers already within a school will help to support any improvement efforts by building on that school's existing strengths.

This approach can also remove dependency on a small number of teachers and foster a culture of shared excellence, thus making it a more cost-effective way of supplementing a professional development programme.

### Cultivating excellence

A further benefit of appreciative inquiry is its promotion of sustainable, values-driven change. Narrative is important in schools. Using appreciative inquiry can help shift your own narrative from one of 'fixing underperformance' to one of 'cultivating excellence'. For teachers, this can have a significant impact on their motivation and how valued they feel. It

promotes a developmental approach, rather than one in which 'accountability' becomes synonymous with 'culpability'. Amid times of change – whether responding to inspection feedback, rethinking curriculums or improving student outcomes – appreciative inquiry can be a constructive and empowering model.

Finally, at a time when rates of teacher burnout remain at record highs, appreciative inquiry offers a solution to the persistent issues of demoralisation and apathy. Centring professional conversations on 'value', 'contribution' and 'collaboration' helps foster a sense of purpose and belonging. When staff feel recognised for their strengths, and can see themselves as part of shaping change, their levels of motivation and commitment to the school – both factors closely linked to teacher retention – will often increase. This also aligns with broader goals around equity and representation, where shared ownership of improvement can reveal

hidden strengths in school communities.

And yet, while appreciative inquiry promotes positivity, it mustn't be misused to mask genuine issues or avoid having difficult conversations. The strength of the approach lies in how it reframes problems as opportunities for growth, but it certainly shouldn't become a mechanism for denial or complacency.

### Build and enhance

For appreciative inquiry to be truly effective, it ought to be paired with rigorous evaluation and a commitment to honest reflection. This will ensure that any identified challenges aren't ignored, but rather explored through a lens of possibility, empowering stakeholders to address them constructively within a strengths-based dialogue.

Appreciative inquiry is fast becoming a core feature of forward-thinking approaches to school improvement – most notably the Laboratory Schools movement. Far from disempowering staff, it celebrates the various strengths that all practitioners bring to the workplace. In doing so, it builds and enhances, adding to what's already there, rather than diminishing and disengaging staff.

It offers a sustainable and ethical approach to school improvement – one which can make staff and students alike become more active participants within their learning communities.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Geoff Baker is a Professor of Education and Craig Lomas a Senior Lecturer in Education, both at the University of Bolton, and both former senior secondary school leaders

## EMBEDDING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

### 1 TRAIN STAFF, BUILD AWARENESS

At a whole school session, introduce the appreciative inquiry framework to staff. Then have colleagues question each other about what their best day at the school was and why, and what conditions needed to be in place to make that best day possible.

### 2 CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Try opening future staff meeting with colleagues by sharing success stories. You could also create platforms for parents to share their own positives when visiting the school for parents evenings, and provide a facility for doing this via email or other electronic means.

### 3 HOW WELL IS YOUR PERFORMANCE REVIEW CYCLE WORKING?

Change the purpose and methodology of your performance management process away from just identifying deficits, to also exploring what's working well and how existing strengths can be built on.

### 4 PLACE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AT THE FRONT AND CENTRE

Rather than having your central school improvement efforts focus on looking for negatives, try identifying any particular areas where the school has grown, or find out what's energising the school at that particular moment.

### 5 CONSIDER THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Communicate the appreciative inquiry framework to your students, then provide curriculum opportunities for them to reflect upon themselves and identify strengths that they can develop further.

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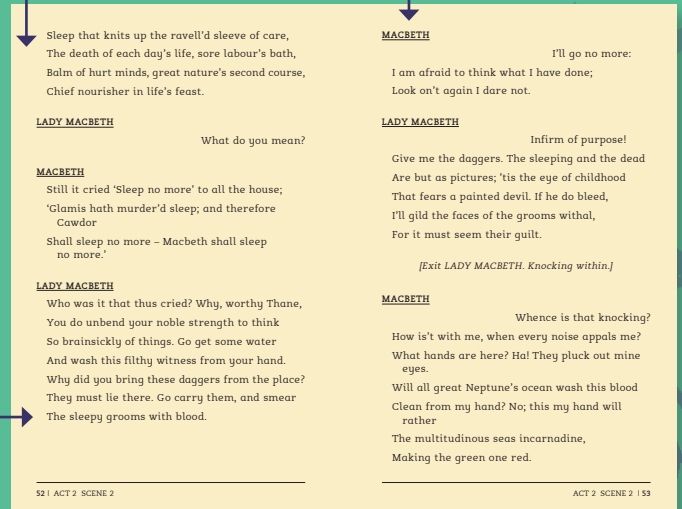
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# FOCUS ON: ENGLISH

Thoughts on a decade-plus of explicit grammar instruction; how teachers can best support EAL students in English lessons; and what your KS4 cohort will need to know about the themes of *Macbeth* come exam time...

**What should English teachers prioritise when building their pupils' knowledge and confidence in the subject?**

## THE AGENDA:

### 62 WHY TEACH GRAMMAR?

Does teaching students what various language components and tools are called actually do anything to improve their command of the written word? Bhamika Bhudia unpacks the arguments for and against

### 65 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

How can English teachers ensure that EAL learners get to be fully involved and engaged in the subject? Iva Miteva offers her thoughts...

### 70 THE THEMES OF MACBETH

Meera Chudasama outlines several classroom activities that can help students unlock the issues and topics contained within The Bard's timeless tale of regicide gone wrong...



# Why teach GRAMMAR?

Does teaching students what various language components and tools are called actually do anything to improve their command of the written word?

**Bhamika Bhudia** unpacks the arguments for and against...

**T**he efficacy of reintroducing explicit grammar teaching to the National Curriculum in 2014 still remains a hotly debated topic among many secondary school teachers, even over a decade later.

Following a series of reforms overseen by then Education Secretary Michael Gove, the National Curriculum has since stated that students, *“Should be taught the correct use of grammar. They should build on what they have been taught to expand the range of their writing and the variety of the grammar they use”*.

This is fine, in theory – but teaching grammar in this way fell out of fashion in the UK in the 70s and 80s, after a US study found that it made no difference in writing skills. This means that not only has the education system returned to an approach deemed futile for mainstream British education decades ago, but that a large proportion of those expected to implement it now have never had any experience of such instruction during their own time at school.

The study of grammar has, nonetheless, become embedded in the primary sector, and largely been a

constant fixture in grammar and private schools. Many mainstream secondary teachers, however – even English specialists – have openly spoken about their insecurities with teaching grammar, given its comparative absence from their own learning. All while at the same time needing to teach two GCSEs’ worth of content at KS4, and

for exploration, and playing with sentence construction and description in a creative and meaningful way.

Ending a sentence with a preposition – *‘He couldn’t find a chair to sit in’* – would once have been considered ugly and sloppy. But again, today, it wouldn’t cause anyone to bat an eyelid. Nor would the use of *‘will’*, instead of its more formal

Nuffield Foundation, which tested the effects of explicit grammar teaching on primary students, found that it had *“Effectively no impact on pupils’ narrative writing... This is consistent with previous studies in the field of*

**“It’s not necessarily the teaching of grammar that’s meaningless, so much as the way it’s implemented”**

simultaneously ensure that the KS3 curriculum has depth, breadth, diversity and challenge.

## Evolving standards

Adding to the contention further is the fact that, like the English language itself, the rules of grammar and what’s deemed as ‘proper’ and ‘accurate’ have evolved over time. For example, the age-old *faux pas* of splitting infinitives – such as *‘to boldly go’* wouldn’t have been acceptable in earlier teachings. Yet writing such as this, by today’s standards, is not just perfectly acceptable, but also allows

counterpart *‘shall’*.

Teaching a system that’s constantly changing in ways considered obsolete by today’s standards begs the question of whether this approach is merely a forced and antiquated return to what was, at one time, considered ‘the proper way’ to do things.

## What the evidence says

More than a decade on from those Gove-ian reforms, the research evidence is again pointing in the same direction. A 2022 study by UCL and The





grammar for writing which have not found an impact. The study finding does not offer support for grammar teaching to improve writing.” (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-EG1](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-EG1))

This implies that investing time, resources and training into grammar teaching can be a fruitless task, and that bringing it back into the curriculum is yet another political decision made without considering the merits of something that has already been researched. The study did, however, find that, “There was a larger effect on pupils’ generation of sentences” – which, being a key intended outcome of effective

grammar teaching, shouldn’t be dismissed.

It’s not necessarily the teaching of grammar that’s meaningless, though, so much as *the way it’s implemented*. The study in question observed 10 lessons that involved explicit teaching of grammar terms, but expecting application after such a short time is unlikely to work.

Everything we know about modern education suggests that *repetition* and *recall* are the most effective ways of meaningfully embedding teaching and learning. The issue may well be that the teaching of grammar itself isn’t ineffective, but that it’s not sufficiently ingrained within in our curricula. The current approach therefore falls short because it’s not consistently and repeatedly interspersed within schemes of learning.

Many (often expensive) programs and resources offer schemes of standalone grammar lessons – or even explicit grammar units – which are taught and then left by the wayside. Yet as any teacher will attest, no matter how grounded in research and proven effective the latest hot educational fad may be, it’ll always fall short if merely implemented as a box-ticking exercise.

### The importance of ‘how’ and ‘why’

For grammar teaching to be genuinely effective, students need constant reminders, models and chances to analyse and apply the grammar knowledge they have, across a variety of contexts.

The trouble is, this isn’t easy to do. It’s an

approach that takes a huge amount of work to properly resource and implement across all secondary year groups, in a way that builds, recaps and reminds students to use the grammar they’ve learned, in ways linked to the contexts of the various topics they’re studying. So again, the question remains – *is there any merit to doing this?*

In English, students are expected to analyse writers’ choices of language in meaningful ways. If, so the argument goes, they can’t understand how that language is formed, then how can they be expected to understand what choices have been made, or when the language is being played with or subverted?

However, the process of doing that involves much more than simply being able to recognise and identify the different components of language; it also requires the ability to understand what those components actually do, and how to apply them in their own writing.

In the same way that it’s pointless for students to try and define a complex term like *epizeuxis* when they can’t yet accurately analyse the effects of the far simpler *simile*, knowing what ‘adverbial clauses’ are is meaningless – unless they’re initially taught *how* and *why* to use them creatively in their writing.

A writer might deploy a fronted adverbial clause, for instance, to generate variety or a sense of suspense. Yet understanding different word forms and what a clause *is* can only be so helpful, because if this foundation hasn’t been understood, students will find it much more difficult to develop

their writing to a higher standard, when they’ll be expected to nominalise their writing across different GCSE subjects in a far more sophisticated and streamlined way. *These* are some of the many ways in which good grammar teaching can reveal complexity and impact upon students’ writing in a beneficial way.

### Promising foundations

In education, the choice of what we should teach ought to come down to what we hope it will achieve – not just because we’re told to adopt certain approaches by external organisations.

An understanding of the different components from which language is put together will always serve as a good foundation for meaningful analysis and writing. Ignoring explicit grammar teaching entirely would mean that only a small minority gets to grasp the full potential of this via osmosis.

Yes, there is much to be gained for students at all levels by teaching them grammar, which is why private and grammar schools have done so for all those years. Comprehensive students should stand to gain from all the benefits of grammar teaching, too – but that will only happen if it’s implemented in a structured and meaningful way.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**  
Bhamika Bhudia is Head of English at a mixed comprehensive school in London



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# Equal opportunities

How can English teachers ensure that EAL learners get to be fully involved and engaged in the subject? **Iva Miteva** offers her thoughts...

**T**here can be a number of challenges that cause EAL learners to struggle at secondary school. Gaps in language proficiency; learners' background and prior experience; the particular language journey they've taken; these can all present difficulties.

Research has shown that it can take five to seven years to master the kind of academic language that these students will be studying in English lessons, before they can have full and effective access to the curriculum. Issues specific to English, as a subject, can encompass certain areas of grammar, specific vocabulary, complex sentence structures and use of abstract concepts, such as metaphors or symbolism.

There can also be a lack of familiarity with cultural references, like those they'll encounter in texts such as *An Inspector Calls* or *Hamlet*. 'Pre-teaching' sessions ahead of lessons with teaching assistants can be very helpful here. Ideally, these would first familiarise EAL learners with the concept(s) that will be covered, followed by the idea, and then the vocabulary. Once learners are able to verbally discuss the concepts in question, they'll then be able to write about them.

## EAL advantages

English teachers should also be aware of how EAL learners are likely to interact, communicate and take part in lessons, and that there may be some cultural differences at work. It's common in English lessons for all-class discussion to be

used as a teaching tool. Chinese students, however, or students from Eastern European countries, may be unfamiliar with this approach, instead expecting teachers to address questions to individual members of the class and wait for responses from them alone.

That said, there are some ways in which EAL students can actually be at an advantage in English lessons, compared to their classmates. As bilingual, or even multilingual speakers, EAL students will be much more sensitive to the construction of English as a language, in terms of grammar, word order, nouns, gender, use of the plural and singular, adjectives, adverbs and so forth.

At the same time, English teachers – as well as teachers of other subjects – should hone their own awareness of the language they're using in class, and consider the type of language they're expecting to see their EAL students using. If the EAL learner's English proficiency is sufficiently advanced, clear explanations of language concepts – such as the 12 tenses used in English, the placing of adjectives before nouns, or that the determiner 'an' may not have a direct equivalent

in the learner's first language – can help harness their multilingualism and improve outcomes.

This can be extended into practical linguistic activities, such as tasking the learner with highlighting all the nouns, adverbs or prepositions within a paragraph, before translating the passage into their home language – if they can, of course – and spotting the similarities and differences between their translation and the original.

## Misplaced assumptions

Teachers should avoid adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting EAL learners, though that's always going to be difficult with a class of 30 working at different levels, some of whom may have differing SEND or EAL needs. It's important to bear in mind that just within the EAL grouping alone, you'll have learners who can differ hugely with respect to their English proficiency, point of arrival and overall educational journey up to that point.

There can also be a misplaced assumption that EAL learners will be able to write long pieces of writing immediately, when they may

actually need to engage in extensive verbal practice first – because if they can't talk about something, how can they be expected to write about it?

One strategy that works consistently well is the use of scaffolded worksheets. Now, with the advent of new technologies like ChatGPT and other such tools, it's become much easier for teachers to produce differentiated and scaffolded resources that specifically target learners working at certain levels of English proficiency.

Other forms of effective practice can include translating key vocabulary into learners' first languages with accompanying images, or sending pre-teaching information home, so that parents might be able to help. As an EAL specialist, I've often sought out opportunities for working and collaborating as part of a team with a subject teacher (whether that's in English, or any other subject)..

EAL teachers can't be expected to know everything about the subject at hand, or the topics being covered in class – but if a school's resources and timetable allows for it, we can certainly advise subject teachers on the various language challenges their EAL students might encounter.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iva Miteva is an EAL specialist at Learning Village, having worked at a number of different schools for over 18 years; for more details about the support, language resources and programmes available from Learning Village, visit [learningvillage.net](http://learningvillage.net)

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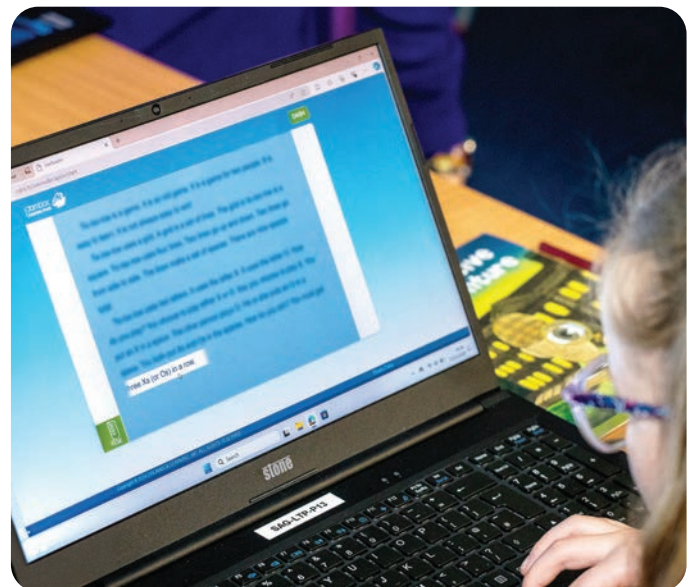
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# The Inside Story

**ALESSANDRO CAPOZZI**

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Academy21 staff reflect on how the learning provider has been able to support students unable to access mainstream education



**BIO: Alessandro Capozzi is Executive Headteacher at Academy21, having previously worked as an English teacher, and latterly as a deputy headteacher overseeing pastoral standards and behaviour**

## [ MEET THE TEAM ]



**Amy Husband, Head of School - Academic**

Amy Husband leads teaching and learning at Academy21, bringing deep expertise in safeguarding, SEND, leadership and evidence-based academic excellence.



**Jesse Johnson, Executive Head of Business Development**

Jesse brings deep experience in education technology, supporting schools, LAs and MATs with innovative, safeguarding-focused digital learning solutions.

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# The themes of MACBETH

**Meera Chudasama** outlines several classroom activities that can help students unlock the issues and topics contained within The Bard's timeless tale of regicide gone wrong...

**T**here are a vast array of themes that interlink and overlap in Shakespeare's tragedy, *Macbeth*. From 'vaulting ambition' to guilty consciences; kingship to the 'supernatural solicitings', *Macbeth* is a play brimming with opportunities to explore a rich historical background, coupled with issues and topics that remain strikingly relevant today.

Here, I want to highlight a selection of classroom approaches, activities and exercises you can use to support students' study of the play. Before exploring a work like *Macbeth*, however, it's important to first ensure that students have a good grasp of the play itself in terms of its narrative, key characters and significant events. Once their foundational knowledge of the play is secure, they'll feel much more confident in identifying, probing at and analysing its assorted thematic complexities.

## Web of Themes

The 'Web of Themes' is a great way of offloading as many themes as possible, using information from the play that links to each one. This is, in effect, a mind-mapping activity that students can carry out individually in pairs or in groups, and is flexible depending on your class' requirements.

At the end of the activity you should have a series of word bubbles arrayed in

formation, showing how different themes specifically relate to different events and characters portrayed within the play. I'll use bubbles of different colours – such as lilac for overarching themes that students must identify, blue for any initial thoughts they might have about the themes in question, and yellow for demonstrations of how a given theme appears within the play.

categories – or in this case, key themes, as per the supplied example.

Students can begin by simply writing down how those themes link to the play, before moving on to sourcing and copying down quotations from the play that illustrate these links. Have the students try and interrogate Shakespeare's possible intentions when presenting the themes in question.

*thumbs, Something wicked this way comes'*

6. 'What's done cannot be undone'
7. 'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more'
8. 'Out, out, brief candle!'
9. 'Tyrant, show thy face!'
10. 'Lesser than Macbeth, and greater'

## Hive it!

The honeycomb structure can be another useful tool for helping students organise their thoughts and ideas around *Macbeth's* themes. In the example provided, an arrangement of hexagons, each labelled with different colours, aims to provide students with a visual tool for mapping out their ideas:

- **BLUE** – A specific theme from the play
- **GREEN** – Write a linking quotation for the theme
- **RED** – Explain how the adjacent theme links to ideas in the play

## "A thematic analysis table can be a wonderful revision tool"

### Theme Grid

Grids can be used in multiple ways to break down key links to themes within *Macbeth*. They can sometimes be a great way of categorising information that will help students meet assessment objectives, as shown in my accompanying example (see 'Free Resources' panel).

A thematic analysis table can be a wonderful revision tool for students about to embark on their exams, or even for internal assessments. When done effectively, it can clearly show students all the key components they'll need to know and successfully execute in the upcoming exam or assessment.

Grids can also be used as a resource for organising students' ideas. Grid-like structures can sometimes be a useful tool for helping students to simply throw all their ideas down and start organising them into key

### Flash quiz

This flash quiz with a twist tasks students with quickly considering which themes can be linked to a specific quotation from the play.

Give students a selection of 20 quotations from *Macbeth*, alongside a list of themes that those quotations could point to. (For higher ability classes, you could streamline the list of themes, or not issue one at all, to give the quiz an extra level of challenge).

Here are 10 quotations to help get you started:

1. 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'
2. 'Look like th' innocent flower, but be the serpent under't'
3. 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?'
4. 'False face must hide what the false heart doth know'
5. 'By the pricking of my





- **YELLOW** – Pick the word from the adjacent quotation that does most to highlight the linking theme

Any hexagons left without a colour can be used to show links between different overarching themes. The task can be made more challenging by placing themes next to each other, so that students must

think carefully as to which quotations can be linked to more than one theme.

This resource is a great way of challenging students to think about the how the play's different themes can overlap. Students are likely to make multiple mistakes at first, which is why I'd encourage them to fill out their honeycomb structures in pencil to start with.

### Learn, revise, present

The resources I've provided rely heavily on students' reading and writing skills, but we can also explore and encourage their oracy skills with a theme-based analysis that takes the form of a presentation.

Working in groups of four, the students assume the roles of 'researcher', 'quotation finder', 'analysers' and 'magnifier'. Each group is given a specific theme, and the members carry out the following assigned tasks:

- **Researcher:** Suggests a number of key ideas for how the group can present their theme, drawing on the play itself and any other resources (teacher handouts, visual imagery, videos, etc.)
- **Quotation finder:** Locates the best quotations within the play that can support the group's theme, with the aim of helping the group flourish in their presentation
- **Analysers:** Analyses the quotations found and checks them for specific links to the group's theme.
- **Magnifier:** Picks out keywords from the quotations found to highlight important ideas linking to the group's given theme

Once the groups have completed their tasks, they can deliver their presentations by following a set structure and format:

1. Theme overview
2. Quotation 1 – how does this quotation link to the theme? At what point in the play is the quotation presented, and what does it tell the audience?
3. Characters that link to the theme
4. Quotation 2 – how does this quotation link to the theme? At what point in the play is the quotation presented, and what

5. Events that link back to the theme
6. Quotation 3 – how does this quotation link to the theme? At what point in the play is the quotation presented, and what does it tell the audience?
7. Concluding thoughts

If you want to challenge students further in this activity, you could get them to 'zoom in' on certain keywords, based on the quotations they've chosen, and show how these words reinforce the theme. They could also outline the messages and ideas audience members should take away with them, having seen the theme being presented in this particular way.



## Tw teachwire FREE RESOURCES

'Web of themes' chart

[bit.ly/ts146-M1](https://bit.ly/ts146-M1)

Thematic analysis table

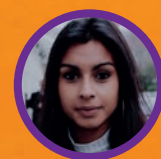
[bit.ly/ts146-M2](https://bit.ly/ts146-M2)

'Theme grid' template

[bit.ly/ts146-M3](https://bit.ly/ts146-M3)

'Exploring themes' honeycomb structure

[bit.ly/ts146-M4](https://bit.ly/ts146-M4)



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meera Chudasama is an English, media and film studies teacher with a passion for design and research, and has developed course content for the Chartered College of Teaching



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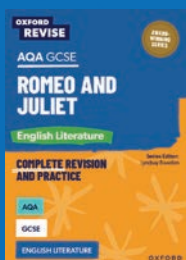
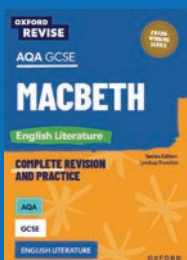


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# “Have you packed everything?”

**Daniel Harvey** runs through the list of what staff should do before students depart for a residential trip...

**R**esidential trips require detailed planning, which should be focused on enabling as much enjoyment, fun and engagement as possible, without compromising safety or standards.

No one wants to remember a school trip for all the wrong reasons – so here are some steps that trip leaders can take to ensure the trip is successful for everyone.

## Bedroom arrangements

Trip leaders should have already gotten to know the students who are going either directly, or via heads of years, pastoral staff and parents. Knowing the students and ‘*what they’re like*’ (teacher code for ‘*Can they be trusted to behave and make good decisions?*’) can help you plan how best to group the students together in overnight accommodation.

Ask the students who they want to room with, but check the proposed groupings with staff who know them well, and if necessary, share any concerns with the students and their parents directly. Working out how far staff will be located from students’ rooms is also important for establishing your check-in

and monitoring procedure. Remember that even familiar trips taken with tried and trusted providers can depend for their success on the makeup of the party.

## Expectations and standards

It’s essential that clear expectations and standards are established, based on the school’s approach to behaviour. Sharing these early with students and parents is a good way of getting everyone familiar and on board with how the trip will be managed.

End of day routines, bedtimes, presence in others’ rooms and general behaviour in and around the hotel or centre should all be explicitly addressed, with clear rules given. These expectations aren’t there just to support great behaviour, but to ensure that the students all stay safe and happy.

It may be wise to collect all students’ phones in the evening before bed, so as to avoid the ‘accidental’ posting of unnecessary photos or videos to social media. This measure also has the benefit of facilitating calmer bedtimes and supporting student wellbeing.

## Keeping busy

A golden rule for any residential trip is make sure each day is a busy one, with plenty for students to do. Long days spent viewing attractions, walking, speaking foreign languages and engaging in physical activity can result in very tired young people. Leaving your base before 9am, walking to various destinations throughout the day and eating out, before returning at 9pm or later can support a good going-to-bed routine. Your staff might be tired too, but be sure to check that those student expectations established before the trip are being diligently followed.

## Check-ins

Regular check-ins with students at your overnight accommodation will ensure things are going smoothly. In the morning, check that everyone is okay, knows what will be happening that day and what time breakfast is. At bedtime, check again that everyone’s all right, that the day they’ve just had was a good one, and that they’re now ready to sleep. I’m sure many readers will have once

been on corridor duty late into the night, ensuring that students stay in their rooms...

Students should know where to find trip staff at all times, and be issued with the phone number of the main trip contact in the event of any emergencies.

## Phones

I’ve previously seen how, for some students, regular evening phone calls weren’t enough, as their anxiety could sometimes get the better of them during the day. Where this was known, procedures could be implemented for parents and/or school wellbeing support staff to be contactable by the student throughout the day.

Some young people (and parents) may want to communicate issues to you directly throughout the trip via phonecalls and emails. Sometimes these messages can be helpful in alerting you to problems that have yet to come to light, enabling you to deal with them promptly. And yes, sometimes they’ll be expressions of ‘parental concern’. Deciding on how often you intend to deal with such messages as part of your trip planning, and explaining your reasoning to parents should help to establish a dialogue that’s both constructive and useful.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Harvey is a GCSE and A Level science teacher and lead on behaviour, pastoral and school culture at an inner city academy



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## At a glance

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*instructors and everyone in between has been absolutely amazing."* – St Michaels, staying at the Clubhotel Frejus, Serre Chevalier

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## Harry Potter AND THE CURSED CHILD

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# CHOOSING CHOICE

Giving students choice sounds nice, in theory – but in practice, it doesn't always lead to good outcomes, cautions **Colin Foster**...

**S**tudents don't choose to come to school. Given the choice, some would and some wouldn't. For most of their schooling, they don't really get much choice about what they study, how they study it, who their teacher is going to be, or even who they get to sit next to in class.

People sometimes draw parallels between schools and prisons, in terms of the restrictions on personal freedom – though the analogy is perhaps closer in some schools than in others...

It's therefore understandable that teachers can, at times, wonder if they should be trying to find more ways of giving students choices about their learning. So much is set in stone by the curriculum, school rules and structures. Where there's the possibility of flexibility, shouldn't we take those opportunities to provide students with more choices where we can?

After all, the day will come when they're 'released' from school and go out into the wider world. Young people who have been closely micromanaged up to the age of 18 might be poorly prepared for the next stages of their lives, when they suddenly have complete autonomy. How are they supposed to navigate this if they've never made a decision for themselves, or taken full responsibility for their choices?

## Feel better, fare worse

While there may be some truth to this, the problem with giving people choices is, of course, that they aren't

always well placed to make them to their advantage. This applies just as much to adults as it does to young people. If I attend cooking lessons, I could try to describe the kind of dishes I want to learn how to make, but it's no good me telling the expert how I want to learn. I have to put myself in their hands, and trust them to do what they're good at.

Similarly, if you give students a choice over how to do their revision, every teacher knows that many students will opt for re-reading their notes and highlighting the key parts.

## “Giving people too much choice over their learning risks imprisoning them in a silo of what they can already do”

Yet we know from research that those are two of the most ineffective ways of revising. Students should instead be self-explaining (not merely paraphrasing) their notes and testing themselves with questions – but those processes feel more difficult, and hence less immediately successful.

It isn't simply the case that students are 'lazy' and want to take the path of least resistance. They may genuinely feel that testing themselves isn't helpful, because they don't know the content well enough to answer the questions – “*I'll test myself later, but I just want to spend some time re-reading my notes first.*”

That's not a lazy student who doesn't care about their

learning, or else they wouldn't be re-reading their notes. The feelings of difficulty they experience when self-testing confuses them into thinking that it's not the best strategy, so they opt for something that *feels* better, despite it actually being worse. So-called 'desirable difficulties' like this usually feel undesirable.

## The expertise deficit

This is a tricky problem to fix, because explaining to students that they should be self-testing may not be enough to change their behaviour. “*What's the point*

*of doing the questions if I don't know the answers?*” they might reasonably ask. Yet research suggests that even if you initially get the questions wrong, testing yourself is likely to be more effective than passively and endlessly re-reading notes.

If students desperately want to re-read their notes, I'm not saying we should make that a crime – but everything should be set up to push students towards methods that are generally found to be more, rather than less, effective. Which ultimately means, if you want to put it that way, ‘denying them choice’.

There can be similar issues when giving students choices in the classroom over what and how they learn. This

feels like a nice thing to do, and besides, why should the teacher act like a little dictator? Won't students be more motivated if they have a say in what happens?

But look at this from the students' point of view. I've seen teachers ask the class whether they want to study topic A first, and then topic B, or the reverse. At that point, the class might not know much about options A or B, so how are they supposed to choose? They can't really imagine what either will entail. It may be an interesting choice for the teacher, but for the students, it's a choice that may seem a bit tokenistic.

If around half the class vote for each, then you risk ending up with more dissatisfied students than if you hadn't asked them in the first place! Surely it's much better for the teacher to use their expertise to think about which order makes more sense – or else simply flip a coin if the outcome really doesn't matter.

## How hard is too hard?

The same thing can happen when students are asked to choose between 'red', 'amber' or 'green' levels of difficulty for



tasks. The teacher gets frustrated when students who should be pushing themselves more instead opt for 'easy' successes. At the same time, there will be other students who want to show off by choosing the hardest task, hoping to get credit for doing so, even though they'd benefit more from consolidating prior learning by attempting the easier tasks.

Gauging the right level of

challenge is a subtle and difficult task – and one for which the teacher will possess a far greater level of expertise than a student could be expected to have.

Choice in assessments is especially problematic. Exam questions in years gone by, which might have said *"Answer any two of the following five questions"*, risked being highly inequitable. The student had to read all five questions, try

to imagine what challenges each would provide, and then decide on which two would best play to their strengths.

This process was, in all likelihood, much harder than simply being tasked with answering two questions. The students most capable of 'gaming' this form of questioning were those most likely to do well anyway, thus increasing the attainment gap yet further.

If *all* the course content matters, then the teacher will want *all* students to learn everything, rather than specialise in certain areas to the detriment of others.

### The myth of choice

The myth of 'learning styles' is still very much with us. Teachers rightly feel that every student is different, but wrongly assume that every student is an expert on what they need. We now know that students who say they prefer to learn 'visually' don't necessarily benefit from being given more 'visual' material.

In fact, everyone benefits from a variety of styles and modes of learning. The

teacher's aim should be to help all students become more balanced and skilled across the whole range. To give people too much choice over their learning is to risk imprisoning them in a silo of what they can already do.

There are many opportunities across the daily routines and procedures of school life for giving students more agency and a greater degree of choice with respect to all sorts of things – from who they become friends with, to which extra-curricular activities they want to participate in. As they get older, they'll start to settle on their GCSE subject options too – but when it comes to classroom learning, giving students more choice will likely make it harder for them to succeed.



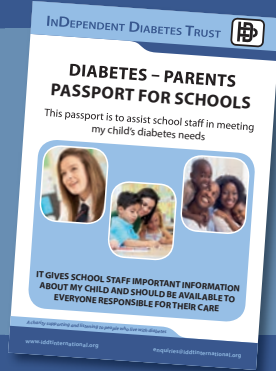
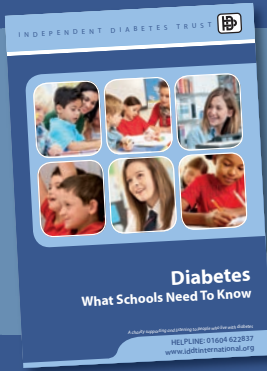
#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colin Foster (@colinfoster77) is a Professor of Mathematics Education in the Department of Mathematics Education at Loughborough University, and has written many books and articles for teachers; find out more at [foster77.co.uk](http://foster77.co.uk)





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# Misplaced melodies

**Helen Tierney** surveys how the teaching of classical music is currently faring within the modern secondary classroom...

**A**t a time when the presence and importance of music in the secondary classroom is increasingly eroding – with recent research showing that only 42% of schools even offer it at GCSE – concerns about the lack of classical music in lessons and extra-curricular activities might not seem like much of a priority.

Yet the gradual diminishing in importance of the classical voice at school, especially at KS3, has long been a concern for many secondary teachers and those across the wider musical community.

## The 'coolness' question

How did this come about? Some of the main factors include fears of being labelled elitist, a growing lack of teachers with applicable skills and knowledge, and reduced funding resulting in band- and technology-based opportunities being prioritised to encourage uptake.

Financial constraints across the board have also made studying music to degree level increasingly the preserve of privately educated, middle class musicians. At one time, those studying in British conservatories would have mostly been state educated, but now the reverse is true.

Plus, the fact remains that classical music simply still isn't cool – but is that really the case? In May of this year, Radio 3 was named 'Station of the Year' at the annual Audio and Radio Industry Awards, coming on the back of an upward trend in listeners, with 2.15 million now tuning in weekly.

In recent years, The Proms have also reached larger and wider audiences than ever before. Could it simply be that adults – unlike school students – are coming to classical music having been drawn in by its structural complexities and the comparatively high demands made on its audiences?

What's now classed as 'classical music' has a much broader diversity of composers and performers than in years gone by – but would many departments give it time, were it not for the KS4/5 syllabus demands?

## Orchestral extinction?

Esi has taught secondary music in both state and private settings, and is now parent to a student studying at music conservatory. In her experience, *"Music technology, for many schools, has replaced mainstream music A Level, and in some departments, KS3's experience of classical can be only through film and gaming music."*

She notes how, over the years, many private schools have widened their music offer from ones that were once largely classical, but has seen far fewer efforts at promoting classical in state schools. *"The lack of classical is even more apparent in extracurricular,"* she adds, *"where many schools have active band cultures, but not many state schools currently boast healthy larger scale orchestral and choral ensembles."*

But why should we dedicate more time to Bach, Britten and Beethoven in our music classrooms and school concerts? Well, it's realistic to assume that the vast majority of students passing through secondary music departments will, as adults, engage with music solely as listeners. Music teachers therefore have a responsibility to try and activate the skills needed for truly rewarding experiences, and give those KS3 students who leave music behind at Y10 a grounding and fearlessness – not to mention respect and appetite – for eventually exploring the classical canon.

## Break those barriers

Now, there's nothing *wrong* with Pachelbel's Canon – but if you need to refresh your

ideas, you could do worse than use the non-statutory Model Music Curriculum's suggestions and resources for delivering lessons in the Western Classical Tradition (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-M1](http://tinyurl.com/ts146-M1)). These include works by Handel, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, but also John Rutter and Anna Meredith.

The BBC's 'Ten Pieces' resources ([bbc.co.uk/teach/ten-pieces](http://bbc.co.uk/teach/ten-pieces)) are also great for teachers who are less confident in this area.

Local support for nurturing classical activity is also often available (and usually free!) from adult enthusiasts in choral and orchestral societies, who long to see younger audiences and could help to create fruitful school partnerships.

Enlisting help from any classical enthusiasts you might have on staff could additionally give your students a new outlook on the relevance of chamber, orchestral and choral music-making traditions.

Because despite everything music educators presently face, the UK remains a world leader with respect to the richness and diversity of its classical music. All class teachers thus have a responsibility to at least try breaking down those barriers for our future composers, performers and audiences.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Tierney has run music departments in comprehensive schools for over 25 years, was an advanced skills teacher for secondary music in Barnet and now works freelance in music teaching, examining and dementia work

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# LEARNING LAB

## IN THIS ISSUE

- + Lessons in adulthood for teens with autism
- + Why every teacher should see themselves as a behaviour management practitioner
- + Does AI have the potential to make educational inequality even worse than it already is?
- + What teachers who do tutoring on the side should know about their tax liabilities
- + How the Lords is urging schools and policymakers to reassess the importance of media literacy education
- + The Trust using live radio broadcasts to bring its pupils and local community together
- + The precipitous decline in teens writing for pleasure

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Thinking about ...

## JOURNALING

The first time I asked one of my students to write about herself, she said ‘Whaaaat...?’ When I asked her again, she rolled her eyes and added, ‘Anyway, I don’t know how to do that...’

This student (a high-achiever underachieving) had learnt PEE structures, as well as mark schemes readings. She even used ChatGPT to proofread her essays, though she didn’t bother to push herself further: ‘I have learnt the structure and the quotes, I don’t need the writing for anything else in my life’.

Was she right? Writing is, after all, thinking – or rather, *the tool that teaches us how to think*. But then some – like my student – come to realise that learners aren’t actually required to write well, but rather to regurgitate *well enough*.

The reason why some colleagues become so mesmerised by AI is because it produces exactly what they’re asking their pupils to recreate; structured model texts detached from real experience, but sufficiently capable of passing an external standardisation process.

Teenagers today have more sophisticated tools than ever to support their learning, and yet the rates of mental health issues across secondary schools are growing, in tandem with rises in alienation and disbelonging. While researching this contradiction, I discovered that physical journals were trending among teenagers (alongside point-and-shoot cameras and Y2K aesthetics, though that’s a different story). As all old things come back around, Gen Z is starting to feel nostalgia for a pre-internet past they never lived through. The analogue

possibilities afforded by a journal – writing about

themselves, without having to share its content on Instagram – feel almost countercultural.

Intrigued, I selected a group of 40 students spanning different year groups and academic backgrounds (top, mixed and low sets). I gave them each a notebook and pen, on the condition that they would write for 10 minutes every day before bed for two months, reflecting on a series of prompts – ‘emotions’, ‘mistakes’, ‘school’, ‘friends’ and ‘future’. I then asked them to complete a regular fortnightly survey and share a video of themselves flipping through the pages, to prove that they were writing. I would never read what they wrote, as the exercise was solely for them. Parents were also informed of the project and its aims.

Initially, I’d expected half the students to toss their notebooks in the nearest bin on their way home, but they all embraced the experiment, with 70% consistently writing across the two months about their emotions, plans, mistakes and fears. When exam season arrived, I asked them to look back and review their entries, with the aim of promoting resilience – *track your notes, identify, act, change, reflect*. Most shared that they felt better after writing everything down, as it was a relief to leave their problems in their journals. 10 participants stated that they slept better after writing.

For the 2025/26 academic year, my goal is to incorporate these reflective tasks around resilience into the classroom, while fostering further personal connections through writing. So far, all of the KS3 participants moving into KS4 have agreed to continue the project, and have asked for new journals. Not bad going for a generation apparently unable to write about themselves!



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jose Sala Diaz is head of media at The Priory School, Hitchin

## FOCUS ON... AUTISM AND ADULTHOOD

Independence, financial management and community belonging. These are the biggest concerns that parents of autistic children have regarding their child's transition into adulthood.

With more than 180,000 autistic students in England (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-LL1](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-LL1)), schools play a crucial role in helping autistic children to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to navigate adult life by incorporating these into students' learning.

At The Cavendish School, our mission is to enable the self for all our students, ensuring they develop the skills needed to succeed as independent and socially confident young adults beyond academic success. Through our Personal, Social, Health and Relationships Education curriculum, our students develop essential life skills – including how to manage their money, navigate public transport and societal expectations in the workplace – to ensure they're equipped to thrive independently when they leave us.

Based on our experience, here are three areas schools should focus on to support autistic students' transition into adulthood.

### 1. TRANSPORT TRAINING

Like many of us, autistic individuals can face difficulties with using public transport: 75% of autistic people report that unexpected changes can cause them distress, with 52% saying that this fear stops them from using the services altogether (see [tinyurl.com/ts146-LL2](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-LL2)). Autistic individuals may also experience sensory sensitivities, anxiety and difficulty navigating the transport systems themselves, further contributing to a fear, or avoidance of using public transport.

We include travel training in our students' learning to help them understand how to use different methods of transport, so they can travel independently for college, work, social and leisure activities. The training can be tailored to children's individual needs, and covers journey planning and preparation, safety and coping strategies in case of unexpected cancellations and delays, which can cause discomfort for those who rely on routine and predictability.

### 2. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Being able to manage a budget is another important skill our students will use throughout their lives. Autistic adults tend



to have lower financial literacy and greater uncertainty around money, often due to difficulties with understanding abstract concepts such as saving, budgeting and managing debt.

To build students' financial literacy, it's important to provide explicit and detailed instructions on financial management. We introduce our students to basic money skills in Y4. By Y8, they will be learning budgeting skills with bank accounts, and have explored the function of wage slips and tax by Y10. Students in Y12 will practice budgeting by planning purchases for our dedicated on-site life skills flat. This way, they'll be better prepared for those small, but often unforeseen costs that are sometimes involved with purchasing essential items for adult living, such as a kettle, crockery and bedding.

### 3. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Classroom dynamics and informal learning outside of subject teaching can build children's understanding of social cues, values and beliefs. Known as the 'hidden curriculum', autistic children can find this learning particularly challenging, since they benefit most from explicit, rather than implicit teaching and guidance.

Teaching autistic students about the social expectations they might encounter in the workplace – rather than relying on them to infer these – can help them feel better prepared to navigate new social situations and participate in their communities as much as they choose to.

As educators, we can ensure that all of our students experience smoother transitions to, and develop a better understanding of the changes that come with adulthood. Because if education doesn't equip all children for successful, fulfilling futures – then what is it for?

## DO THIS

### BE A BEHAVIOUR PRACTITIONER

**ROBIN LAUNDER**  
PRESENTS HIS TIPS FOR  
OVERSEEING BRILLIANT  
BEHAVIOUR...

Geography teachers have two subjects: geography and behaviour management. Science teachers have up to four subjects: the three core sciences and behaviour management.

In other words, behaviour management is integral to teaching. Consequently, you must view yourself as a behaviour management practitioner. In fact, more than that, you must embrace the role – because when you do, you put student behaviour at the forefront of your thinking.

Behaviour management practitioners don't wing it. They don't leave it to chance, and simply hope that the students will behave for them.

Instead, they plan for, promote and normalise the behaviour they want. They're also quick to correct any behaviour they don't want, and will do so calmly, efficiently and effectively.

It's a skilled role – so skilled, in fact, that hardly anyone (if anyone) comes into teaching as an expert from day one. It takes time, effort and practice to get behaviour right.

Yet, the teachers who get it right the quickest are those who embrace the role. When you see yourself as a behaviour management practitioner, you think and act like one. And that makes all the difference in the classroom.

**Robin Launder is a behaviour management consultant and speaker; this column is adapted from his book, *Brilliant Behaviour in 60 Seconds or Less* (Routledge, £18.99)**

STEPHANIE SMITH IS HEAD OF SCHOOL AT THE CAVENDISH SCHOOL – CAMBRIDGESHIRE'S FIRST STATE-MAINTAINED SPECIAL AUTISM SCHOOL; FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [THECAVENDISHSCHOOL.ORG.UK](http://THECAVENDISHSCHOOL.ORG.UK)



# 70%

of 16- to 18-year-old UK school leavers say AI's growth has influenced their career choice

Source: Savanta survey conducted in July 2025 on behalf of E.ON

Amid the ongoing

conversations around the growing presence of AI in schools, a frequently cited concern has been the degree to which the technology will become another driver of inequality, with well-resourced schools better placed to harness the technology than those in disadvantaged areas.

A recently published report from The Sutton Trust – pointedly titled ‘Artificial Advantage? – AI in the classroom and the inequality gap’ – has attempted to put some numbers on those talking points, and concluded that the technology “*Could act as a major leveller, or it could be a gap widener.*”

Already, there would seem to be marked differences in how private schools are approaching the technology compared to their state school counterparts, with 27% of the former having a whole school AI strategy in place, compared to 9% of the latter.

Private school teachers emerge as the most enthusiastic users of AI to perform certain duties, with 29% using it to perform pupil reports (compared to 11% of state school teachers) and 12% for marking (versus 7% of state school teachers).

Commenting on the findings, Sutton Trust CEO Nick Harrison stated, “*These tools can provide a range of benefits to overworked teachers, but their use is spread unevenly, with inequalities in training and appropriate guidance and monitoring. If action isn’t taken to close these widening gaps, access to AI risks becoming the next major barrier to opportunity for disadvantaged young people.*”

The ‘Artificial Advantage?’ report can be downloaded in full via [tinyurl.com/ts146-LL4](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-LL4)

## CLOSE-UP ON...

### TUTORING AND TAXES

It’s a familiar story – you take on a few tutoring jobs outside of school, or pick up some exam marking over summer, and assume the earnings will be too small or infrequent to worry about tax. Thanks to a quiet change in HMRC’s data collection rules, however, many teachers could potentially be in for an unpleasant surprise.

Online tutoring platforms, such as Tutorful, Preply and Superprof, are now required to report tutor earnings directly to HMRC. This means that if you’ve earned more than approximately £1,700 through one of these platforms, or completed more than 30 tutoring sessions, HMRC will already have your name and figures on file. So if you’ve been tutoring or exam marking, what do you need to know?

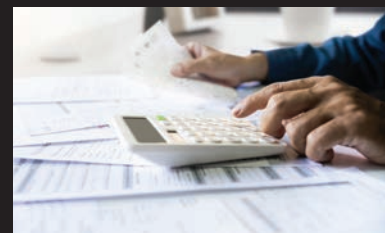
#### GET TO KNOW YOUR THRESHOLD

Even if you don’t hit the £1,700 platform reporting threshold, you may still need to report your income. If you earn over £1,000 in self-employed income (i.e. income not taxed under PAYE) in a tax year – including through tutoring, exam marking or running revision workshops – you’ll need to register for self assessment and file a tax return. That’s the law, whether or not HMRC has a data trail.

A common misconception is that if you’ve earned only a small amount, or it’s just a few sessions, you don’t need to do anything. But that £1,000 threshold is *total income*, not profit – and it doesn’t take much to pass that, especially if you’re tutoring at GCSE or A Level rates.

#### WHAT IF YOU HAVEN’T DECLARED?

If HMRC identifies undeclared income, they’ll usually send a ‘nudge letter’ prompting you to come forward. If you’ve yet to receive one, there are two options:



1. Wait to be contacted, which makes your disclosure ‘prompted’ and usually leads to higher penalties
2. Come forward voluntarily, before HMRC contacts you. This is an ‘unprompted disclosure’ and tends to result in lower penalties.

If you ignore a nudge letter or don’t respond, HMRC may open a what could be an intrusive and stressful formal investigation. The earlier you act, the better.

#### WHAT TO DO NEXT

If you think this might apply to you, then don’t panic – but do act. Tally your income from 6th April to 5th April each tax year. If it’s over £1,000, you’ll need to register for self assessment.

Register with HMRC by 5th October following the end of the relevant tax year, and if necessary, file your tax return by 31st January (e.g. for income earned in the 2024/25 tax year, you’ll need to file by 31st January 2026).

#### WHAT IF IT’S MORE SERIOUS?

In rare cases, where large sums are involved or there’s evidence of deliberate non-compliance, the Contractual Disclosure Facility may apply – a more serious process, but one that can protect you from prosecution. Again, expert advice is essential.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

Extra income from tutoring or marking entails tax responsibilities. The rules haven’t changed, but the reporting has. If you’re over the £1,000 mark, take steps now. Sorting it yourself, before HMRC comes knocking, is always the better option.



MATT WATKINS IS TAX DISPUTES AND DISCLOSURES DIRECTOR AT THE ACCOUNTANCY FIRM MENZIES; FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [MENZIES.CO.UK](https://menzies.co.uk)

# 2.97%

of A Levels taken in 2024 were for MFL, classical subjects, Welsh (second language) and Irish

Source: 'The Languages Crisis: Arresting decline' report produced by The Higher Education Policy Institute

## Need to know

The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee has issued a stark warning that echoes what many teachers have been saying for some time – that unless standards of media literacy improve, “*Social cohesion is at risk and democracy itself is threatened*”.

So begins the Committee’s latest ‘Media Literacy’ report, which calls for a new and more effective form of media literacy education to be embedded across the National Curriculum from Early Years onwards. This would replace what the Committee describes as the more ad-hoc media literacy teaching offered currently – centred on occasional assemblies and optional subjects, and dependent on access to resources and knowledgeable staff – and be accompanied by updated CPD and ITT offers.

Other recommendations put forward in the report include introducing a new ‘media literacy levy’ on tech companies; appointing a new ministerial position to oversee a nationwide media literacy programme; and launching a media literacy awareness campaign aimed at adult members of the public.

The full ‘Media Literacy’ report can be downloaded via [tinyurl.com/ts146-LL3](https://tinyurl.com/ts146-LL3)



## WHAT WE DO BROADCASTING STUDENT VOICE

At Belle Vue Girls’ Academy, part of Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust (BDAT), we’ve always believed in the power of student voice. Following the pandemic, however, we saw just how much the experience had impacted our students’ confidence and sense of connection.

We wanted to rebuild this by creating something lasting, which would give our young people a platform and amplify the voices of the next generation. So to achieve this, we turned to radio broadcasting.

Our Trust works closely on regional summits with Bradford Citizens – a local organisation that brings together young voices from different schools and Trusts across West Yorkshire, to debate some of the most pressing issues in our region and advocate for change. Inspired by our students’ passionate discussions, we reached out to our local community radio station, BCB Radio, to see if they would like to speak to students about their experiences as young social activists.

After a successful one-off broadcast featuring student reflections on a recent pandemic recovery summit – where students had shared their thoughts on issues ranging from wellbeing to inequality – it became clear that there was potential and enthusiasm for more. We saw it as a unique opportunity to formalise a partnership with BCB Radio, and launched a long-term, student-led radio project. We suggested the idea to the station and they loved it!

We invited students from across our Trust to take on roles such as presenter, interviewer or editor, depending on which aspect interested them the most. BCB Radio have provided training, along with access to professional studio equipment and recording booths, giving our students invaluable hands-on experience.

From scripting and editing, to choosing music and themes, students continue to shape each programme

themselves, sharing their thoughts on topics that matter to them, such as inclusion, sustainability and anti-racism. This not only helps to deepen their understanding of important issues, but also empowers them to shape conversations through the power of hearing their own voices, as experts.

In the second year of the programme, we linked the project to our Trust-wide ICARE values – Inclusion, Compassion, Aspiration, Resilience and Excellence – to align more closely with our wider student voice programme. We have also welcomed the school’s Wellbeing Ambassadors and Student Parliament members to share their experiences on air, as role models for our community.

Throughout the project we’ve seen transformative benefits for our students. Quieter students have become confident communicators who can now build relationships with their peers with ease. Others have discovered interests in media, journalism or activism.

For many, it’s been their first real experience of work, thus building crucial employability skills such as time management, teamwork and decision-making. One student, Fasanya, has described it as a space “*To express myself freely. Radio shows have proven to be a medium where I can get my voice across as a young person, and I’ve felt really empowered.*”

For any school eager to hear their students’ voices on the radio, we’d recommend starting an initial discussion with a radio station in your local area, and maybe offering a short interview, a themed discussion or an exciting project proposal.

It’s also essential to think about the small things that will create a respectful and calm space in which students’ expression and confidence can be encouraged. Most importantly, let students lead. Their voices are powerful – and when we make space for them to be heard, amazing things happen.



**JONATHAN KENNEDY IS STUDENT VOICE CO-ORDINATOR AT BRADFORD DIOCESAN ACADEMIES TRUST; FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [BDAT-ACADEMIES.ORG](https://bdac-academies.org)**





## On the radar *A crisis of confidence?*

Research by the youth insight and publicity agency Hark has found that a significant proportion of adolescents experience major declines in confidence over the course of their time at school. Drawing on survey data involving over 1,400 11- to 18-year-olds across the UK, the agency's 'Listen Up' report details how 1 in 3 respondents professed to having little or no confidence in themselves.

The report's authors describe this group as an 'unheard third' who are reluctant to engage in class, prefer to avoid extra-

curricular activities and rarely speak up. The pupils most well-represented among this 'unheard third' include the 34% of girls stating that they possess little to no confidence (compared to 27% of boys) and the 37% of respondents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who echo the same sentiment.

The point at which students' confidence tends to dip the most seems to be after they turn 16, though the researchers did record a slight uptick in confidence past the age of 18. In terms of regional difference, the respondents reporting to

have little to no confidence were most likely to be found in Northern Ireland (where 43% responded as such), Wales (41%) and parts of the Midlands (35%).

There also appears to be some deliberate masking at work, with 44% of girls responding to the survey saying that they had pretended to 'less confident than they actually felt', owing to concerns at being perceived by classmates to be showing off.

The full report can be downloaded from [harklondon.com/listen-up](http://harklondon.com/listen-up)

## TRENDING

Our pick of the recent resources and launches teachers might find useful...

### THE LAY OF THE LAND

Pearson has published its latest annual School Report, charting the developments and perspectives that have done most to shape the education profession over the past year. Areas covered include learning motivation, what trends are impacting upon learning and what directions the profession should take next.

[tinyurl.com/ts146-LL5](http://tinyurl.com/ts146-LL5)

### WE THE UNDERSIGNED

Stephen Fry and Kate Nash are among nearly 4,000 signatories to an open letter urgently calling on the DfE to revise its updated RSHE guidance, due to it placing "Trans, non-binary, intersex, asexual and gender non-conforming pupils at risk by erasing their identities from the curriculum and silencing their experiences within schools."

[tinyurl.com/ts145-LL6](http://tinyurl.com/ts145-LL6)

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT... RELUCTANT WRITERS

Research carried out by the National Literacy Trust has highlighted a dramatic decline in writing for pleasure among 5- to 18-year-olds across the country.

The headline figure, based on data gathered by the NLT's Annual Literacy Survey of 114,970 respondents, is that just 26.6% said they enjoyed writing in their spare time. That proportion seems even starker once the historical context is taken into account, with levels of writing enjoyment decreasing by 20.2 percentage points

since 2012.

That said, there are some reasons for optimism among the results – including the finding that 31.1% of students receiving free school meals, across all ages, continue to enjoy writing more than their non-FSM peers (among whom 25% can say the same). 10.4% of all respondents meanwhile said that they tried to write something in the spare time each day.

Those stating that they did not enjoy writing said that being given more freedom to choose their preferred writing topics,



and more say over the format of their writing, could entice them into picking up their pens.

According to NLT chief executive Jonathan Douglas, "The findings offer a sobering view of writing culture in the UK, but also point to actionable

*insights. By focusing on what motivates children and young people – particularly autonomy, creativity and personal and cultural relevance – they are far more likely to engage with it on their own terms. That's where true progress begins."*

Got a great learning idea? Email [editor@teachsecondary.com](mailto:editor@teachsecondary.com) or tweet us at [@teachsecondary](https://twitter.com/teachsecondary)

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# “Our normal can change very quickly”

**Jennifer Hampton** explains why, 30 years on, the Srebrenica genocide in Bosnia needs to be studied more than ever...

In July 2025, a cross-party group of UK politicians, including Angela Rayner and Priti Patel, gathered at St. Paul’s Cathedral to remember. Later that month, another group of politicians laid wreaths at Westminster Abbey.

Elsewhere, top officials gathered at the UN Assembly while an exhibition took place at the UN headquarters in New York. Hundreds of other commemorative events took place across the world.

The politicians at many of these events weren’t the speakers that commanded the most attention. Instead, people’s eyes and ears were on the survivors, and their testimonies of torture, displacement and loss.

## Three decades on

July 2025 marked 30 years since the Srebrenica genocide. Before the Bosnian War ended and the Dayton Peace Accords were signed, three years of ethnic cleansing by Bosnian Serbs culminated in the systematic murder of 8,372 men and boys in Srebrenica, a

two-hour drive from Sarajevo.

Just two years earlier, Srebrenica had been declared a ‘safe area’ by the UN for Bosniaks fleeing ethnic cleansing in the eastern region. At that time, it was the worst atrocity to have taken place on European soil since WWII.

In the summer of 1995, Supergrass, Pulp and Robson and Jerome were in the charts. Britpop was in the ascendance. It was the year that saw Bill Clinton make history by visiting and touring Northern Ireland as

## “The explicit and unapologetic othering of a group of people echoes across history”

the peace process there began to take shape. It was the month that saw John Major win his second Conservative leadership election. Stan Collymore’s move from Nottingham Forest to Liverpool for £8.5m marked the third time that the British football transfer fee record had been broken within the past six months.

## Hostile rhetoric

The massacre in Srebrenica was formally recognised by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2007. The genocide’s victims had been buried in mass graves in an effort to disguise the perpetrators’ war crimes. Bosnian Serb forces used heavy machinery, including bulldozers, to disturb primary graves and systemically move bodies across large distances.

A series of brutal

July 2025 also saw the government announce that the UK’s voting age will to be lowered to 16 in time for the next General Election, scheduled to take place no later than August 2029. Many students entering Y8 this September will be eligible to vote.

The enduring dominance of the Labour and Conservative parties has been disrupted of late with the 14.3% share of the vote and five Parliamentary seats secured by Reform in the 2024 general election, and its subsequent local and by-election wins. Reform’s website tells us that they stand for ‘British culture, identity and values’. They want to ‘freeze immigration and stop the boats.’

The explicit and unapologetic othering of a group of people echoes across history. Already, the funding of annual summer Pride events in some towns across the country has been attacked. We’ve witnessed a purportedly centrist Labour Prime Minister use hostile rhetoric, such as that deployed in his now infamous ‘Island of

exhumations revealed not just the violated integrity of individual victims, but how people’s remains had been distributed across secondary, and even tertiary graves. Many grieving and traumatised families today still remain without any sense of closure.

So what relevance does any of this have for us in secondary schools?



Strangers' speech.

In early summer, a by-election for a local councillor in the ward where I live resulted in us receiving not one, but three flyers for the far-right Britain First party. They went on to perform pitifully, but the unashamedly racist language and imagery that fell through my letterbox was genuinely shocking to see, and deeply alarming. We'd never received anything remotely similar throughout the 12 years we've lived in the area.

### Chilling sights

The geopolitical global order has changed. Westminster is changing. The political discourse that our young people are now exposed to – from flyers in their hallways, to the vast, unregulated online expanse of social media – is changing too. They need a wider field of knowledge and a broader understanding to unpack and process what's happening. But is that what we're currently giving them in our history lessons, citizenship lessons and school assemblies?

Prior to 1992, Bosnia was a functioning and peaceful multiethnic society. Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs lived in communities together. They were neighbours.

Only last summer, the UK saw anti-immigration and far right rioting unfold

in multiple cities. Just a few months ago, Ballymena in Northern Ireland was engulfed in hate-filled riots that resulted in houses being set on fire.

The chilling sight of 'Locals live here' signs in multiple homes, as people tried to protect themselves from violent mobs, were a stark reminder of so many dark periods in history – only this time, the threat felt far closer. At the time of writing, further anti-immigration protests have taken place outside hotels used as accommodation for asylum seekers.

### Systematic, planned and intentional

Yes, we already study the Holocaust, and we should continue to do so. But could that valuable learning be made even deeper, given knowledge of other atrocities? The children who survived the Bosnian War are middle-aged adults now; some of them millennials who have children of their own attending our schools.

Survivors work in our schools, and have a tremendous appetite to share their experiences, because they want to the world to know that our normal can change very quickly. Ethnic cleansing and genocide aren't just horrific, isolated moments in our history wrought by spontaneous

eruptions of hatred. They are systematic, planned and intentional.

This is all too painfully clear to see whenever we turn on the news. It's important that students learn how to recognise these patterns, and see how they can transcend religion, borders and context.

We're often told that we now live in a 'post-truth world'. The impact of this in Bosnia has been that genocide denial is becoming increasingly normalised. Past perpetrators of ethnic cleansing and genocide are being celebrated and memorialised.

The country isn't without political tensions, yet Bosnia's capital only features in our lessons when we study the outbreak of WWI. We can do better than this – for the survivors of Srebrenica and the conflict in Bosnia that took place just 30 years ago, but also for the young people in our schools. They will be making important choices very soon, and we need to equip them for that.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Hampton (@brightonteacher) is an English teacher, literacy lead and former SLE (literacy)

## LESSONS FROM SREBRENICA: SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

*Remembering Srebrenica is an education charity funded by successive UK governments. It aims to tackle hatred and intolerance by using the lessons of Srebrenica to build a safer and more cohesive society in the UK.*

*The materials available from its website include:*

- ▶ PSHE resources
- ▶ Poetry and short story resources
- ▶ Information sheets about the conflict, its background and the genocide
- ▶ Ground rules for discussing the genocide
- ▶ A '10 stages of genocide' resource
- ▶ Activities of remembrance
- ▶ Survivor testimonies
- ▶ Assembly resources
- ▶ Short documentaries and films

For more information, visit [srebrenica.org.uk](http://srebrenica.org.uk)





# FlashAcademy® Secondary

A comprehensive online teaching programme and pupil-facing app to enhance your EAL support provision



## AT A GLANCE

- An online EAL skills programme with curriculum-linked vocabulary adapted for secondary users
- Suitable for use in school and at home
- The teacher dashboard stores all assessment data and reporting
- Beyond the app, there is a wealth of CPD packages and practical resources available

REVIEWED BY: RUTH ASTLEY



For classroom teachers, unlocking the world of learning for children with English as an additional language is an essential task, but one that can be extremely labour intensive. The secondary version of FlashAcademy®, however, could make a real difference.

FlashAcademy® is an online teaching programme that comes with a comprehensive range of online lessons for pupils with EAL. Its potential uses extend far beyond that, though, to encompass many helpful resources and tools for daily use in the classroom.

FlashAcademy's app interface is easy to navigate and designed in an age-appropriate way for secondary-age users – not something you can always say of EAL resources. The extensive package of lessons and videos provides early acquisition learners with all the language and skills development they'll need throughout their secondary school journey. Helpfully, users can also access the materials found in the programme's primary version, enabling teachers to dip into an even more extensive range of curriculum-aligned language resources and ensure smoother rates of progress for students.

The learning journey students take is clearly mapped out via programmes intended for groups or individual learners. The inclusion of assorted learning challenges and games, complete with live leaderboards, will help keep pupils motivated and engaged,

and we're told that a custom lesson builder will be added in later down the line.

Powerful packages like this can sometimes be hindered by the design of their teacher dashboards, but that's not the case here. FlashAcademy's user-friendly dashboard interface makes all vital admin and information controls readily accessible, so that busy staff can easily use it to prepare lessons, assign tasks and set homework.

The programme's assessment functions are especially insightful, with the ability to baseline pupils before monitoring their subsequent progress across different proficiency bands. AI-powered marking features can provide teachers with highly detailed breakdowns of pupils' strengths and next steps for development, while also tailoring assessments to your particular setting's needs and cohorts. The grading systems provided are clear and precise, and could potentially serve as a valuable tools for tracking progress.

Then there's the extensive array of high quality training videos and materials intended to help teachers make the best possible use of the system, as well as the translated print documentation for parents and printable resource sheets for classroom use. One particular highlight are the 'learner profiles' spanning a huge spectrum of home languages. Each learner profile includes background information regarding the learner's home country and any notable

cultural differences; key language language distinctions between a pupil's first language and English; any specific difficulties there might be in learning English linked to the home language, and more besides.

FlashAcademy® is definitely worth investigating, as it could well fulfil many of your pupils' needs and give their learning of English a real boost.



## VERDICT

- ✓ Easy to access and use
- ✓ Specifically designed to enable curriculum-aligned language acquisition for EAL learners
- ✓ Presents teachers with a wealth of CPD and support materials
- ✓ Ideal for tracking progress both in school and at home

## UPGRADE IF...

...you want a programme for EAL learners that does everything you could ever need, all in one place.

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



ENGLISH



# Fully Booked

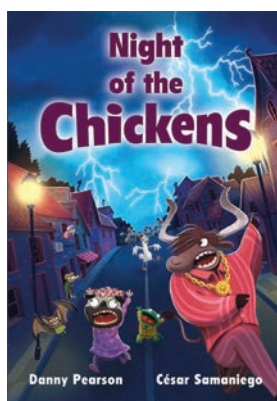
Boost your students' reading confidence with these compelling new books from Collins

fully  
BookED

## AT A GLANCE

- A new series of 20 decodable fiction and non-fiction phonics books
- Designed to appeal to students aged 11+
- Introduces words and word structures in a planned sequence
- Provides rich opportunities to practise decoding skills
- Accompanied by free teacher notes

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



To get students reading, the last thing they'll want is to be presented with a slab of text containing thousands of words. For many at KS3, their reading opportunities need to include shorter phonics books with a good mix of engaging content, ideally presented in a standard paperback format.

Older students can easily feel self-conscious carrying around books that outwardly appear to be too childish for them, so finding an appropriate entry point is paramount. Get it right, and you'll ensure a positive reading experience.

This is precisely what Collins has done. Their new Fully Booked series of decodable fiction and non-fiction books place phonics at the heart of students' reading, with the aim of boosting their self-efficacy.

Why does this matter? Because students who are still developing their phonics skills, especially those not yet reading fluently, can benefit greatly from reading decodable books, which purposefully aim to build confidence, improve fluency and provide a strong foundation for comprehension.

These new books from Collins are both highly accessible and extremely engaging, and should do a good job of providing targeted practice to address reading gaps and building confidence in decoding skills. Though aimed at KS3, these decodable readers aren't age-specific, so much as skill-specific.

There are 10 engrossing fiction titles and 10 inspiring non-fiction titles available, giving students plenty of options to explore,

each with solid hooks to ensnare readers' attention. The titles alone – which include *Night of the Chickens*, *The Thing in the Deep*, *Stranded Under the Stars*, *A Day in the Life of an Astronaut*, *Football Skills* and *Spider Strike* – should give you a sense of the genre variety on offer.

The books themselves range in length from 24 to 32 pages, and feature top quality illustrations and presentation throughout. The relatable themes found across the series are bound to resonate with students' experiences and interests, and are conveyed through straightforward, approachable writing. Some editions include glossaries, too.

In terms of their main aim – providing a means for students to engage in sequential phonics practice, so that they can develop their foundations in reading – the books hit all the bases, being well-written, with engaging content and numerous opportunities for practising and solidifying phonics skills.

Collins' Fully Booked series will ultimately help students develop the crucial foundational reading skills they'll need to succeed at KS3 and beyond, while at the same time taking big strides towards becoming fluent, independent readers.

Age-appropriate decodable readers like these can help give older students a sense of achievement, while also compelling them to read more.

Collins would seem to have a real hit on their hands here – if you want to find out

more, visit the Collins website, where you'll be able to access some free teacher notes aimed at helping you further develop students' comprehension skills, vocabulary acquisition and recall.

teach  
SECONDARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ Helps students practise their decoding skills, rather than relying on pictures or guesswork
- ✓ Strengthens orthographic memory and mastery of phonic structures
- ✓ Provides students with a sense of achievement, while boosting their enjoyment of reading
- ✓ Supports students with developing their level of independent reading comprehension

## PICK UP IF...

You're looking for engaging and effective resources that can promote independent reading and set students up for future reading success.

**Titles in the Fully Booked series are priced from £6.99 to £7.99; for more information, visit [collins.co.uk/FullyBooked](http://collins.co.uk/FullyBooked)**

EDTECH 

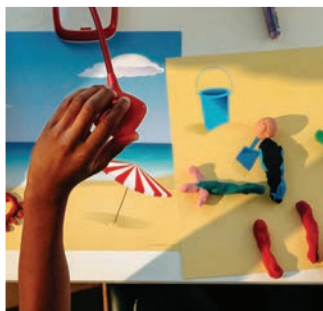
# HUE Animation Studio Pro

A super-smart, versatile camera addition to your school's tech toolkit...



## AT A GLANCE

- A flexible and easy to use animation camera
- Helpful instructions and manual
- Easy to set up and control
- Pupil-friendly interface
- Adaptable for different ages and skill ranges



REVIEWED BY: RUTH ASTLEY

Are you looking for new additions to your school's camera kit? Is animation on your priority list? Well, if you're looking for a solution that's high in both quality and versatility, look no further...

Technically, the included HUE HD Pro is a great USB camera in its own right, with a reassuringly sturdy construction that should prove durable for classroom use. Its strong, yet flexible neck makes it well-suited for use by pupils – as does the option to use it with the stable base powered via a USB cable. Pupils then don't need to hold the camera to take pictures or create tracking shots.

There's also the option of plugging it in without the base, straight into a desktop or laptop's USB port to use the camera as a classroom visualiser. The HUE Animation Studio Pro certainly performs well in traditional classroom applications, then – but when it's used for the purposes of animation, *that's* when the strengths of this package can be fully appreciated.

The camera's ergonomics and ease of use opens up the possibilities of stop motion film-making across a vast age range. The flexibility of its positioning and movement makes it a good fit for many other types of media, in a variety of ways – from filming visuals placed on a flat surface from above, to capturing 3D objects from different angles, or even in

conjunction with a green screen. More advanced film-makers can explore its time lapse modes and different playback speeds, or even turn the camera upside down for a better angle and flip the image in the camera menu.

The quick setup guide does a good job of walking teachers through the camera's various uses and functions, further aided by the intuitive controls on the camera itself, particularly the focus ring and video feed indicator. The onscreen controls and 'project setting' options should make it easy for pupils to independently edit their creations, and even delete certain scenes frame-by-frame, if necessary. It's also easy to add external music and sound effects, either using HUE's own bank of sounds or by recording your own.

What really sets this camera apart from others I've used in the past is its suitability for different ages and abilities. Having taught clay animation to younger pupils, for example, I know how difficult it is to keep track of how your clay has been positioned in earlier frames.

The included Stop Motion Studio software features an 'onion skin' feature, so that every time you move the clay, the camera will render a fixed 'ghost' image of how the object was positioned, enabling pupils to easily line up their new image with where the old image was, thus

ensuring that the final animation remains smooth.

The accompanying software even provides access to effects such as rotoscoping and pixelation, making it an amazing all-rounder for any animation curriculum, topped off with the ability to record, save and conveniently export your creations to a variety of platforms.

## teach SECONDARY

## VERDICT

- ✓ High quality, durable hardware
- ✓ Easily accessible software
- ✓ Useful additional resources
- ✓ Highly flexible

## UPGRADE IF...

...you want a piece of film-making kit that does everything you could ask for in one place!

£59.95 + VAT; see [huehd.com/pro-animation](http://huehd.com/pro-animation) for more information



TEACHING SUPPLIES →

# STABILO MARKdry flipchart and whiteboard markers



An economical, pencil-style alternative to liquid ink whiteboard markers

## AT A GLANCE

- Dry-wipe pencils for whiteboard and flipchart work
- A genuine, effective alternative to liquid-ink markers
- Pencils produce consistently strong marks to the very last stroke
- Robust and chunky enough to suit hands of all sizes
- Packs contain four coloured pencils, whiteboard, cloth and pencil sharpener

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



Now and again, you come across a product that makes you cry, 'Yes! Yes! Yes!', Meg Ryan-style. Watch *When Harry Met Sally* if you're drawing a blank at this stage.

In case you think I'm being weird, let me give you some perspective. One of the greatest frustrations of my classroom practice was getting down to some whiteboard work, only to be confronted with a forest of raised hands: their whiteboard pens had run out. Again. So, I would issue replacements from my worryingly dwindling supply, only to have to repeat the same process again just a few days later. It seemed that these pens – which, let's face it, were not cheap – dried up quicker than a puddle in the Sahara.

What's more, for the five minutes when the ink *did* flow, it got all over their hands and, inevitably, all over their school shirts. Before long, it looked like you were teaching not 30 children but 101 Dalmatians.

So, you'll forgive my excitement at having been introduced to a genuine alternative to liquid ink whiteboard pens, in the form of MARKdry markers.

To reference yet another ancient cultural reference, there used to be a story going round that NASA spent years trying to create pens that worked in space. The Soviets, on the other hand, saved themselves the bother by simply issuing their cosmonauts

with pencils. Sadly, it would seem that this story is just a myth. Nevertheless, it almost exactly mirrors what Stabilo have done here.

That's because its new(ish) whiteboard pen is... a pencil! It works just like a traditional whiteboard pen – you write, you wipe, you write again (but not on glass, apparently). The pencils themselves are nice and chunky, enabling all ages to use them comfortably. Each pack contains a dry-wipe board and four pencils in black, red, blue and green. Also included is a wiping cloth and a suitably capacious pencil sharpener.

Goodness knows how long they'll actually last, but it's bound to be a lot longer than the alternative. What's more, the nature of the 'lead' means that marks will remain strong and consistent until you can sharpen the pen no longer, as opposed to the liquid ink versions that tended to start fading before they eventually died.

Everyone will be glad to know that they are solvent-free and odourless. Furthermore, the wood enclosing the lead is sustainably sourced. The only criticism I can think of is the name. Call me picky, but I don't like the combination of upper- and lower-case letters in MARKdry. How does that help anyone, let alone kids who have only just got to grips with letter formation and basic punctuation conventions?

Rant over, let's just celebrate a product

which, like the best ideas, is elegantly simple and efficiently effective – unless, of course, you think you'll miss the clang of dried up pens landing in the bin, or the thrill of finding countless pen lids under your drawer units at the end of term. In short, I love these. And I'm not faking it.

**teach  
SECONDARY**

## VERDICT

- ✓ Simple and effective
- ✓ Long-lasting
- ✓ Reliable
- ✓ Durable
- ✓ Economical

## UPGRADE IF...

...you want to wipe away your memories of leaky, short-lived liquid ink whiteboard pens and replace them with a more practical and cost-effective alternative.

RRP £15.49 [stabilo.com/uk/products/writing/markers-ohp-pens/stabilo-markdry/](https://stabilo.com/uk/products/writing/markers-ohp-pens/stabilo-markdry/)



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Lawson is a former secondary teacher, now serving as a foundation governor while running a tutoring service, and author of the book **The Successful (Less Stressful)**

**Student** (Outskirts Press, £11.95); find out more at [prep4successnow.wordpress.com](http://prep4successnow.wordpress.com) or follow @johninpompano



## THE LAST WORD

# A warm welcome



**John Lawson** presents his script when meeting a new class, complete with acknowledgement of why – thankfully – their experiences of education will be very different from his own...

Most secondary teachers follow remarkably similar principles, though we will often use different terminology. When I returned to the UK after teaching in America back in 2018, I was unfamiliar with terms such as ‘scaffolding’, ‘retrieval’, ‘metacognition’ and ‘scripting’ – though I had long practised all of those pedagogical processes by other names.

Allow me to share with you below a script I’ve used annually for a number of years. Over time, it’s become a remarkably effective pre-emptive strike on the kinds of disruptive behaviour that virtually every teacher can expect to encounter at some point over the coming academic year.

### Wanton and gratuitous violence

“I am not your enemy. I became a teacher because I want to give teenagers a better school experience than I endured. Many of my colleagues express similar sentiments.

When I was 5, teachers routinely beat even primary schoolchildren with belts, canes, slippers and fists. I’ve never forgotten the ferocious metalwork teacher who grabbed me by the hair and repeatedly hit my head against a wall – all because I’d messed up on a work project.

I went to hospital for seven stitches. No disciplinary action was ever taken against him.

The upshot of this wanton and gratuitous violence was that I ‘switched off’ from education. Why, when I most needed love, guidance and compassion, as we all do – did I instead experience indefensible brutality, belittlement and belligerence from so-called ‘educated people’? How can cleverness engender such cruelty, when what education is *meant* to do is enlighten and humanise us?

At 15, I underwent a dramatic adolescent metamorphosis and returned as a 6ft tall, barrel-chested Y10 hoodlum who frequently scared many of my peers and teachers. One day, my PE master hit me with a cricket bat after he’d been told that I’d helped vandalise his local church. Something snapped and I broke his nose. Yours truly was expelled.

### Never apologise

I therefore know better than most what leaving school with no qualifications and a bad reputation is really like. It’s demoralising. Few people have the patience to listen to our sad stories – ‘*So, young man, you punch people*

*you disagree with – right?* Judging someone’s worth by their paper qualifications is superficial, yes – but it’s also easy.

I am not your enemy. At the same time, I will never apologise for being a ‘zero tolerance’ disciplinarian who rarely resorts to punishment, because I want you to be intelligent, happy, engaged and successful. Discipline is a gift, not a curse – so please don’t yell at me, or anyone else in this classroom. Civility works far better.

Also – everyone has rights! The safety and wellbeing of every student is paramount. I work hard to make this classroom as clean and comfortable as possible for everyone, so I won’t let anyone trash my efforts.

### Thinking for ourselves

If I permit students to threaten and intimidate their peers, what does that say about me? Where will you fit into adult society if you’re lacking in self-control and a sense of humanity? While I abhor the use of physical coercion, I do

acknowledge that almost every child from my generation could learn if they wanted to. I learned 500 vocabulary words in one weekend 50 years ago because I dreaded getting thrashed for failing a test. (Sadly, fear works.)

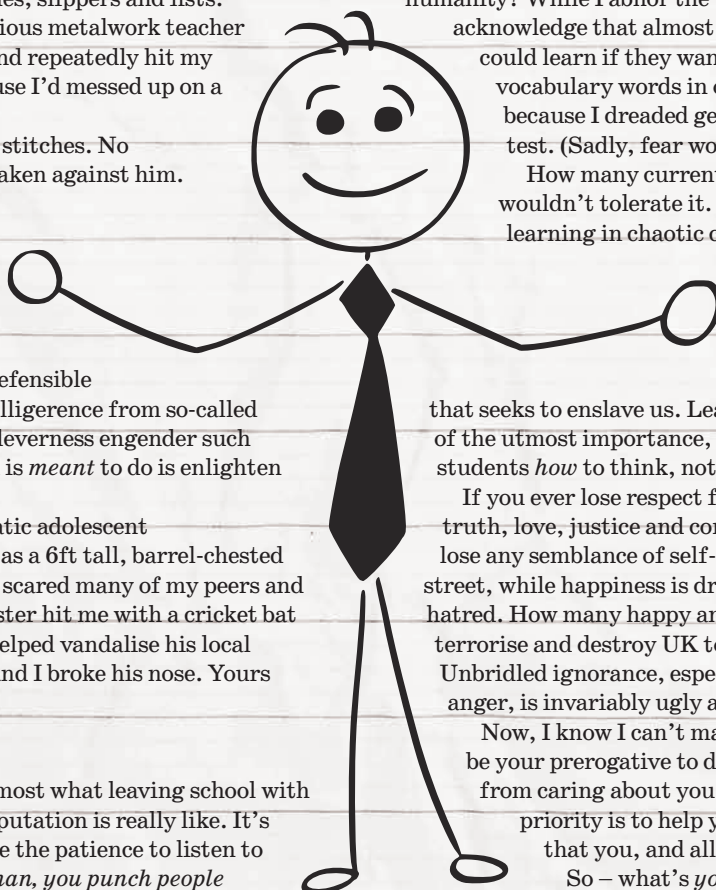
How many current Y7s would do that? Parents wouldn’t tolerate it. Many children today find learning in chaotic classrooms almost impossible – and that’s something I won’t tolerate.

We are currently sleepwalking into a post-truth, populist society that seeks to enslave us. Learning to think for ourselves is of the utmost importance, which is why I always teach students *how* to think, not *what* to think.

If you ever lose respect for the timeless virtues of truth, love, justice and compassion, then you’ll quickly lose any semblance of self-respect. Respect is a two-way street, while happiness is driven by love, rather than hatred. How many happy and educated people tried to terrorise and destroy UK towns in the summer of 2024? Unbridled ignorance, especially when combined with anger, is invariably ugly and destructive.

Now, I know I can’t make you like me. It will always be your prerogative to dislike me, but you can’t stop me from caring about you and your future. My primary priority is to help you discover the unique talents that you, and all of your peers possess.”

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