VISIT TEACHWIRE.NET/SECONDARY

teach SECONDARY

Outstanding advice from the UK's top education experts

TABLE TENSIONS

How should students be sat in class?

"YOU CAN DO IT!"

The art of unlocking students' confidence

SEND IN THE EXPERTS

What you can learn from special schools

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Will Ofsted's changes affect your teaching?

VOTES AT 16

Why teens need lessons in politics

Realistic REVISION

HOW TO BANISH Y11 BURNOUT

Plus

Behaviour | History | Sustainability | Coding | Drama | AI

artichoke

£3.99 | Issue 14.7

9 772049 278016 07

We are the NEU join us

The NEU is the largest union for teachers and education professionals in the UK. Together we will shape the future of education.

Join FREE as a trainee or for just £1 if you are newly qualified*

national education union

Join us today

neu.org.uk/join

0345 811 8111

*Terms and conditions at **neu.org.uk/neu-membership-tcs**

NEU4075/0925

FROM THE EDITOR

"Welcome...

You'd have thought enough time would have passed since the establishment of Ofsted in 1992 for the regulator and the teaching profession to be fully cognisant of each other's professional incentives and challenges by now, and aspiring to a set of mutually agreed outcomes.

And yet, as shown by the lukewarm-to-hostile reception that's greeted Ofsted's latest education inspection framework, we're still seeing the inspectors and the inspected engaged in what appears to be an adversarial relationship. I'll let Adrian Lyons explain why these 'changes' may have been somewhat oversold and the specific reasons as to why the profession is unhappy with Ofsted's plans (see page 21) – but it's striking to see how, decades into this arrangement, both sides still seem to be talking past each other.

Of course, new research, demographic shifts, overarching government priorities and other unforeseen developments have all prompted Ofsted to rethink what it wants schools do at one time or another. There is, however, one recent event that's motivated this particular set of changes in a very different way to what we've seen previously – that being the tragic suicide of primary headteacher Ruth Perry in 2023, less than two months after an Ofsted inspection had downgraded the school she led from Outstanding to Inadequate.

Following an inquest into her death, the media reported how Perry had been personally impacted by an inspection she felt to have been antagonistic. She feared being blamed by local families and residents for lowering property values. Was worried that her school-age daughters would experience bullying. Contemplated the loss of her job, given the likelihood of that Inadequate grade prompting the school's conversion to an academy.

The picture painted is of one person being made to answer for the outcomes of a complex collective enterprise, with unimaginable pressure piled upon their shoulders, and potentially ruinous professional and personal consequences were they to be found wanting.

In this light, it's not surprising to see Ofsted's recent talk of making inspections a 'more collaborative experience', while announcing its plans for school inspections to be carried out by larger teams, who will be led by experienced HMIs and subject to more robust performance monitoring.

It remains to be seen whether the objections to some of Ofsted's plans from certain groups within the profession will force yet another rethink. But whether you agree or not with the regulator's proposed remedies for the issues that gave rise to such sorrow and anger in the wake of Ruth Perry's death, let's hope it's at least a positive step towards a more meaningful, considered and sensitive dialogue between the regulator and the profession.

Enjoy the issue,

Callum Fauser
callum.fauser@theteachco.com

On board this issue:

Terri Bottriell-Wyse is a special school headteacher

Philip Arkinstall is a university lecturer and former head of history

Nikki McGee is a trust lead for RE

Christian Friday is a trust-wide maths strategy lead

Rebecca Leek has been a secondary teacher, SENCo and MAT CEO

Jose Sala Diaz is a head of media

KEEP IN TOUCH!
Sign up for the weekly TS newsletter at **teachwire.net/newsletter**

Essential reading:

OCT/NOV '25

CONTENTS

Regulars

Features

TS Special – Revision

TS Focus – English

Learning Lab

teach SECONDARY

Publishers: Joe Carter, Sam Reubin, Richard Stebbing

Editor: Callum Fauser, callum.fauser@artichokehq.com, 01206 505115

Group Advertising Managers: Samantha Law, samantha.law@artichokehq.com, 01206 505499

Hayley Rackham, hayley.rackham@artichokehq.com, 01206 505928

Deputy Advertising Manager: Hannah Jones, hannah.jones@artichokehq.com, 01206 505924

Art editors: Richard Allen, Sarah Barajas

Customer services: secondary@artichokehq.com

Accounts: artichokemedialtd@integral2.com

Published by: Artichoke Media, Suites 2 & 4, Global House, Global Park, Eastgates, CO1 2TJ

artichoke

Enable personalised teacher-led PD at scale

with AI-assisted Coaching, Reflection & Collaboration tools

"Through IRIS Connect, the teaching and learning strategy takes on a life of its own, it becomes something that we're all talking about and doing, it becomes a part of our culture, not just professional learning."

Anna, Sir Thomas Wharton Academy

Better teaching. Better outcomes.

Jump right into our expert-built frameworks and resources or work with us to create a custom experience for your organisation.

www.irisconnect.com/uk

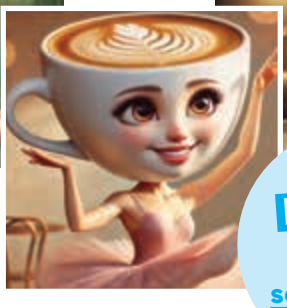
iris CONNECT

The newsletter

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

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

ITALIAN BRAINROT



Buckle up, folks – you're about to read the most nonsensical passage of text that's ever been printed in *Teach Secondary*...

'Italian Brainrot' is the term that young internet users are using to describe a cast of surreal, AI-generated cartoon characters that appear in short-form videos often narrated by an overexcited text-to-speech voice speaking Italian or, as the trend has gone global, Indonesian.

Said characters include Tung Tung Tung Sahur – an anthropomorphised stick frequently shown carrying a club or baseball bat; the half-elephant, half-cactus Lirilarila; a simian tree with gargantuan feet known as Brr Brr Patapim; and a mug of cappuccino grafted onto a ballerina's body called Ballerina Cappuccina (obviously) – plus many, many more.

A key vector of IB's spread has been the profile page of TikTok user @noxaasht and its countless videos, many of which show different characters largely standing and posing while the text-to-speech narration outlines backstory, describes an urban legend or just spews gibberish. The core 'appeal' of IB, though – if you can call it that – is how the cast has escaped containment and spread like wildfire across wider TikTok and YouTube, via a slew of yet more AI videos showing them dropping their kids off at school, hanging out by the beach, at a funeral procession(!) and...yeah.

At best, you could describe the daft vibes here as falling somewhere between *Cocomelon* and *The Fast Show*'s Chanel 9 sketches ('*Scorchio!*', '*A-theth-theth Chris Waddle*', etc.) The more pessimistic among you will take one look at an IB video and want to lie down in a darkened room.

DO SAY
"Hiiiii, seremnyaaaa"

DON'T SAY
"This is that Skibidi thing, isn't it?"

BEAT THE BUDGET

What are we talking about?
'Sinking Feeling Schools Resource' by the youth suicide prevention charity, Papyrus UK

Who is it for?
Y6 to Y13

What's on offer?
PSHE lesson plans, PowerPoint slides and other printable materials to help schools meet government guidance that suicide prevention should be covered in the classroom as of September 2026. The resource also includes an hour-long tutorial with a suicide prevention officer, but is only available to staff that have completed Papyrus UK's 'SPEAK' or 'ASIST' training courses.

Where is it available?
papyrus-uk.org/sinkingfeeling

WHAT THEY SAID...

"We've seen them promise a lot and then not deliver. And what I say to Keir Starmer, Bridget Phillipson and the government is, 'This is the last chance saloon for you. Get this wrong and you are out.'"

Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey, addressing a rally organised by parents protesting the government's plans to reform SEND provision

Think of a number...

70.5%

of 16-year-old GCSE entrants in the 2025 cohort achieved grade 4 or above; 23% achieved a grade 7 or above

£600m
Amount of government investment in a 3-year extension to the Holiday Activities and Food Programme, enabling LAs to support disadvantaged children during school holidays
Source: DfE

54%
of parents state that they are struggling to afford school uniforms for their children
Source: Survey by Park Christmas Savings of 3,500 parents to children aged 4 to 18

ONE FOR THE WALL

"I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it"

Writer Evelyn Beatrice Hall, summarising the philosophy of Voltaire in a 1906 biography

Ofsted rings the changes

Ofsted has detailed the reforms to school inspections that will take effect from November 2025, and published its latest Education Inspection Framework.

The headline change will be the introduction of inspection report cards, aimed at conveying a more nuanced, yet concise breakdown of inspection outcomes for parents and providers. Following an initial test and gathering of feedback earlier in the year, the report cards have been redesigned to be 'more accessible' and easier to navigate via mobile devices.

As has been known for a while, the four Ofsted grades of old (from 'Outstanding' to 'Inadequate') have been replaced with a 5-point grading scale employing different terminology. From worst to best, the scale consists of 'Urgent improvement', 'Needs attention', 'Expected standard', 'Strong standard' and 'Exceptional'. Ofsted reports will henceforth cover more evaluation areas, though the number of 'core evaluation areas' originally proposed at the start of the year has since been reduced. Of particular note is the new 'inclusion' evaluation area, intended to encourage better support for learners with SEND and from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ofsted inspections are now subject to operating guides that will set out suggested arrival and departure times to manage the length of inspection days, and require inspectors to base their findings on an understanding of the school or setting's unique context and local priorities. Schools can also expect more emphasis to be placed on the effectiveness of their parental engagement processes.

The changes will apply to all inspections carried out at state schools and FE providers from 10th November; the latest Education Inspection Framework can be accessed via tinyurl.com/ts147-NL1

SAVE THE DATE

SPEECHES AND CORRESPONDENCE

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

THE SPEECH:

Education Secretary addresses launch of National Parent Survey

WHO? Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education
WHERE? The launch of the National Parent Survey 2025 by the charity Parentkind
WHEN? 16th September 2025

"We're failing in our collective responsibility to give a good education to every child. And it's up to all of us – parents, schools, and government too – to turn this around and rebuild the bonds of trust.

Our upcoming White Paper on schools will chart our path forward. And at the centre will be parents – and their engagement in their child's learning. Because when parents are engaged in school life, their children make four months of extra progress on average, every single year.

Whether it's in early years or in school, parental engagement isn't just a nice-to-have. It must be front and centre of our mission to raise standards and cut the link between background and success.

So high expectations of children must mean high expectations of parents too. To live up to our responsibilities. To play an active role in our children's learning. To send our children to school. To reinforce good behaviour. And to engage with our children's school.

But engagement is a two-way street of course. And schools must do their bit. It's why our schools White Paper will set out plans to establish, for the first time, clear expectations of schools for parental engagement, so that families can be clear on what they should expect from schools and schools can be clear on what they should expect from parents."

THE RESPONSE:

NASUWT shares Ofsted concerns

FROM? Matt Wrack, general secretary of the NASUWT
REGARDING? Ofsted's response to its consultation on the introduction of inspection 'report cards'
WHEN? 9th September 2025

"NASUWT remains gravely concerned that the new inspection regime isn't fit for purpose and will harm the wellbeing of teachers and headteachers. Despite the fact that these changes were prompted in part by the tragic death of headteacher Ruth Perry, the reform's independent assessment on teacher wellbeing hasn't been made available to stakeholders for review. This lack of communication is evasive and demonstrates a failure to engage with educators."

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

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

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

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.

Academy 21

The Online Alternative Provision Experts

Building Bridges to Brighter Futures

Supporting Key Stages 2–4 with DfE-accredited online provision, working with students facing barriers to mainstream education, including those affected by trauma, anxiety, SEND, or at risk of exclusion. Our trauma-informed approach and reintegration support empowers every learner to re-engage, rebuild confidence, and realise their full potential.

Find out how we can support you and your students. Scan the QR code to read our prospectus or contact us via our website or phone.

academy21.co.uk | 0800 2088210

Department for Education

TEACHER TALES

True stories from the education chalkface

Mime's a cough, please...

I used to regularly nag our young male students for not fastening the top buttons of their shirts. Some needed more encouragement than others. One such fellow once spotted me in the corridor and immediately raised his hand to his neck, in an effort to conceal his sartorial slip.

Knowing that I was heading directly for him, he paused, extended his other arm out to hold the balustrade, and in an epic performance, proceeded to act out an ever-escalating coughing fit. At its climax, bystanders started to wonder if he was experiencing a seizure. As I walked past this prone figure clutching the balustrade for dear life, I said quietly into his ear, "*Fasten your top button, please.*" To which he replied, in measured tones, "*Yes, sir*" – and then calmly walked away.

Naturally, those who witnessed the event forever held the view that I possessed some mystical powers that could ail tormented souls, simply by whispering in their ear...

Here's a tip

Our headteacher was extremely proud of his yellow Citroen 2CV, and was delighted at being able to peel back the car's roof during his journey to school on sunny summer mornings.

Unfortunately, however, on one such morning he forgot to close the roof. Several hours after he'd parked the car outside the staff room, there was a fierce thunderstorm – which, as you'd expect, filled the car with rainwater.

The car was later seen being tipped fully on its side to empty out the water, courtesy of four burly sixth formers working under the headteacher's anxious supervision...

Have a memorable true school tale or anecdote of your own? Share the details, and find more amusing stories, at schoolhumour.co.uk

A FEW MINUTES OF DESIGN

#37 ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Trace around this image three times to give yourself three frames. Draw the five pictured elements in three different arrangements or compositions. One composition in each frame.

You can simplify the elements. You can change the scale of any or all of them. You can overlap or connect them.

Give each of your compositions a name.

Get Into Film

Bookings are now being taken for the Into Film Festival – a celebration of film taking place at over 600 cinemas across the UK from 7th to 28th November. Open exclusively to UK educators and pupils aged 5 to 19, the event will include 3,000 free film screenings, as well as Q&As with assorted screen industry professionals and a range of curriculum-linked special events.

Said screenings will include the UK premiere of *Future Council* (pictured) – a campaigning documentary with fantastical set pieces that follows the experiences of eight children as they travel across Europe, interviewing notable business leaders while searching for solutions to humanity's toughest ecological challenges. The festival will close with a pupil premiere of *Zootropolis 2*, and there will be additional pupil premieres for Gurinder Chadha's new film *Christmas Karma* (a Bollywood take on Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*); Australian family comedy, *Kangaroo*; and the concluding part of last year's all-conquering Oz-set musical, *Wicked: For Good*.

Those planning to attend should also take note of the Into Film Festival Review Writing Competition, which will task young audience members with reviewing films they have seen, and award winning entries the prize of a £200 voucher to be shared among the entrant's class.

For more information and booking details, visit intofilm.org/festival; seats will be awarded on a first come first served basis, with waiting lists available.

Like and subscribe

Who's been saying what on the socials this month?

Sue Cowley @suecowley.bsky.social
It tends to be secondary people who think skills are just more knowledge rather than also having physical and psychological elements. It's definitely something you see said and a powerful influence on Ofsted. There was a slide Ofsted did about how toilet training is a series of 'knowledge items'...

Prem Sikka @premnsikka.bsky.social
A quarter of England state secondary schools have no dedicated physics teacher. Shortages in other subjects too. Govts don't plan long-term, quick to cut real wages of public sector workers. University fees and student debt are a disincentive. Migrant labour can't solve all systemic failures,

Follow us via @teachsecondary and @teachsecondary.bsky.social

travelbound

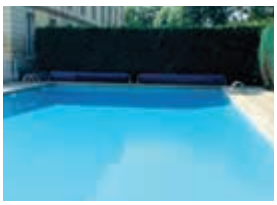
Your First Overseas School Trip, Made Simple.

CHÂTEAU DU MOLAY, NORMANDY

Owned and operated exclusively by Travelbound, our 18th-century château provides the perfect base for secondary school groups beginning their overseas journey.

Safe & secure: 38 acres of private, gated parkland with all facilities under one roof.

Tailored for schools: En-suite accommodation for 195 guests, with the support of our experienced on-site team.



Learning brought to life: Explore the D-Day Landing Beaches, Bayeux, Caen and more - history, language, and culture all in one trip.

Unforgettable experiences: From archery tag and survival challenges to crepe nights and campfires, students build confidence, skills, and memories.

"The site feels safe and secure, which reassures parents. Students gain independence but are always supervised - it's the best of both worlds."
The Chase School

Trusted by schools for over 30 years.
Plan your Normandy adventure with confidence.

stf SCHOOL TRAVEL FORUM ASSURED

TO BOOK SIMPLY CALL 01273 244 572
EMAIL info@travelbound.co.uk
OR VISIT travelbound.co.uk

Quality Badge awarded by Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

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

How many people realise that 'flamboyant' and 'flame' stem from the same root? A *flamboyant fireworks display* figuratively means 'colourful' and literally 'on fire'. In cooking jargon, *to flambé a dish* means to ignite it with a liquor, such as brandy, to add depth and sweetness to its flavour. In the same semantic field, a *crème brûlée* literally means 'a burnt cream', due to its upper layer of caramelised sugar.

TEACHING TIP: ACCENTS

Most teachers understand that accent and identity are strongly linked, and many of us have tried to raise awareness about accent discrimination. Luckily, we're now moving away from the idea of RP or 'standard pronunciation'. As the linguist Professor Jane Setter puts it, "*Anybody who uses a spoken language speaks it with an accent*".

And yet, studies show that the way we talk can be perceived in many different ways. Thus, even within the native British population, some accents may be associated with positive or negative stereotypes, and occasionally be associated with concepts of agreeableness, credibility or even intelligence. There is also the unavoidable 'class' association. Of course, it's part of our job to combat such biases, but there's another, very pernicious form of bias – low expectations, leading to low rates of success.

In psychology, this is called the Golem effect. Some EAL students may have a strong foreign accent and/or a limited repertoire when it comes to vocabulary, making it very important for educators to not form hasty conclusions regarding their linguistic abilities or literacy levels. A foreign accent isn't necessarily representative of a lower lexical ability in English – Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov and Ayn Rand all spoke with strong accents.

It's also worth noting that foreign students with a limited English vocabulary may have advanced writing or reading skills in their own language, or simply be reluctant to speak while being proficient listeners. EAL students' rates of progress can also be impressive to the point of outperforming those of native speakers, even in English exams. By getting to know these students well, teachers can provide them with appropriate opportunities for developing linguistically, socially and culturally.

LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

How many words does one know? Well, it depends how we define 'words' and 'know'. Specialists identify four depths of word knowledge. As for the *number* of words, are we talking about lemma (words represented in all their inflected forms, such as 'go', 'goes', 'going', 'went', 'gone')? Do we count compound words as singular entities? Are we including archaic words?

We can dissociate receptive vocabulary (all the words we recognise) from productive vocabulary (those which spring to mind and can be readily used for speaking or writing). The latter could be less than half of the former.

Most toddlers will know more English words than the number of foreign words an MFL learner excelling at GCSE level would recognise. According to Emeritus professor of linguistics David Crystal, a 13-year-old may know 30,000 words, while an adult with a respectable vocabulary range could know twice as many. A professional linguist, such as a journalist or author, could know as many as 100,000, which would still only constitute less than 10% of all English words! And let's not forget that certain fields of knowledge, such as horticulture, science or mechanics, can generate huge subject-specific jargons of their own...

SAME ROOT, DIFFERENT WORDS

Unique means 'only one'

'**Uni**corn' literally means 'one horn'

A **uni**cycle has only one wheel

Flying the FLAG

Alex Standish ponders the increasingly complex question of how schools should relate to British culture

Most readers will be familiar with the story of student Courtney Wright, who in July this year arrived at her school's Culture Day wearing a Union Jack dress – only to be told by her teachers that this was 'not appropriate'.

She had composed a personal – and compelling – speech about why British culture was important to her, but was instead placed into isolation and denied the opportunity to read it. The reactions of parents and the local community around Bilton School in Rugby was, understandably, one of outrage, prompting the school to close early for the holidays.

A shared history

Why would a school shame a pupil for wanting to celebrate their culture and national identity? How have we arrived at a situation where some British schools are uncomfortable with expressions of national culture? This isn't the case in most countries around the world – so here, I want to examine the relationship between culture and education, and show why it matters.

Firstly, what is British culture? Great Britain first emerged following the 1707 Act of Union between the kingdoms of England (including Wales) and Scotland. A further Act of Union in 1800 then joined Ireland with Great Britain, until Ireland was partitioned in 1921.

Notwithstanding some differences, British culture encompasses the values, traditions and shared history of our four nations – Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Immigrants settling here have become British subjects, thus producing hybrid cultures within British identity. We recently had our first British Asian Prime Minister, for example.

For the most part, we value liberalism, democracy, common law, individualism, property and equality of civil and political rights, regardless of sex and ethnicity. Our indigenous Celtic culture was transformed through the Roman invasion, the arrival of the Saxons and Christianity. Our languages, government and traditions (including education) have been shaped by European influences from Ancient Greece, Rome, France and Germany.

"Why would a school shame a pupil for wanting to celebrate their national identity?"

Individualistic values

Why, then, is it so difficult to talk today about a 'shared British culture'? It's because we've largely been avoiding the question. In his 2024 book, *The Crisis of Culture*, French political scientist Olivier Roy discusses the decline of national culture as an international phenomenon, tracing this back to the 1960s and the promotion of individualistic values. This accelerated from the 1990s onwards, driven by globalisation, migration, multiculturalism, the internet and growing secularisation.

These developments have all, to some extent, disrupted our established cultural practices – from relations at work to family life, and even our relationship with time and space (through, for instance, working from home). Roy suggests that our collective culture has become de-socialised, de-territorialised and more individualised. As a national culture diminishes, migrants are able to bring their own cultural practices with them – albeit separated from the society which gave them meaning.

Instead of socialising young people into a common culture, the void has been filled with alternative narratives built around neoliberalism, diversity, inclusion and, more recently, traditionalism. Roy argues that all are symptoms of 'de-culturation', since none provide a basis for the development of a new common culture.

Bilton School advertised its Culture Day as one that would '*Celebrate the rich cultural diversity within our school community*' (see tinyurl.com/ts147-TP) – though this evidently wasn't extended to British culture. We may well want students to learn about different cultures at school – but are we losing sight of how education can serve as an induction *into* culture?

Laudable intentions

A 2023 survey of English secondary teachers conducted by the English & Media Centre found that 90% of respondents had 'diversified' their curriculum since 2020, by drawing on a wider range of texts and authors (see tinyurl.com/ts147-TP1). In practice, this meant replacing traditional books like Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* with more 'relatable' texts like *Windrush Child* by Benjamin Zephaniah and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas.

Some respondents cited racist and problematic language in texts as their motivation for doing so, but most wanted to expose students to a wider range of voices, especially those from minority perspectives. Another stated aim of respondents' diversity efforts was to ensure that all students and teachers were 'represented' in the texts they studied, via characters of different races, religions, sexes, genders, physical abilities and social classes.

There's been a similar trend in history lessons, with some teachers moving away from a 'Euro-centric' curriculum by including alternative perspectives of marginalised historical figures or people. This might entail undertaking a study of pre-Colonial Africa, examining WWII from the perspective of a soldier from a British colony or showing students how Ango-Saxons were also immigrants.

While the intentions here

Join the CONVERSATION

The Academy of Ideas Education Forum gathers monthly to discuss trends in educational policy, theory and practice. Find out more at academyofideas.org.uk/education-forum

are laudable, my concern is that moves to diversify the curriculum serve to undermine the very notion of culture, and will therefore fail to help students fully appreciate human differences.

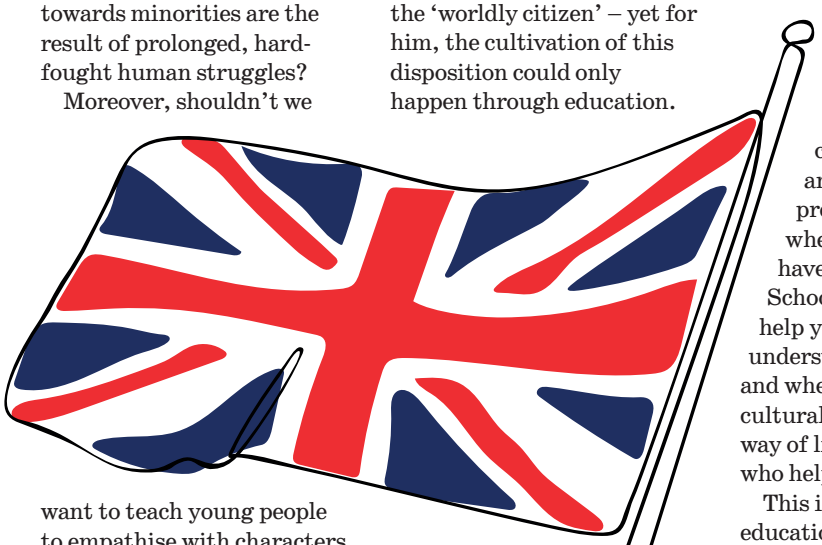
Humanist thought

The suggestion that students should be 'represented' in the curriculum usually refers to their (presumed) identity characteristics – yet surely the curriculum should teach students that people in the past viewed their identities very differently (assuming they even thought about them at all), and that today's progressive attitudes towards minorities are the result of prolonged, hard-fought human struggles?

Moreover, shouldn't we want to teach young people to empathise with characters in the curriculum who look very different to them, or come from alternative backgrounds? Teachers must take care not to reduce 'culture' down to 'identity', or other superficial characteristics.

The ability to fully appreciate other cultures is contingent upon receiving an education in *a* culture, and the cultivation of judgement – an ideal evolved from European intellectual traditions. In her book, *Humanly Possible*, Sarah Bakewell traces the evolution of humanist thought from the Renaissance. In Europe and beyond, people sought to cultivate *humanitas* (our common humanity), enquiry and hope through 'culture, thinking, morality, ritual and art'.

One of these humanists, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1530), was a Christian who advocated for reforming the church. Erasmus was a traveller who felt that education should train people to be at home in the world, be courteous and share the light of knowledge with others. Erasmus is often cited as progenitor of the notion of the 'worldly citizen' – yet for him, the cultivation of this disposition could only happen through education.



A precarious position

Young people can't be coerced into respecting differences. That disposition can only come about through an education in their own culture, and by *also* teaching them about other cultures. Learning a foreign language is key part of the humanist tradition. More than just a form of communication, it's an act that also involves learning about the culture and history of a nation.

Humanities and arts subjects, for their part, offer insights into different aspects of the human condition – beliefs, religion, music, art, literature, history – and the forms these can take in different cultures. We cultivate in students the capacity for appreciation and judgement about truth, beauty and morality by introducing them to works selected for their epistemic qualities.

The fragmented nature of our modern culture puts teachers and schools in a precarious position, where one misstep can have large ramifications. Schools could do more to help young people understand who they are and where they live – the cultural foundations of our way of life, and the people who helped to shape it.

This is the basis for the education curriculums of almost every other country. Knowing their own culture helps young people to develop a sense of identity and responsibility towards their community – both essential for a healthy democracy. It's a solid basis from which to understand people from other cultures. And through her speech, Courtney expresses these sentiments well.

COURTNEY WRIGHT'S CULTURE DAY SPEECH

"Hello everyone.

Today I want to talk about my culture – British culture – and why it's important to me. In Britain we have lots of traditions, including drinking tea, our love for talking about the weather, and we have the Royal Family.

We have amazing history, like Kings and Queens, castles and writers like Shakespeare. It's also modern, diverse and always changing, with music, fashion and food from all around the world blending into daily life. And let's not forget fish and chips!

It's also the way we speak, our humour, our values of fairness and politeness, and the mix of old traditions and new ideas.

But sometimes at school, we only hear about other cultures – which is great, because learning about different countries is interesting and important. But it can feel like being British doesn't count as a culture, just because it's the majority.

I think culture should be for everyone – not just for people from other countries or backgrounds. Being British is still a culture, and it matters too. It's part of who I am.

So let's celebrate all cultures - whether they come from far away or right here at home. Thank you!"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dr Alex Standish is Associate Professor of Geography Education, UCL Institute of Education, Knowledge and Curriculum book series editor at UCL Press and co-editor of *What Should Schools Teach? Disciplines, Subjects and the Pursuit of Truth*

Don't read this...

(unless you want your school trip sorted)

#SchoolTripWinner

nst

School trips, we're on it

Same-day quotes*

Ultra-fast planning

Smart online tools

Scan to get trip-ready today

*Enquire before 3pm, we'll deliver your quote the same working day.

The Inside Story

DIANE DOWLING
bebras.uk

Put your students' logic skills to the test with the UK's biggest student computing challenge...

BIO: Diane is Director of Curriculum and Resources at the Raspberry Pi Foundation, having previously taught A Level computer science.

[MEET THE TEAM]

Harriet Page, Learning Manager
With extensive computing education experience, Harriet supports content development for the Ada CS and Bebras team.

Andrew Csizmadia, Bebras Competition Manager
Having taught computing for 37 years, Andrew now manages the UK Bebras Challenge and works with the international Bebras community.

The UK Bebras Challenge is a free annual online competition run by the Raspberry Pi Foundation, which is designed to introduce students aged 6 to 19 in the UK to computational thinking through engaging and fun interactive puzzles.

The challenge fortnight takes place in November, during which schools can run the competition on a day that suits them. To take part, at least one teacher at the school must first register as a co-ordinator. Teachers must then upload their student lists to the Bebras entry platform before the Challenge fortnight commences.

On the day of the Challenge, teachers print out and issue a series of auto-generated usernames and passwords to all participating students. The challenge then proceeds under the supervision of a teacher at the school. (though we do also support a large number of home educated students, by enabling parents and guardians to register their children and supervise the challenge via a similar set of arrangements).

The Bebras Challenge itself sees each participating student given 45 minutes to complete a series of age-appropriate tasks, commencing from the moment they sign in (though extra time can be allocated to those students normally entitled to it). At the conclusion of the Challenge fortnight, all submissions are automatically marked and graded via the online Bebras platform.

As with any competition, it's helpful to practise ahead of time. Past challenges are regularly published on the Bebras UK website, allowing students to familiarise themselves with the types of tasks involved. Teachers are also able to access a large repository of past questions, which they can assign as auto-marked quizzes to support their students' preparation process.

Every student who takes part in the challenge will receive a certificate of participation, and there are a number of school-level awards. In each age group we will award a Certificate of Distinction for the top 25% of students, a Certificate of Merit for the next 25% and a 'Best in School' award for the highest-performing student within each age category.

Nationally, the top 10% of students in each age group will be awarded a Gold Certificate, in recognition of their talents and ability to perform as accomplished computational thinkers.

We would love for every school in the UK to take part in Bebras. We are especially keen to reach more disadvantaged learners, including those in alternative provision settings, such as hospital schools.

Over time, we've collected a great deal of feedback from those schools that have taken part – including this testimonial from Sharon Pendreigh, Head of Computing at Brownedge St Mary's Catholic High School:

"We have thoroughly enjoyed delivering the UK Bebras Challenge at our school. What I've observed is that the Bebras Challenge helps to create a sense of achievement and confidence in our students. They are encouraged to approach problems from different angles, which not only enhances their mathematical and logical reasoning but also nurtures their curiosity and resilience."

Contact:
To join this year's UK Bebras Challenge, visit **bebras.uk**; for more on the Raspberry Pi Foundation, visit **raspberrypi.org**

Our Journey

2004
The Bebras Challenge begins in Lithuania and quickly spreads to other countries

2013
The UK runs The Bebras Challenge for the first time with 21,473 students

2019
The challenge grows to 317,004 students and adds a new category for visually impaired learners

2024
The Bebras Challenge becomes the UK's largest computing challenge, with 467,190 students taking part

Show-me®

Seeing is achieving

Back to school
Ready to master

Our subject specific whiteboards help your pupils master important concepts

Each pack contains - whiteboards, pens, erasers and 2 free bottles of cleaner.

Antimicrobial Surface
Show-me boards are protected against germs.

2-Year Surface Guarantee
We've got your back. Show-me boards are covered for two years, Ensuring long-lasting quality.

Anti-Glare
Making it easier to see from every angle.

PVC-Free
Safer for you and the environment.

StayClean Technology
Ensuring your boards stay clean for longer.

Recycling Scheme
Show-me offers a free send back recycling scheme.

Rapid Recall Whiteboards

Expertly Designed.
Ready to Teach.

Created by a senior Maths consultant, these whiteboards support discussion, recall, and fluency in primary Maths. Aligned to key number objectives and ideal for learners with dyslexia or visual impairments.

www.show-meboards.com

As the government prepares to examine once more the reasons for lower outcomes among 'white working class' pupils, perhaps this time we'll finally see some policy prescriptions that actually make a difference...

Melissa Benn

"*Not another one!*"

That famous cry uttered by Brenda from Bristol ahead of the 2017 General Election could well apply to the recent announcement of yet another major enquiry into the underachievement of the white working class.

This latest commission, staffed by the influential research and polling organisation Public First, draws on a range of experienced figures in education, and is co-chaired by former Education Secretary, Baroness Estelle Morris (see tinyurl.com/ts147-MB1). The big question, however, is whether the commission comes up with any new solutions to some very old and well-rehearsed problems...

Lagging behind

In the last decade alone, the Commons Education Select Committee has undertaken not one, but two major investigations (in 2014 and 2021) into the underachievement of white working class pupils, with the more recent of those reports finding that depressingly little had changed (see tinyurl.com/ts147-MB2).

In summary, white working class children continue to lag behind both their middle class counterparts and ethnic minority pupils from similarly economically disadvantaged backgrounds (bar certain categories of Traveller children) in both Y6 SATs and GCSE results. Rates of underachievement are particularly marked in rural and coastal areas, with COVID having only made the situation even worse.

Two other reports published in the past year have piled on further bad news. In April, the Institute for Government drilled down into the figures behind 'exploding levels' of school absence, and put forward some proposals for improvement that drew on lessons from the successes of the New Labour years (see tinyurl.com/ts147-MB4).

Meanwhile, the latest findings from the National Behaviour Survey reveal that 1 in 10 working class children were suspended from school over the last academic year – a shockingly high figure (see tinyurl.com/ts147-MB5).

'Punished' by the system?

Listening to public discussion of white working class underachievement in 2025, one glimpses new, more threatening framings of the problem, with some newspapers suggesting that white working class children are being 'punished' by the school system.

Commentators have pointed the finger at diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies as the source of these harms, or else claimed – as Matthew Goodwin has, writing in *Daily Mail* – that working class children have never been 'fashionable' enough to engage the left (see tinyurl.com/ts147-MB6).

This is dangerous, yet unsurprising stuff. Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson seems keenly aware that Reform and its allies, riding high in the polls, will take every opportunity to stoke up white working-class discontent.

To counter this, Labour could start by recognising the true roots of the problem – which include rising child poverty, educational under-funding and 'left behind' places. Many rural and coastal communities have long been unable to attract sufficient teachers, particularly in specialist subjects, and are able to offer few employment opportunities for school and university leavers. To that, we can add the seemingly intractable difficulty of multi-generational educational under-achievement, which has fostered a culture of disengagement.

Disengaged and struggling

Cambridge Professor Diane Reay has identified an even more profound reason for working class alienation – the 'miseducation' of disadvantaged white youth. Labelled from the start as low-achieving in a rigid, competitive and test-driven system, she argues that working class students have been left feeling worthless, with school holding no meaning or value for them. (see tinyurl.com/ts147-MB7).

So what solutions are there? With its incendiary talk of 'dumping equality policies' and introducing a 'patriotic curriculum', it's clear that Reform has no serious proposals for positive change.

The government, for its part, has emphasised the importance of investment in early years education, and the need for parents to get their children to school. It also recently announced the launch of 21 new attendance and behaviour hubs, in an effort to tackle school refusal and challenging behaviour.

These are important steps, but the government must be bolder, by committing to reducing child poverty and introducing a genuinely engaging curriculum. There also needs to be targeted interventions in those left-behind areas where white working class achievement is rising. Only experienced specialist educators can offer the kind of support and scaffolding these children will need, and which disengaged and struggling families may not be in a position to provide.

There are no shortcuts, and those much-needed reforms won't come cheap – but these proposals are infinitely preferable to the cheap politics of the populist right, which are currently getting too widespread and respectful a hearing in our national media.

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

Q&A

A place to gather, unwind and connect

Stephen Toone discusses the options for schools looking to make the most of their outdoor spaces

30 SECOND BRIEFING

Fordingbridge is the UK's leading provider of all-weather solutions for the education sector, designing and installing off-the-shelf and bespoke canopy solutions for outdoor learning and dining areas, social spaces, multi-use games areas (MUGAs), walkways and bike storage.

Why are so many schools installing all-weather outdoor dining spaces?

In schools across the UK, forgotten corners and empty courtyards are being reimagined as vibrant outdoor dining zones – places where students can gather, unwind and connect. So much more than a solution to cramped indoor facilities, these all-weather dining spaces breathe new life into a school, turning underused areas into dynamic social spaces that enhance school culture.

What are the biggest benefits of creating year-round outdoor dining spaces?

Outdoor dining areas instantly upgrade your school's offering, easing indoor crowding, encouraging fresh-air breaks, and transforming the school day. Rain or shine, students can dine and socialise comfortably, and these versatile, covered spaces also double up as ideal venues for everything from school fêtes to careers fairs. It's not just shelter – it's a smarter way to use space.

What do schools need to think about when installing a hybrid indoor / outdoor dining space?

Because we're Brits, we tend to focus on rain, sleet and snow when we think about weather protection, but sunshine matters too. Our excusive Opal 60 canopy fabric filters harmful UV rays, while still letting in 60% natural light. The result? A bright, uplifting dining space that's protective, flooded with light and offers students the benefits of being outside, no matter the forecast.

Extras like table tennis tables and social seating can create a vibrant hub in your school

What other design considerations do you advise schools to consider?

Dining canopies make a visual impact, so why not make them beautiful too? Whether your site suits sleek steel or natural timber, or a blend of both, our in-house design team can tailor your new all-weather dining canopy to suit its setting, including colour matching the structure to your school's branding. For windier locations, we can even fully enclose your new dining space in toughened glass, to create a cosy, sheltered environment.

ABOUT STEPHEN: Stephen Toone is Managing Director at Fordingbridge

FORDINGBRIDGE inspiring design + build

Contact:
T: 01243 55 44 55
E: info@fordingbridge.co.uk
W: fordingbridge.co.uk

An all-weather canopy can create valuable additional dining and social space for students

To maximise the value of your space, think *experience*, as well as *function*. Spacious layouts, thoughtfully placed tables and extras like table tennis tables can transform your new dining space into a true social hub that encourages interaction, relaxation and a real sense of community.

What's the difference?

+ Bring your vision to life with a complimentary site visit and expert, tailored advice
+ Enjoy a seamless experience, from design to installation – handled entirely by our in-house team
+ Every Fordingbridge education canopy comes with a sector-leading 25-year guarantee as standard.

The re-emergence of artificially constructed beauty standards that young people aspire to calls to mind one of the most damaging cultural trends of the 1990s...

Natasha Devon

18 months ago, few people had any concept of there being such a thing as a 'weight loss jab'. Today, it's all anyone ever seems to talk about.

Every celebrity has apparently been jabbing themselves senseless. It's impossible to open a newspaper without some columnist eulogising about their 'jab journey'. Grand claims are being made about the superpowers of these treatments. They don't just help you lose weight, apparently – they'll also cure your alcoholism and slow the ageing process, too.

Even politicians are at it. Wes Streeting recently claimed in an interview with LBC that 'half the House of Commons' are on them.

'Effortless' weight loss

I have no doubt that for those whose weight or relationship with food is causing them significant health issues, these jabs can be revolutionary. The problem is, we all know that's not the way in which they're being used.

I've heard and read numerous stories of people who have acquired jabs via private prescriptions to attain certain weight goals before a big holiday or social event. Most of the celebrities either rumoured or confirmed to have been using them haven't been anything close to obese before starting their treatments. The jabs have simply come to be seen as an 'effortless' way to lose a few pounds.

The net result has been the re-emergence of a beauty standard we thought we'd left behind in the 1990s. Anyone who lived through that decade will shudder to hear the words 'heroin chic', and remember how disordered eating and exercise habits were normalised in pursuit of the kind of hip bones that low-slung jeans would hang precariously from. Yes, 90s fashions are back – which might partly explain why teachers have been sharing stories with me about pupils Photoshopping images of themselves and lying about their weight in order to obtain jabs.

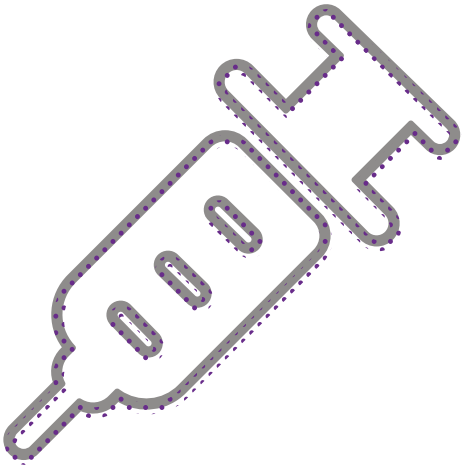
Reductive messaging

Anorexia and bulimia were endemic amongst my peers in the 90s. We knowingly took terrible risks with our health to attain an unrealistically slender ideal aggressively sold to us as the only route to success and happiness.

A key difference between my adolescence and the experiences of teenagers today, however, is that messages around thinness have been conflated with health advice, ostensibly in a bid to reduce obesity. Young people are absorbing hugely reductive messaging from influencers, and even some public health bodies, that deem anything other than thinness as inherently unhealthy.

Yet the truth is far more nuanced than 'thin = healthy' and 'fat = unhealthy'. If we were to state that 'Yellow teeth cause cancer', we'd be confusing correlation with causation, since it's smoking that significantly increases the risk of cancer; the yellow teeth are just a by-product.

> ***"What we say can have a huge impact on impressionable young people"***



Yes, sedentary lifestyles and poor diets are provably bad for our health. At the same time, though, there are numerous other factors that determine an individual's weight, most of them genetic. A person can eat a nutrition-rich diet, engage in regular exercise, and yet still be heavier than someone who does neither of these things. The reasons as to why a person might not be able to access high quality food or maintain an active lifestyle can be highly complex and varied.

Shut out the noise

In my body image sessions for teenagers, I try to untangle some of this. I explain that they should concentrate on engaging in healthy behaviours, rather than believing health has one narrowly prescribed look. I also speak about body neutrality, which removes the pressure to love everything about one's body and instead focuses on acceptance.

Diversity is key. There's evidence to show that being surrounded by a variety of different body types improves how we feel about our own. Teachers can help facilitate this by ensuring there's visual diversity on classroom walls and in their lesson resources.

Ultimately, however, the most crucial thing any adult wishing to instil positive body image in young people can do is address any of their own issues. What we say can have a huge impact on impressionable young people trying to make sense of their relationships with their own bodies, in a world determined to overcomplicate this. Attempting to shut out some of the unnecessary noise around weight loss jabs might be a good start for all of us.

Natasha Devon is a writer, broadcaster and campaigner on issues relating to education and mental health; to find out more, visit natashadevon.com or follow @_NatashaDevon

RHS

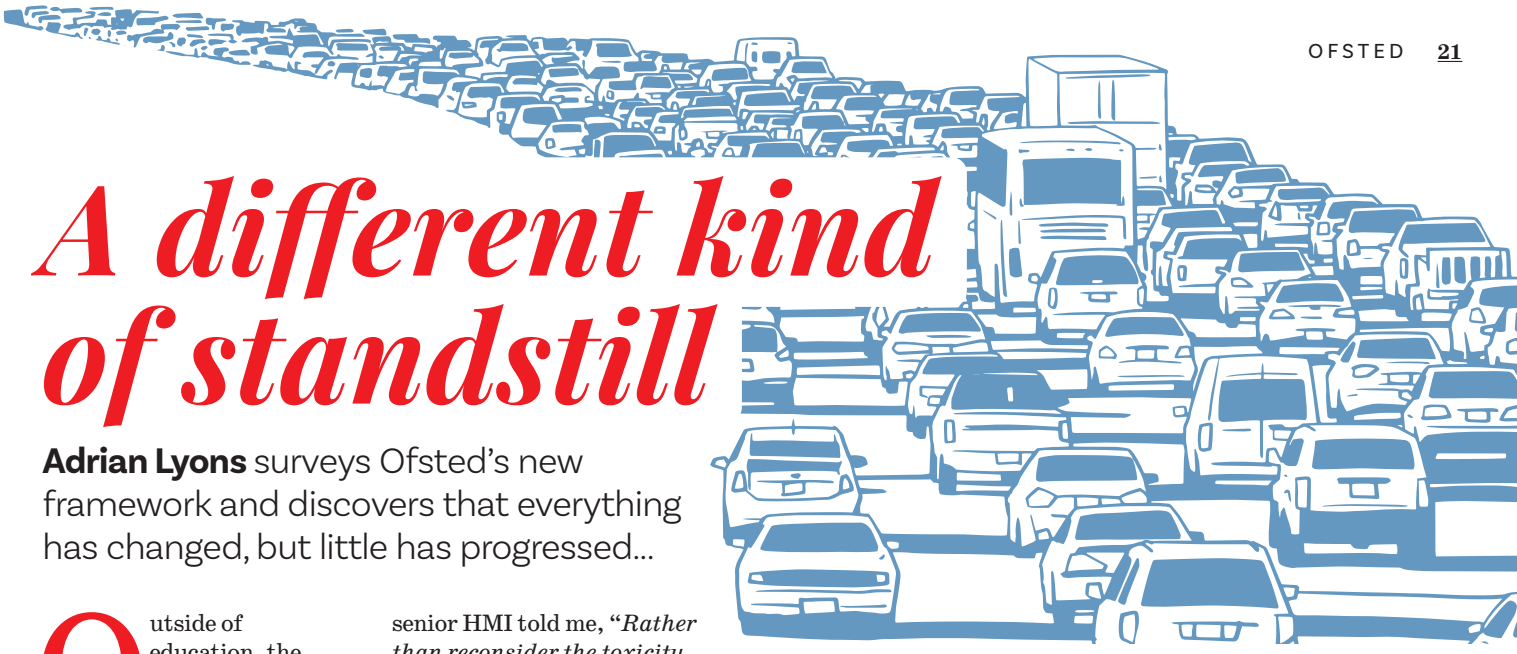
Unlock the power of plants for your students

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

rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/awards



A different kind of standstill

Adrian Lyons surveys Ofsted's new framework and discovers that everything has changed, but little has progressed...

Outside of education, the process of inspection sounds simple. Inspectors check to see if a school is doing well. If yes, praise. If that's a no, change the leadership.

Yet inspection has never been that neat, since every new Chief Inspector redraws the map. Christine Gilbert championed Every Child Matters. Michael Wilshaw prioritised standards and behaviour. Amanda Spielman rebalanced things towards the curriculum. Now, a new era dawns – or does it?

Continuing concerns

On the launch day of Ofsted's 2025-26 framework, a coalition of mental health experts, former Ofsted HMI, academics, trade unionists (teachers and headteachers) and governors told the Education Secretary via an open letter (see tinyurl.com/ts147-01) that the new framework fails to deliver:

"*We urge you to halt the roll-out of these proposals because of our continuing concerns about the reliability, accuracy and consistency of inspection results, and about the dangerous, negative impact of a punitive, grades-based inspection system on the welfare of the workforce.*"

Cliff-edge grades are damaging staff welfare. Trust continues to be undermined. Schools are still being put under toxic pressure. As one former senior HMI told me, "*Rather than reconsider the toxicity and risks, they are just continuing as if nothing happened.*"

This frustration reflects a broader disillusionment. Successive calls for reform – from, among others, the 2023 Beyond Ofsted Inquiry, *The Times*' 2022 Education Commission and the Education Select Committee – have all been ignored. Labour's manifesto commitment to a school 'report card' has been co-opted by Ofsted, but only as a heading for the same old cliff-edge judgements.

The real issue actually goes deeper, though – that being Ofsted's entrenched commitment to cliff-edge grades. This is what creates those pressures that fuel workforce stress and undermine reliability, while Ofsted itself is left largely unaccountable. The balance of power has remained entirely with the inspectorate, with accountability largely only directed towards educators.

It's been fascinating to see how, in its much-delayed consultation response regarding the new framework, Ofsted describes those disagreeing with the proposals as '*A small but vocal minority*' – though that assertion is somewhat undermined by the volume of damning responses from school professionals described elsewhere in the same report as a 'mixed and largely negative response'.

A few tweaks

Ofsted's current Chief Inspector has talked up consistency, pledging early on that every inspection would be led by HMI or recent ex-HMI. In my own early years as an HMI (having been appointed in 2005) schools found inspection by an HMI reassuring. However, given the present day rapid turnover of staff with limited experience, this was a flimsy promise – and one that's allegedly been broken, with inspectors who left HMI nine years ago said to be leading visits again.

So, what *has* actually changed? Well, the old four-point scale (Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Good, Outstanding) has now become five – 'Urgent Improvement', 'Needs Attention', 'Expected Standard', 'Strong Standard' and 'Exceptional'.

Descriptors have given way to a 'toolkit,' while safeguarding gets a separate 'Met/Not met.' Six areas now carry judgements – those being inclusion; curriculum and teaching; achievement; attendance and behaviour; personal development and wellbeing; and leadership and governance.

Sounds new? Not really. It's the 2019-25 framework with a few tweaks. The old 'Quality of Education' judgement has been split into three. There are some welcome additions in the toolkit, such as the expectation for teachers to understand subject differences, and a requirement for all pupils to be explicitly taught oracy. Otherwise, the message is clear – *little has changed*.

Ofsted has placed 'Expected standard' in the middle of its toolkit page, signalling that this is what most schools will receive. In practice, though, many currently judged as 'Good'/grade 2 will slide to 'Expected'/grade 3).

So yes, everything *looks* different, with more boxes to tick, more grades and yet more jargon. But the fundamentals? Unchanged. The cliff edge is still there. The stakes remain in place. The disillusionment felt by many is still real.

Ofsted has tinkered with the labels, but not the system itself. As schools and staff carry on contending with the same set of pressures, the rest of us may well ask, '*Was all this noise really worth it?*' Everything has changed. Yet nothing has.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrian Lyons was one of His Majesty's Inspectors between 2005 and 2021 and now works with MATs, teacher training providers and LAs to support education; find out more at adrianlyonsconsulting.com

LEARNING *from the best*

Mark and Zoe Enser reflect on what visiting hundreds of schools taught them about the *real* markers of success...

When you spend years visiting schools up and down the country – as teachers, leaders, inspectors and now while working in school improvement – you begin to notice patterns. Each school has its own context, challenges and story, and yet certain common threads keep re-emerging.

The best schools aren't those with glossy prospectuses or clever branding. They aren't defined by the quirks of a charismatic leader, or by one impressive initiative. Instead, their success rests on something far more deliberate – clarity of purpose, intentional action and relentless reflection.

Beyond the surface

That's the core message of our new book, *How Do They Do It? – Learning Lessons from Amazing Teachers, Leaders and Schools*. It's a celebration of those schools that get it right, and an invitation for all of us to learn from them.

Schools are complex places. Every day, thousands of small interactions add up to something far greater than the sum of their parts. In weaker schools, this complexity looks chaotic; in stronger ones, it appears to be seamless. But when you dip beneath the surface, you see just how much thought has gone into creating that apparent effortlessness.

From our visits, four big lessons stand out as the real markers of success.

1. Purpose comes first

In too many schools, curriculum intent became little more than a glossy statement on a website – something retrofitted to existing practice, rather than driving it. In the strongest schools, intent was woven into the DNA of their planning. Leaders thought hard about what they wanted pupils to achieve, and then stripped away anything that didn't serve that purpose.

This didn't mean narrowing the curriculum. Quite the opposite. Purposeful schools achieved *breadth* without *bloat*. They were ruthless about cutting content that didn't fit, freeing up time for greater depth and coherence. As one leader told us, "*If you don't know what you want, then you don't know what you don't need.*"

2. Ambition means more than slogans

Every school claims to be ambitious for its pupils. The difference is in what that looks like in practice.

In less successful schools, ambition was pitched either too low (with KS3 students repeating the rainforest lessons they had already studied in primary) or unrealistically high, with pupils asked to tackle material they had no foundation for.

In great schools, ambition was carefully sequenced. Leaders knew what excellence looked like in each subject and age phase, and created the steps needed to get there. Most importantly, they gave pupils real opportunities to do ambitious things – writing extended essays, performing complex drama, conducting serious fieldwork. Ambition wasn't an aspiration pinned to a wall; it was something lived daily in classrooms.

> **"Ambition wasn't an aspiration pinned to a wall; it was lived daily in classrooms"**

3. Coherence beats gimmicks

We've all seen the laminated 'whole school themes' that distort curricula, rather than unify them. Egyptians in history forcing a detour via the Nile in geography, novels chosen for their thematic links rather than literary merit – that's not coherence, it's confusion.

What marks out the best schools is a *deeper* coherence; a clear, shared sense of purpose that shapes decision-making across the organisation. You can see this in assemblies that reinforce curriculum aims, in assessments that align with values and in how all staff – from NQTs to senior leaders – can articulate why they do what they do.

'Coherence' needn't mean

'uniformity'. The strongest schools respect inter-subject distinctions, while also holding firm to their broader mission. They avoid the extremes of both laissez-faire autonomy on the one hand, and stifling prescription on the other.

4. Culture is crafted, not assumed

Perhaps the most striking commonality is culture. In high-performing schools, behaviour isn't left to chance, or to the whims of individual teachers. Expectations are crystal clear, taught explicitly and reinforced consistently.

But it goes deeper than rules. These schools nurture positive attitudes. Pupils believe in the value of learning, teachers feel supported and parents see the school as a partner. This culture doesn't emerge overnight, but is built deliberately, day after day, through small acts of modelling, communication and reinforcement. As we note in the book, the most successful leaders over-communicate their purpose. They make sure that no one – be they a teacher, parent or student – is left guessing about the values that matter.

Why this matters now

It's tempting to see these themes as obvious. Who *wouldn't* want a sense of purpose, ambition and coherence contributing to a positive culture at their school? Yet visiting hundreds of schools shows just how fragile these markers of success can be.

A single change in leadership, one rushed initiative or an over-correction in the face of external pressures can tip the balance. Before you know it, workload balloons. Behaviour slips. Curriculum coherence unravels. Suddenly, the swan's graceful glide gives way to a frantic paddling that can barely keep the school afloat.

This is why we argue that the *real* secret to improvement is *deliberate action*: knowing what you want to achieve, acting purposefully and then checking whether it's working. The best schools don't chase fads. They do the hard, steady work of improvement.

A celebration, not a checklist

One of our aims in writing *How Do They Do It?* was to challenge the narrative that school improvement is a grim, compliance-driven business. What we saw in classrooms and corridors across the country was something far more hopeful that entailed creativity, care and the sight of communities striving together.

Yes, schools face immense pressures – funding challenges, recruitment crises, political churn. Yet despite this, every day millions of children will experience places of genuine magic. Schools where teachers and leaders are making something greater than the sum of its parts.

Our book is both a celebration of that magic and a practical guide to sustaining it. It's structured around the broad themes of the Education Inspection Framework – not because inspection is the goal, but because doing so provides a useful lens through which to reflect on purpose, quality, culture and leadership.

We hope it gives teachers and leaders the same inspiration we've found from visiting so many schools; that improvement is possible, that good practice is abundant, and that deliberate, thoughtful action can make all the difference.

Final thoughts

If there's one thing hundreds of school visits have taught us, it is this – *success isn't a mystery*. It doesn't come from gimmicks or chance. It comes from clarity, coherence and consistency sustained over time.

The schools that embody this aren't just 'Good' in Ofsted terms. They're schools where pupils thrive, staff feel valued and communities can flourish. That is what we celebrate in *How Do They Do It?* And that is what we hope every school, in its own context and with its own challenges, can work towards.

LESSONS FOR LEADERS AND TEACHERS

So what can schools take from all this? We would offer three practical reflections:

- **Interrogate your purpose.** Can every member of staff articulate what the school is trying to achieve? Does your curriculum match that purpose, or is it weighed down with legacy content?
- **Raise ambition, but sequence it.** Ask whether each stage of your curriculum gives pupils the knowledge and practice they need for the next. Avoid both re-treading old ground and leaping too far ahead.
- **Build culture deliberately.** Don't assume shared values, but instead teach them. Model them. Reinforce them. Make sure your behaviour systems and professional development align with them.

These aren't quick wins, but they are sustainable markers of success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark and Zoe Enser were both teachers and school leaders, ex-HMIs in Ofsted's Curriculum Unit and now co-authors of *How Do They Do It? Learning Lessons from Amazing Teachers, Leaders and Schools* (Crown House, £16.99)

Tech, teaching AND TRUST

Teachers aren't going to be replaced by artificial intelligence any time soon, says **Colin Foster** – and here's why...

Why do we need teachers any more? After all, for many years now we've been able to look up information on Google or Wikipedia and get instant, factual answers.

When I was a child, I had to visit the local library and crawl around on the floor leafing through heavy, outdated copies of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to find the equivalent information. In so many ways, the internet has been a massive step forward in terms of discovering information.

But if we want to ask more complex questions, then what we often really need is someone to interact with – which is where human beings have tended to come in very handy! More recently, however, even that seems to have changed with the rapid growth and adoption of large language models...

Competing with the machine

If our artificial intelligence prompts are sufficiently well-engineered, then AI can often respond in highly sophisticated ways, rather like a knowledgeable human might. I sometimes like to run my draft articles through an AI and ask it to give me five objections to my argument. One or two of them might be a bit flimsy, but I'll often find that there's some idea I hadn't considered, and that the process helps me to improve what I've written.

Of course, AI isn't perfect, and the errors, hallucinations and outright bluffing to which it's prone can often be hilarious. But whatever AI's limitations might be today, by the time you're done reading this article, they will surely be less pronounced than before.

Improvements are coming much faster than most of us would have predicted a few years ago, and the change is going in only one direction – that of progress.

So, amidst all this, what duties are left for the role of the human teacher? If the students of the future can learn by conversing with an intelligent AI that has access to the best of all that has ever been written or said, then how can a mere human teacher possibly compete with that?

Big betrayals, big consequences

One answer to why we'll still need teachers is *trust*. We build relationships with human beings, and we learn to trust them and rely on them. If people let us down, or disappoint us, that will affect things going forward in the relationships we have. And big betrayals can have big consequences – even professional ones, for someone with the responsibilities of a teacher.

> **"AI has no shame, and doesn't feel guilty for having led you astray"**

AI has none of this. It lives in the moment, bluffs when it's trained and rewarded for doing so, and has no investment in the person it's communicating with. It will give out incorrect – possibly even dangerous – information without a care. If you point out that it's wrong, it won't argue; it will just shift ground and try telling you something different in order to see whether you might like that response instead.

It's true that AI is often right about its facts, but it's just as confident when it's wrong. When it misleads, it will generally admit it – but AI has no shame, and doesn't feel guilty for having led you astray and wasted your time. You might find AI useful, but you can't trust it in the way that you might trust a human teacher.

An honest lack of expertise

What about expertise? I was reflecting on this recently, thinking about some of my experiences as a teacher when I stepped outside of my expertise.

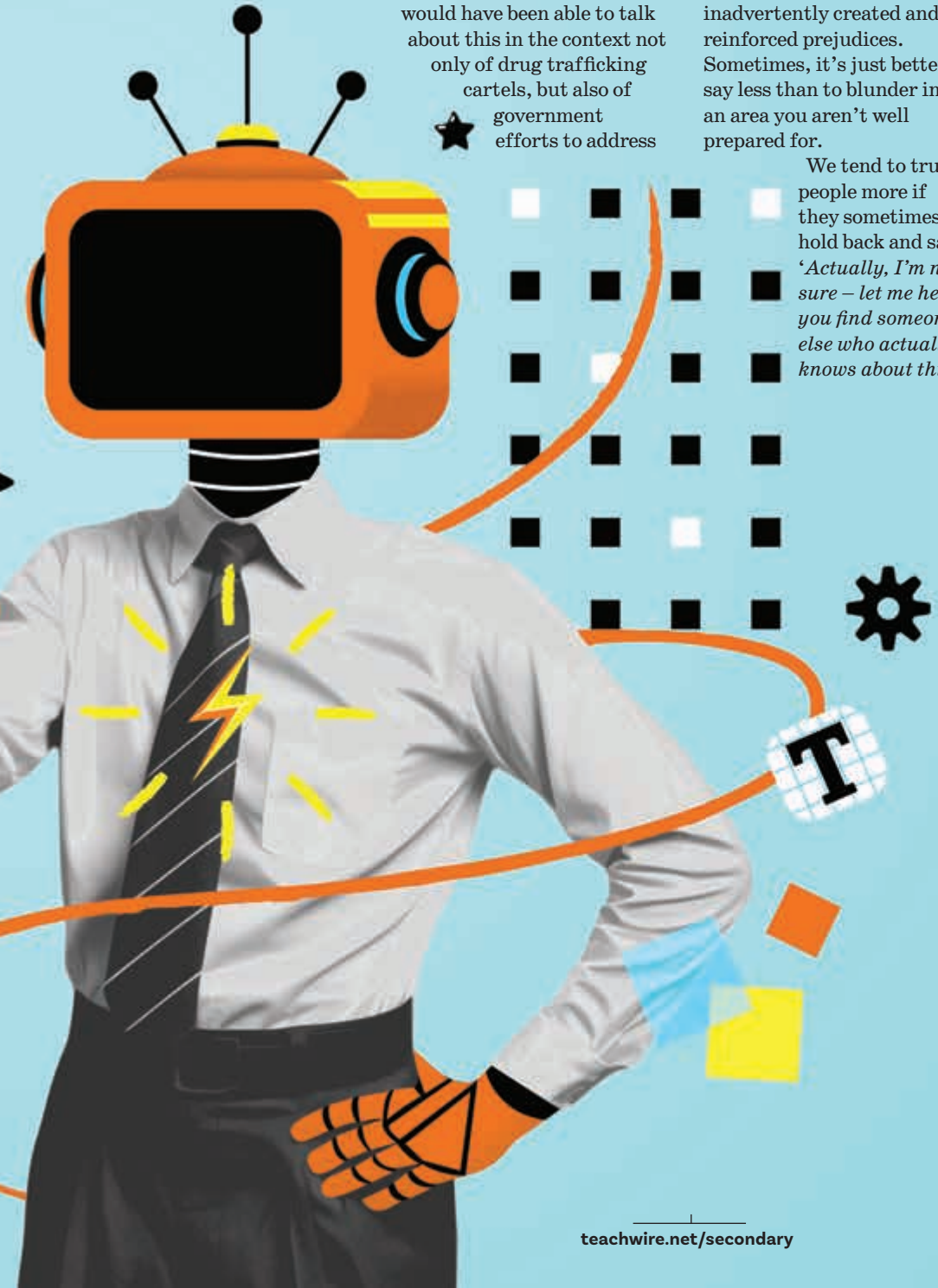
I remember once covering a geography lesson, which is certainly not an area of speciality for me. The lesson had something to do with Colombia, and a student said, "*They have lots of drugs in Colombia, don't they?*"

I wasn't sure how to respond. It sounded like it could be a dangerous stereotype – offensive, even – to make such a sweeping statement about an entire country. But I could imagine where this comment might be coming from. I think most of my knowledge about Colombia is based on my extensive familiarity with *James Bond* films, and so I think I also had this sense about Colombia. From my position of geographical ignorance, I thought, "*That's either true, or it's a very common misconception – and I don't know which.*"

An actual geography teacher, with actual expertise, would have been able to respond properly to this comment, They would know that the illegal drug trade in Colombia is definitely 'a thing'. But they would have been able to talk about this in the context not only of drug trafficking cartels, but also of government efforts to address drug-related crime. They would have been able to give a balanced response that didn't leave the student with a misleading impression of an entire country. I was way out of my depth, and had to advise the students to talk with their geography teacher about it when she was back.

Note, it wasn't the case that *I couldn't think of anything to say* in response to the student's comment. I could have easily said all sorts of things, but they might have been completely wrong, or at the very least, unhelpful, and could have inadvertently created and reinforced prejudices. Sometimes, it's just better to say less than to blunder into an area you aren't well prepared for.

We tend to trust people more if they sometimes hold back and say, '*Actually, I'm not sure – let me help you find someone else who actually knows about this.*'



Modelling humility

Another way in which teachers can help students in the context of AI is to model *intellectual humility*, which students won't see, or be able to learn from in their interactions with large language models.

As teachers, we don't simply grab hold of the first view or answer that comes to mind, just so that we have something to say. We want to first check that we aren't misunderstanding or misrepresenting what we've been asked. AI, at least in its current form, seems to lack this sense of caution. It doesn't hesitate. It plunges in straight away with an immediate answer, and if it's wrong, it's wrong.

It behaves a little like the worst kind of politician – one who always has a simple, instant view on anything you care to bring up, but not necessarily any positions or perspectives that are well thought through.

As teachers, we can model a slower approach than AI; one where we take time to sift and weigh up facts. Yes, we can look up information when we need to, but we don't 'look up our views'. We form those ourselves, by critically assessing the facts and learning from other people's perspectives. We accept that we might be wrong, and try not to be.

If we're unsure, then we'll say so. Because there's still lots that students can only learn from their all-too-human teachers.

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

Engagement, support and progress

As the world's leading education systems continue to invest in remote learning infrastructure, it make sense for us to do the same, says **Alessandro Capozzi**

Throughout history, innovation has solved society's greatest challenges. The embrace of technology has brought comfort, communication and progress. While disruptive and uncertain at first, technological innovations have ultimately helped us overcome challenges and advance humanity.

In education today, we face mounting pressures driven by persistent absenteeism, stretched budgets, teacher shortages and rising disengagement. Behind all these issues lies a common thread – the struggle to provide and access high quality teaching. There's a growing global consensus that technology isn't just an enhancement to education, but a way of addressing this common thread.

A scalable solution

All around the world, governments are investing in edtech and remote education not just as a reaction to disruption, but as a strategic tool for expanding access and raising standards. At Academy21, we witness every day how live online learning connects young people with excellent teaching to keep students engaged, supported and progressing.

For some students, attending a physical classroom isn't possible due to mental health issues, medical conditions or past trauma. Remote education offers a flexible way of keeping these learners engaged with expert teachers and maintaining a routine, helping them stay connected to their education while preparing for their return to mainstream school when ready.

At the same time, many schools face persistent shortages of specialist teachers in subjects like science, maths and languages. Remote live lessons delivered by subject experts provide a reliable way of filling these gaps.

Finally, limited staff and small class sizes can restrict the range of subjects a school can offer. Partnering with accredited online providers lets schools broaden their curriculum, provide students with more choice and do more to support personalised learning, without overstretching their resources.

Learning from the leaders

The UK is no stranger to innovation, but in education, we risk falling behind. Nations like Singapore and Estonia are already integrating remote learning with powerful results.

In the 2022 PISA rankings, Singapore was the top scorer in mathematics, reading and science. Being a country that knows what educational progress should look like, it has a clear long-term strategy for educational technology, entitled 'EdTech Masterplan 2030' (see tinyurl.com/ts147-A1).

Under this plan, every secondary student is provided with a personal digital device. Schools have structured 'home-based learning' days integrated into their timetables, where students engage in remote learning from their own homes. Hybrid learning is embedded into Singapore's system for its proven benefits with regards to digital literacy, learner independence and improved accessibility.

Estonia, meanwhile, is one of Europe's highest-performing education systems. According to the country's Education minister, Kristina Kallas, "*Education has been the social lift for Estonia to become a nation.*" (see tinyurl.com/ts147-A2). This has involved using technology to remove barriers, and provide every student with access to excellent teaching.

Virtual classrooms are used to replicate the traditional classroom experience. Estonia's digital infrastructure includes a comprehensive national learning management system that supports students, parents and educators by providing real-time updates on progress, assignments and learning materials.

A chance to lead

The UK has already laid the groundwork for high quality online education. The DfE's Online Education Accreditation Scheme (see tinyurl.com/ts147-A3) provides a robust framework for safeguarding and teaching quality that holds providers accountable.

Even with this infrastructure in place, however, the national strategy has yet to realise its full potential. Schools across the country are grappling with rising pupil absence, strained in-school capacity, ongoing challenges with recruiting and retaining specialist teachers, and significant barriers to providing appropriate support for students with SEN.

When integrated intentionally within a school's wider provision, remote education enables timely intervention, maintains subject expertise and helps to close support gaps before they widen.

As the Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, remarked at BETT 2025, "*The world of even five years ago is gone forever.*" A single model of daily, on-site attendance will continue to serve most learners, but not all. For those who cannot access full-time physical education due to health, emotional needs or other circumstances, live online teaching – delivered by qualified professionals, and built into the fabric of school provision – can provide a lifeline. It can strengthen the system with flexible, responsive alternatives that will ensure every pupil can access quality learning.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Alessandro Capozzi is Executive Headteacher at Academy21; for more information, visit academy21.co.uk

THE TS GUIDE TO... REVISION

As your Y11s prepare to walk that final path to the exam room, we survey the technological assistance they can now call upon, learn why it's important to give them a reality check, and run through a list of those revision essentials...

IN THIS SECTION

IN FIGURES:

WHO ARE STUDENTS TURNING TO FOR HELP WITH THEIR REVISION?

74%
of students have looked to education content creators and influencers for academic advice, with 32% viewing such material each day

20%
of students routinely rely on influencer predictions of exam content when deciding what areas to prioritise in their revision

93%
of parents attempt to help their children with revision, despite not feeling confident in their ability to do so

Source: Survey of 1,000 students and 500 parents carried out in August 2025 by revision advice and resource provider Save My Exams (savemyexams.com)

3 TEACHWIRE ARTICLES FROM THE ARCHIVES

A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES
Meera Chudasama looks at how teachers can help students make the most of the time they have left before exam day
tiny.cc/147special1

BETTER USES FOR PAST PAPERS
Claire Gadsby serves up some suggestions for a more varied revision diet that's less reliant on drilling and completing exams from yesteryear
tiny.cc/147special2

HIGH-FLYERS NEED HELP TOO
Even the most able students can struggle with revision, observes Vic Goddard – which is why it's our job to guide them every step of the way...
tiny.cc/147special3

21st century thinking

The range of online revision tools and resources available for students is only getting bigger – so how can teachers help them separate the helpful wheat from the counterproductive chaff?

As I write these words, I'm still basking in the success of my eldest daughter's GCSE results – and I can tell you that they didn't happen by chance. I've watched in wonder over the past year as she built timetables, drew up colour-coded grids, annotated mark-schemes, got through more and more highlighter pens, shuffled flashcards and worked through past papers.

On the face of it, what she was doing didn't look all that different from what I got up to in the 1990s (though she was far more meticulous than me). And bar a slowly-expanding range of stationery options, I wonder whether my own experiences were especially different again from what my mother got up to in the 1960s…

A heady mix

However, running in tandem with all this paper-and-pen work was a whole other world taking in the palm of her hand. Thumbs tapping, finger scrolling, the anxious parent asking, '*Are you actually revising…?*' – those phone and tablet screens were portals to something else entirely.

The colour options for Post-it notes alone would be enough to make a 1960s O-Level student marvel. The cyberspace expanse of the early web would have stopped them in their tracks. AI-made revision questions? Incomprehensible.

Those screens that we parents worry about so much can, of course, be a student's best friend. The online landscape continues to offer a heady mix of content, AI tools and apps to help with efficiency and wellbeing – not to mention countless online communities made up of peers who are reliably ready to provide help and assistance across multiple social media platforms.

But just because these rich pickings are available, it doesn't necessarily follow that your students will know about them, or how best to use them. It would be like expecting a Y7 pupil to magically know how to 'do' homework. Best not to leave it to chance.

Besides which, as teachers, it would be foolish to pretend this virtual world simply doesn't exist. When we make our online classrooms and subject guides, or put together talks for parents, we need to cover what the digital world has to offer.

1. Entry-level AI chatbots

Think of a subject, an exam board and a topic. Then ask an AI chatbot, such as ChatGPT, to generate some questions. For example: '*Give me five questions to help me revise cell structures for AQA Biology GCSE.*'

It's as simple as that. Try it out with your own subject, and then demonstrate how students might be able to use this approach at home. Alongside that, model how to sit with a pen and paper and attempt to actually answer the questions – because reading questions alone and thinking about them hopefully ('*Oh yes, I know that!*') isn't revision.

It's also worth showing students how this approach can easily go wrong if you forget to specify the exam board or muddle questions up – e.g. '*How does Priestley show he is sociable?*'

2. Quizzing and recall

There are a number of applications available that can generate virtual flashcards, or provide ready access to existing flashcards on set topics. Your school may have invested in a platform like Carousel Learning (carousel-learning.com), based around the concept of spaced retrieval practice – a process whereby

you test and retest yourself at certain intervals, to ensure that knowledge sticks in your long-term memory.

Gizmo (gizmo.ai) is one such service that I'm increasingly hearing about in conversation with young people. Users receive access to decks of flashcards that are ready to go, and there's the option to make decks of your own, too – by, for example, importing and combining slides to generate a whole new set.

On its own, though, the process is quite rough and ready. A one-off flashcard check might well produce an instant feeling of success, but that doesn't mean it will translate into better exam performance in the long term. Interval spacing is really important here, so help your students plan out how frequently they intend to test themselves over a week. And then get them to stick to that schedule.

3. Organisation and Efficiency

When I was in sixth form, and not entirely enamoured with T.S. Eliot, there was a student across the landing (yes, boarding school) who was in a similar position. We'd set ourselves a timer for half an hour, learn some quotes in our separate rooms, and when those 30 minutes were up, rattle through them together. Let's keep this kind of human connection going!

These days, however, there are also online platforms that can do that kind of work for you. The idea is that it will be like having someone sat beside you consistently prompting you to keep at it, reminding you to learn the key components, and giving you a big, virtual thumbs-up when you get the work done.

Study Buddy (thestudybuddy.com) is one such platform among many. If students purchase the GCSE bundle, for example, they'll not only get subject summaries for up to 10 subjects with accompanying real-world flashcards, but they'll also get access to an online tracker.

Not everyone will stump up the required £100, and it's not going to work without some elbow grease – but Study Buddy does combine some tried and tested methods while helpfully cutting out a lot of organisational hassle.

When it comes to improving efficiency, and warding off the many distractions presented by phones and tablets, there are apps for that too. *Of course* there are. I rather like Flora, which blocks distracting apps while keeping you squarely focused on the task at hand with the aid of 'virtual plants'. If you neglect what you *should* be doing, and go down the rabbit-hole of blacklisted apps (TikTok, Instagram, etc.) then your virtual plants die.

Ultimately though, just keeping a timer on your phone can work wonders. Teach your students about the Pomodoro Method, model it, use it in class and do it together. You'll have soon managed to turn them into both lifelong learners and productivity gurus in a very short space of time. So maybe you don't actually *need* an app for that, after all…

"It would be foolish to pretend this virtual world doesn't exist"

4. Communities of support

Finally, cultivate communities of support. These could include the existing online classrooms you use with Google Classroom and other remote learning tools, but it's likely that students will naturally deviate away from institutional setups. You can still encourage their preferred ways of supporting each other – but just be curious about who is helping whom, and how.

If someone is socially isolated, have a chat with them about the ways in which they can connect to others online in safe spaces, using platforms like Study Together (studytogether.com). In some ways, I was lucky to attend boarding school. I was among my own peers at all times and we helped each other along. Phones and social media platforms now enable this to happen virtually, so it's wise to take an interest in how your students might be engaging with other learners, be it in their own school or with others across the world.

As we all know with the things that hide behind the screens they hold in their hands (and invariably take to bed at night), there can be as many benefits to what they offer as there are risks.

Communication and conversation is key, so get involved. Model how your students can make the best use of the learning technologies and revision tools available to them, and pay attention to how they get on. The metaverse, subsequent generations of AI and other technologies we can scarcely imagine yet will be with us soon enough. It's probably best to keep a keen eye on such developments and embrace them where appropriate, alongside our younger generations who will often already be a number of steps ahead of us…

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Rebecca Leek has been a primary and secondary teacher, SENCo. headteacher and MAT CEO; she is currently the Executive Director of the Suffolk Primary Headteacher's Association

Collins

UNBEATABLE VALUE REVISION

ORGANISE AND RETRIEVE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge organisers and retrieval practice together in one book!

- Clear and simple revision providing all of the subject essentials
- Short, snappy explanations with lots of images and diagrams for each topic with a recall test to match
- Perfect for retrieval practice throughout the year as well as catch up and intervention

Available for KS3, GCSE and A-level Maths and Sciences

SCHOOL PRICE FROM ONLY **£3.00**

TAKE A LOOK INSIDE

Find out more at collins.co.uk/revision

Q&A

"Make every school day easier"

Alistair Gates explains how ParentPay Group is on a mission to help schools reclaim their team's time...

30 SECOND BRIEFING

ParentPay Group delivers everything schools need to create environments where children thrive. From MIS insights and classroom management tools, to payments, meal ordering and parental engagement, we help leaders, teachers and families save time, reduce admin and focus on better pupil outcomes.

What is it that ParentPay Group is able to offer?

ParentPay provides tools that simplify every aspect of school life – from your MIS, finances and parental engagement, to secure payments, reading engagement and easy and safe meal ordering. We know schools are under pressure. Our solutions are about giving teams time back – whether that's more time for teachers to focus on learning, cutting the admin burden for the school office or giving school leaders the insights they need to make informed decisions.

How do you help leaders make informed decisions?

Our solutions transform data into actionable insights. From attendance and behaviour, to SEND and staff absence, we can help you spot trends, drill down in detail and make evidence-based decisions. Our intuitive dashboards and reports provide school leaders with a simple, yet smart way of improving pupil outcomes. For MATs, we can also deliver aggregated insights with school-level drill-downs to provide both the bigger picture and essential details on the ground, enabling you to pinpoint specific trends and areas for improvement.

What advantages do your solutions offer for teachers?

Class View in SIMS lets teachers perform all of their main daily tasks in one place. That includes taking the register, awarding conduct points and accessing key pupil information (such as attendance, SEND and medical information, and key indicators for EAL and Pupil Premium students). Teachers can access a pupil's profile directly from Class View for more detailed information, and will soon be able to message parents in our app directly via SIMS too.

How are you seeking to make life easier for parents and carers?

Parents are already spinning so many plates, the last thing they need is more complexity. We offer auto-top up and pre-booking for easy school meal selection, and the widest range of payment options available. Single basket check out means they can pay for everything in one app, even if their children are at different schools. Our single app, coming soon, will let them manage messages, clubs, trips, timetables and payments, all in one place.

Are these solutions secure and easy to use?

Yes – and with cyber-attacks in education rising, that matters. We have been independently rated as market-leaders in cyber and data security, and have a team of experts on hand who keep schools safe 24/7. Our cloud-based solutions are intuitive and accessible, so that school teams and parents can start using them straight away – meaning fewer calls to the school office, and more time back for your teams.

ABOUT ALISTAIR: Alistair Gates is Chief Product Officer for ParentPay Group

ParentPay Group

Contact: For more information, visit **parentpay.com/parentpaygroup**

What's the difference?

+ Make every school day easier – from managing classrooms, to easy parental engagement and payment reconciliation
+ Turn complex data into clear insights, with dashboards that help leaders make smarter decisions and improve pupil outcomes
+ Busy parents love the ease of choosing meals, making payments, booking trips and communicating with their school

Realistic revision

A key element of effective revision is knowing what your limits are, and whether there are enough hours in the day for what you're planning, advises **Katharine Radice**

How complicated do you want the revision process to be? Revision used to involve an exercise book, perhaps a textbook, maybe some flashcards. There was comparatively little available and this offered simplicity.

Now, there's potentially overwhelming complexity. In addition, the range of revision resources available adds financial pressure into the mix. What happens when teenagers worry about whether their families can afford the revision guides?

In the classroom – realistic revision plans

Time is limited and students have to make choices. Ask your classes how much time they have available to give to your subject. Scale this up by 9 or 10 subjects and check that this is realistic; if it isn't, challenge them on it.

Encourage them to err on the side of caution: '*Don't overestimate – choose something manageable and let's make a game plan that fits within that. If you end up with more time, then great, you'll be ahead.*'

Classes need to hear this message, so that there's space to discuss what those choices might be. '*What are your top three revision priorities?*' – this is a useful question, as it's much more enabling than only talking about all the things that could be done in an ideal world. Talking about priorities allows the student to cut things back to a manageable size. This brings the positive next step more clearly into view and makes it easier to be motivated.

"Unrealistic conversations with friends about revision make everyone feel worse, not better"

Year group focus – realistic conversations

How much time do students actually have for revision? Ask them to put a number on it, and encourage them to be realistic about what can be done in that time.

Unrealistic conversations with friends about revision make everyone feel worse, not better. It's more constructive to stay focused on a sustainable amount of time to give to revision, and make sensible choices about what to do with that time.

For families – A realistic understanding

Revision is often boring, gruelling and nerve-wracking. Families can sometimes need to be reminded of just how grim revising for exams can be. For students who find school difficult, it's a sustained process of rubbing your face in things you feel you can't do.

For students who are on track to do well, it's often a tedious process of going over and over material. It's like chewing an orange – even if the material tasted juicy and interesting the first time round, it rarely tastes that way by the time it's been chewed right through to the summer.

Families often worry about whether their children are motivated enough, with this concept of 'motivation' often blurring with the concept of 'enjoyment'. Maybe their teenager finds it hard to get started? This is natural. It could be that their teenager is in a bad mood – this too is natural. Keeping revision realistic for families means reminding them that it's okay for their children to be annoyed by the process.

Supporting in a realistic way means acknowledging this: '*Yes, revision sucks sometimes, but we're cheering you on. Tell me your plan for today; when it's done you can do something more fun.*' Realistic support is a matter of focusing on one step at a time, and celebrating the small wins of that bit being done, rather than over-emphasising the August results day finish line, which will be too far away to be motivating:

'*You said you'd do an hour. It's 7pm now; at 8pm I'll come back and you can show me what you've done. If you're finding it boring, let out your frustration by telling me at 8pm the most boring bits. I am there for you, and I know it's not easy.*'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katharine Radice is an author, teacher and education consultant, currently teaching part-time at both a mixed ability comprehensive school and at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge; this article is based on an extract from her book, *Exam Stress – A Practical and Positive Guide for Teachers* (£14, Bloomsbury)

The A to Z of GETTING AN A

Start early, engage in self-reflection, monitor your progress and don't forget to socialise – **Jose Sala Diaz** presents his alphabetised guide to making revision work...

Active' is the first word that comes to mind when teachers ask me about revision. Here, I'll explain what'active revision' means to me, and how it can make learning...

Better. Revision is a very important tool – perhaps more important than the learning itself – and intrinsically connected to behaviour and independence. There has been a big push of late to teach self-regulating techniques – from those based on metacognition, to others like self-determination theory (autonomy, competence and relatedness) – since they're seen as being closely linked to effective learning. And yet, as a teacher, I feel that students' biggest problem during revision is when they're not being...

'Challenged' to... 'Gerry?'

Challenged enough. Instead, our students are more typically spoon-fed guidance on how and when to revise. Some will go on to make beautiful colour-coded mind-maps that lack depth. Others, overwhelmed by the volume of resources available, will find a comfortable space where they can get by with repeating the same questions, or doing the bare minimum. I believe that learners should stop revising what they already know, and instead identify 'productive struggles'. Because if anything, active revision should be...

Difficult. Unfortunately, we can't pretend that learning is easy. After all, that's essentially the main reason why education settings exist – to pay attention to things that are difficult but necessary. Resilience doesn't mean removing stress, but rather learning to face it, in order to become more...

Efficient. To do this, I believe learners should be continuously engaging with previous content at the same time that they're being introduced to new material. We need to focus less on making amendments to the learning ('*Uh oh – everyone did very badly in the mocks, let's revise what went wrong...*'), and far more on the processes that take us there. We need to cultivate students' attention with regular routines that will help them maintain their...

Focus, since a lack of real and efficient engagement will only make our students needier than ever – as once explained to me by one of my Y11 students,

Gerry: "*No one has ever told me how to revise, sir – therefore, I'm not going to revise. It's too hard.*"

Please – help your students fare better than Gerry. Ideally, without spending endless...

'Hours' to 'Knowledge'

Hours on completing homework. Students should accept that they will, indeed, spend a significant amount of their time revising outside school. Though the question of exactly how much revision homework your students need is ultimately one that only you, their teacher, can answer honestly. That said, you might be able to offer some better...

Ideas. Everyone has differing opinions on how best to revise ('*The Pomodoro technique is the new black!*'), but at the end of the day, teachers need to hold students accountable for the decisions that they make. Which brings us to...

Journals, and other similar tools that enable students to reflect daily on the progress they're making, or which will encourage them to undergo an honest, self-regulating process. Some might use Google Calendar. Others might deploy Post-it notes – but please, be sure to prioritise...

Knowledge, and be careful in your use of 'quizzing apps' and other such products that make great claims about how productive they are for learning. Let's just briefly acknowledge them here and move on. Because on the whole, 'gamification' won't prompt students to revise what they *need* to, but rather what *entertains them*. Which will inevitably pull them away from...

"Revision should be embedded not at the end of Y10, but from the start of KS3"

'Learning' to 'Passive'

Learning. There shouldn't be any division between 'revision time' and 'teaching time'; both ought to combined within the same lessons. If anything, revision should start on students' first day at secondary, and eventually form part of a long-term learning process in which their...

Motivation is intrinsic ('*Why I am doing this?*'; '*What is it that I want to achieve?*') rather than extrinsic and reliant on rewards and points systems. The former is considerably harder to cultivate in students, but will take them much further. You want them to be satisfied with the idea of 'productive struggle', and to feel good about themselves enjoying said struggle – which is easy to say, I know. At the same time, we must also remember that...

N2 sleep is the longest, and most important stage of the sleep cycle. It's when your body temperature drops, your heart rate slows and your brain starts to create K-complexes, which are critical for consolidating memories. Speaking as someone who once spent epic hours (unproductively) revising the night before exams back in my uni days, trust me – sleep is important, and a state in which we obviously aren't…

Online. Several decades on from that initial explosion of digital tools, teachers are still striving to find that necessary balance between analogue and digital learning aids. And that's before you even broach the issue of smartphones, and how clearly they highlight the ways in which technology can make students more…

Passive – or at least insufficiently challenged. In a world awash with entertainments vying for eyeballs and attention, the difficult process of teaching complex concepts should be considered a…

Quite considerable priority and given the space to succeed. Returning us to…

'Routine' to 'Zone of silence'

Routine. As the esteemed record producer Rick Rubin once remarked, "*Good habits create good work. The way we do anything is the way we do everything.*" Note – this doesn't mean that in the run-up to their exams students should forego…

Socialising. We could have gone with 'Success' or 'Strategies' here, but making time for socialising during revision periods is hugely important. Wellness doesn't occur in isolation, and isn't sustainable as an individual pursuit. Those learners who manage to balance a healthy social life with consistent study habits will see better results across both. Moreover, it's perfectly okay to acknowledge that virtually every other Y11 student in the country will be going through the same intensely stressful…

Times themselves. We should remember that for students, schools are sites of both anxiety and wonder, staffed by people encouraging them to keep going, because they're part of a much larger learning community. Within reason, we should try to impress upon students a sense of…

Urgency, which they sometimes won't develop in themselves unless we issue regular reminders, assign revision homework via Google Classroom, set revision deadlines, distribute tailored revision techniques and materials, and attempt 50 different ways of capturing their attention in an effort to make them realise that all this, right here, right now *matters*…

Very much indeed. I'd personally like to oversee a classroom where autonomy is the norm, so that we can strengthen our students' Wellbeing, rather than diminish it. We want our students to succeed in their exams, but we should also want them to eventually become better people, capable of understanding that the hardships they've faced in school are nothing compared to the hardships they'll face in later life (sorry). The sooner we show students how to reflect on their daily lives, the healthier they'll be. So let's plot 'year group' along our…

X-axis, progress on our Y-axis and get that line going up as early as we can. Some of those students at the very start of their secondary school journey may well protest that they still have…

Years to go yet, but it bears repeating: *revision should be embedded not at the end of Y10, but from the start of KS3*. To learn how to look forward, students must first learn how to look back and self-reflect. One idea recently adopted at my current school was to create a…

Zone of Silence in the sixth form, so that students could use the common room for productive study and revision. At present, most of us are making students learn how to pass subjects while assuming that they'll implicitly learn the skills needed to do so as they go. In practice, however, most of us will only encounter productive struggle when given access to guided spaces that are free of distractions and which let us explore. It might not be the most *fun* way for students to spend their time – but it could be the most meaningful…

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

WESLEYAN

we are all about you

Ready... Set... Retire!

Let's make sure your retirement plans stay on track

When it comes to achieving a gold standard retirement, expert planning can make all the difference, which is why Wesleyan Financial Services are here to help get you retirement ready.

If you haven't thought about your pension for a while, or are giving serious consideration to early retirement, we can help you to understand all your planning options.

Ask the specialists **Our Specialist Financial Advisers can:**

- Offer individual advice tailored to your own unique circumstances and goals
- Create a plan for the retirement you've been hoping for
- Help you to fund the things that matter most to you
- Explain the Teachers' Pension Scheme to you and your loved ones
- Assess if you could afford to take early retirement or reduce your hours
- Support you in accessing your pension pots

Ready to prepare and plan for your retirement?

If you'd like to find out more about how Wesleyan Financial Services can help, visit **wesleyan.co.uk/retirement-teach-secondary**

TEA AD 0089 04/25

Framing futures in film

By establishing partnerships within the creative industries, schools can reimagine their careers education in powerful ways, says **Julie Green**

The landscape of careers education is evolving. The DfE has proposed a series of changes to its work experience guidelines (see tinyurl.com/ts147-WB1) that will see the traditional one-week placement model at the end of Y10 or Y12 phased out. Instead, schools will be encouraged to provide students with 50 hours of workplace experiences between Y7 and Y12.

This shift presents a unique opportunity for educators, careers leaders and professionals in the film and creative industries to collaborate – by bringing industry insight into the classroom, and opening doors for students to explore the dynamic, creative career paths within the film industry.

'Below the line' careers

Research from Ravensbourne University London reveals that while a third of young people express interest in the creative industries, fewer than 25% receive guidance on the breadth of roles available (see tinyurl.com/ts147-WB2). Many students are familiar with high-profile positions, such as directors or actors, but remain unaware of the extensive range of 'below the line' roles – which can range from production design and sound engineering, to costume and post-production.

A national asset

The UK is home to a thriving film and television sector, with major studios such as Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, Pinewood, Elstree and Sky Studios contributing to what's been dubbed 'Britwood'. The sector is not only culturally significant, but economically vital.

Greta Gerwig's *Barbie*, for example – filmed primarily at Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden – generated an estimated £80 million for the UK economy and created nearly 700 jobs. In response to this growth, the UK government has pledged £380 million to support the creative industries, including £75 million specifically for film and TV training programmes aimed at addressing critical skills gaps.

Creative careers

The traditional model of a single week of work experience often disadvantages students without industry connections – particularly those with SEND or from under-represented backgrounds.

The creative industries require a more flexible, inclusive approach to workplace engagement. Such an approach could encompass studio visits and immersive school trips, as well as short-term placements of one to three days.

Students could further benefit from industry insight events, hybrid or virtual project-based experiences, themed careers fairs, youth-led programming and curation and closer links between the creative industries and Arts Award qualifications (artsaward.org.uk).

The Gatsby Benchmarks

The Gatsby Benchmarks (see tinyurl.com/ts147-WB3) provide a robust framework for integrating creative careers into school programmes – notably Benchmarks 2 ('*Learning from career and labour market information*' to explore those 'below the line' roles) and 4 ('*Linking curriculum learning to careers*').

For Benchmarks 5 and 6 ('*Encounters with employers and employees*' and '*Experiences of workplaces*'),

there could be opportunities for learning outside the classroom via studio visits and workshops. Benchmark 7 ('*Encounters with further and higher education*') affords scope for showcasing career pathways via film schools, apprenticeships and university courses, while Benchmark 8 ('*Personal guidance*') could see tailored guidance and mentorship delivered to students keen to pursue creative and technical roles.

A tiered approach

The updated guidelines' support for hybrid models of work experience – combining in-person and virtual engagements – are ideally suited to film studios, which must navigate non-disclosure agreements and an array of health and safety protocols.

A reimagined, age-appropriate model could provide engagement with the creative industries throughout students' schooling under three themes. From Y7 to Y10 ('Inspire') there could be studio visits and career talks. Y9 to Y12 ('Explore') might see students undertake research projects inspired by certain roles and industry trends. A third theme ('Experience') would then see Y10 to Y12 embark on meaningful work placements and project-based learning.

This model would ensure that students build awareness, develop their skills and gain real-world insight over time. With the right support, young people can then envision careers not just in front of the camera, but across the entire production pipeline.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Julie Green is Education & Learning Manager at Warner Bros. Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- Warner Bros. Studio Tour London Schools Resources **wbstudiotour.co.uk/schools**
- CREWHQ – entry level film industry training **crewhq.co.uk**
- Film and TV Educators Network – CPD, training, resources and events **ftveducators.net**
- Equalex Learning Outcomes – a new type of Work Experience **careersandenterprise.co.uk/modern-work-experience**
- Industry data and insights – creative industries workforce data from the BFI **tinyurl.com/ts147-WB4**

Off the Shelves

Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore

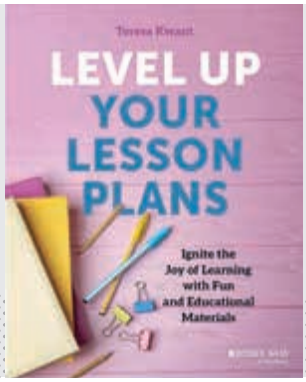
Conversations with Third Reich Contemporaries: From Luke Holland's Final Account

(Stefanie Rauch, UCL, £45 / open access PDF)

The 'Contemporaries' of the title are individuals who were children or teens during the Hitler years. Rauch assigns them different categories – 'victims', 'perpetrators', 'bystanders' – but it soon becomes clear just how malleable these roles are. With sufficient toleration and tacit approval, bystanders can become accomplices to, or even perpetrators of the Nazi regime's crimes. Given how the book grapples with questions of complicity, responsibility and accountability, it could be a useful source of inspiration for discussion topics in history and PSHE lessons. Hearing the views held now and back then from people who lived through the era as children provides an important warning for our times, and gives us an illuminating alternative perspective of the period.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman

bit.ly/Eclecticism

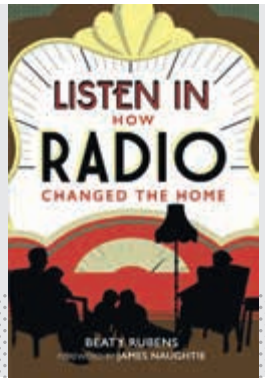


Level Up Your Lesson Plans

(Teresa Kwant, Jossey-Bass, £22.99)

This book is awash with ideas that are frequently presented in the form of bullet points, making it easy to skim through, select a couple of ideas that you like and put them into practice. The commentary surrounding the suggestions presents some sound advice and is refreshingly light on academic jargon. While on balance I would recommend *Level Up...* as a useful resource to have on hand, it should be noted that it's written for an American audience, so don't expect the schemes of work for maths and literacy to fully align with our own. It also seems to have more of a primary focus, though that's not to say that many of its featured ideas can't be adapted. A few of the suggestions may take some time for busy teachers to prepare and implement – but it's nevertheless a great book to dip into and draw creative inspiration from.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman



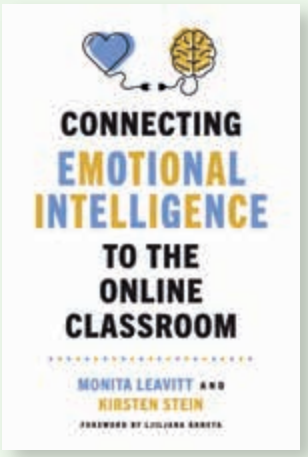
Listen In: How Radio Changed the Home

(Beaty Rubens, Bodleian, £30)

As told in this history of the wireless, in 1922 just 150,000 people regularly listened to the radio. Fewer than 20 years later, that number had expanded to 34 million. Radio was once the cutting edge in home entertainment. A couple of generations before the first internet cafés were opened, someone attempted pretty much the same thing by opening a 'radio café' in an electrical shop. Enthusiasts of the medium built radio sets of their own. The advent of the radio had a huge impact – particularly on the speed of broadcast news – and even prompted the adoption of 'standard time' across the country. *Listen In* contains contemporary photographs, adverts and even cartoons, all presented in the sumptuous manner you'd expect from the Bodleian. It's a fascinating and detailed document of the game-changing impact of an historically consequential technology.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman

ON THE RADAR



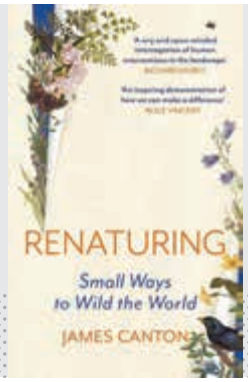
Connecting Emotional Intelligence to the Online Classroom

(Monita Leavitt and Kirsten Stein, Johns Hopkins University Press, £23)

The remote learning infrastructure that emerged in the wake of the COVID pandemic may not serve the vital role it once did, but it's given educators and learners a valuable tool for tackling various challenges related to SEND, inclusion and long-term absence. That said, there are many teachers out there who still struggle with the distance and barriers to genuine engagement that remote learning can present. This book is for them.

For co-authors Leavitt and Stein, the key to overcoming those issues lies in helping students develop their emotional intelligence, which will impact positively upon their ability to self-regulate, motivate themselves, focus and stay engaged. If teachers were to do the same and work on their own emotional intelligence, they would be able to 'read the virtual room' more easily, and establish those connections so vital for the relationship-building that's core to effective teaching.

Connecting Emotional Intelligence... covers a lot of theory – Leavitt and Stein have certainly done their reading – but consistently applies it to matters of practice, with lots of valuable tips and numerous pointers that teachers can take away with them. It may be written with an American audience in mind, but the book's deep and extensive consideration of what remote learning requires to be successful aptly transcends national borders.

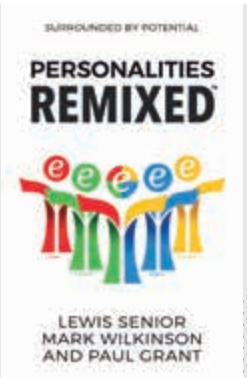


Renaturing: Small Ways to Wild the World

(James Canton, Canongate, £13.99)

To the uninitiated, 'renaturing' is essentially rewilding, just on a smaller scale. Indeed, Canton goes so far as to state that even an act as humble as planting flowers in a window box counts. This book could therefore prove useful to schools keen to cultivate their own dedicated 'back to nature' area. Readers will learn about the kind of changes to look out for, and the methods that can be deployed to lend nature a helping hand. The mini-essays at the start of each chapter are informative, but the book as a whole is more descriptive than explanatory. We're told, for example, that there are a huge number of ladybirds around, but not given any reasons as to why. *Renaturing* is, however, beautifully written and presented in the manner of a diary recorded in the present tense, making for a gentle, yet compelling read.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman



Personalities Remixed

(Lewis Senior, Mark Wilkinson and Paul Grant, Hasmark Publishing International, £18)

According to the authors of *Personalities Remixed*, there are four dominant personality styles which can be laid out as colour-coded quadrants of a circle, known as the 'E-Colours' model. They comprise 'Doer' (red), 'Thinker' (green), 'Relator' (blue) and 'Socialiser' (yellow). Understanding how they intersect and drive behaviours can, so the thinking goes, help us forge better interactions with each other. For readers shuddering at memories of VARK, this isn't that. The book explains that in education contexts, the E-Colours model is more about giving children and young people a language with which to express themselves, and a way to better understand the personalities of their peers. With reference to individual case studies, they proceed to detail what the approach looks like in action, and the role it can play in fostering self-awareness, empathy and compassion – which is surely something that every educator can get behind.

Meet the author

LEWIS SENIOR

The book recounts how you and your colleagues at [coaching organisation] Equilibria delivered the E-Colours model in a number of US schools. What did you observe?

When we first started, I saw a trend of more disadvantaged kids being quicker to pick up on it, as it provided them with a tool that could really help them. They called it a 'coping tool' that helped them better understand what was going on in their lives, both in school and at home. Prior to COVID, when we had an E-Colours scheme being delivered in American high schools, the average graduation rate was 78.2%. In every school we went into, the graduation rate rose to between 98 and 100%. It's not a solution to every challenge school students will face – but it makes so much sense when encountered at the right age.

When talking to educators, have you been met with any scepticism of the ideas underpinning the E-Colours model, and if so, how have you overcome that?

Our approach involves talking about tendencies, gaining a deeper understanding of yourself, and how we can all better manage those *tendencies*. We haven't seen much scepticism from students, but we've certainly seen how rare it is for teachers to have the time needed try something new.

Those kinds of conversations have to start with the leadership, where they will hopefully grasp the benefits for themselves. In my experience, just during those first meetings, any reservations leaders have will quickly go away once they realise how valuable a process for helping people leverage their personal strengths and manage their limitations can be.

Many would point out that personalities aren't fixed, and can change over time through personal growth – is that acknowledged within the E-Colours model?

Very much so. We explain our thinking around personality diversity by asking people to imagine a human as a constantly changing iceberg. What we can see above the water are the most visible aspects of our personality, from where we'll typically *react*. The larger piece below the water is our character, from where we *respond*. A core part of what we teach is 'intentional leadership', which can start at any age, and concerns the idea that you get a much better outcome when you respond, rather than react.

Lewis Senior is the co-founder and co-CEO of Equilibria (equilibria.com), having previously worked as the global head of health, safety and environment for the deepwater drilling company, Transocean

TABLE TAXONOMIES

Aaron Swan recalls how having second thoughts around his classroom seating plan informed his approach to teaching some vital interpersonal skills...

I recently had a disappointing revelation. One which, much to my dismay (and the joy of colleagues who share the room with me) caused me to finally break a 10-year tradition and de-implement one of my most reliable teaching and learning strategies.

Yes, after a decade of having my students' tables grouped, I've finally succumbed to 'exam rows'. And my heart is broken.

Shared objectives

I've always been a firm believer in the importance of shared, collaborative objectives. My intent has been to break down barriers to relationships through work, and build upon the strengths of individuals in order to promote the essential life skill of teamwork.

In reality, this strategy hasn't always met with long-term success. Friendship groups gossip. Mixed groups don't mix. Grouping by academic need creates an atmosphere of exclusion. And yet, I've still persevered.

I've taught lessons specifically designed around the premise of collaboration, only for them to be regularly marred by low-level disruption. My trusty five-table groups, each seating six students together, are therefore no more. The reign of the individual tables arranged in rows and columns has begun. A new atmosphere of invigilated examination has now dawned.

My displeasure at this outcome has forced me to consider how I ended up here. What went wrong?

Face Value Theory

I tend to see many teaching structures through the lens of taxonomies – proper hierarchical, sequenced and cumulative taxonomies. Could our classroom table layout be taxonomical? Perhaps grouping students is a level they're not ready for yet. What shallows could constitute a 'level 1' of group work, en route to the cumulative 'deep waters' of table groups?

I've been drawn to thinking about Erving Goffman's Face Value Theory, which describes an individual's 'social self-image' that they'll want to maintain in interactions. In this context, social interactions are likened to an on stage performance, the 'script' being a rigid set of social expectations that we're expected to follow.

This idea was developed further by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, whose 'politeness theory' proposed different types of face values:

- **Positive Face** is the desire to be liked, reflective of a person's need for social validation and connection
- **Negative Face** is the desire for freedom from imposition, representing an individual's need to act independently, without interference

'Face-threatening acts' occur when someone's words or actions challenge another person's positive and negative face needs. Ignoring someone, criticizing them or rejecting their opinions can damage their self-esteem and social approval. Imposing on someone, making demands or restricting their choices can infringe on their autonomy.

> *"I've taught lessons designed around collaboration, only for them to be marred by low-level disruption"*

Lowering the threat

I've started to think that this concept of 'face value' could be seen in a literal sense, when previously I've always thought of it more as something cognitive or abstract. Is the quantity of physical faces a driver of increasing anxiety over face-threatening acts? Every face that's facing you in class is arguably a face act that could be potentially positive or negative. So do we decrease the overall 'face threat' by lowering the number of actual faces that a student is 'facing'?

When a room is tabled in exam rows, there will be a much lower potential for face-threatening acts to occur. When tables are grouped, that threat increases. The most threatening of all would perhaps be a horseshoe / roundtable arrangement, in which everyone is facing each other at all times.

None of this is especially groundbreaking. Everyone who's ever presented will tell you that the size of your audience can increase anxiety over being ignored, being criticised or having demands made upon you, but synthesizing face theory with a taxonomical design has changed how I think about room layouts.

The top level of an educational taxonomy is our desirable state. Levels lower down the taxonomy are increasingly deficient from this desirable top level – deficiencies to be overcome through teaching and learning. In a growth mindset culture, we will measure the performance of students against some form of criteria, so that we can better identify how to ascend the levels.

Is the horseshoe table layout therefore our 'desirable state' towards which we should be aspiring,

and against which all other states are deficient? Speaking subjectively, I'd say yes. We should want our students to be sociable, collaborative and resilient – all traits required of group work.

Fewer faces

According to 2017 polling data gathered by One Poll, nearly half of all homes in the country don't actually use their dining rooms for the majority of meals, whilst 'TV meals' are routinely undertaken by around 45% of Britons.

At the same time, the rapid expansions of social media and video streaming services in recent years have been driven by the dopamine effects they provide for their users. How popular are board games now? Online gaming has made in-person, shared-screen multiplayer gaming redundant. That classic go-to location for a flirtatious rendezvous, the back row of the cinema, is in serious decline. App-enabled food delivery services are even fast replacing the consumption of meals in venues that are filled with other people we don't know.

We live in a world where we're all being exposed to steadily fewer face acts – and thus fewer opportunities to develop coping strategies

A desirable characteristic

The ability to face groups, while delivering to and collaborating with other people is a desirable characteristic that needs developing somewhere. It's an attribute that every child must have to some extent if they're to ever deliver verbally to facing people – not least in their English language GCSE, where a fail in the speaking and listening task will accrue a 100% weighting on the language grade they achieve.

More broadly, they'll one day be speaking to people when forming their future relationships, both romantic and acquainted. They'll face road rage and older people crossing roads. They may well encounter a disabled person requiring assistance, and meet people asking for their favour. Their future job may require them to take part in interviews, issue instructions and provide direction for others.

Coping with the pressures of face-threatening acts is a learning journey that we can and should try to navigate through our table layouts – a journey that will ultimately end with the maximum number of faces that we feel we can give them.

My aim is to get students comfortable with being in situations where criticism and imposition are possible outcomes, and yet able to handle these as opportunities, rather than threatening actions. As the students become increasingly adept at coping with varied interactions, I hope to then increase their exposure to larger groups, while rewarding them for their progress along the way.

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

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

So what can we do in the classroom to confront face-threatening acts, increase students' ability to work in diverse groups and eventually climb the table taxonomy?

FIND AND SEEK – I know my students, the quality of their outcomes and where they rank in my class. I know this through percolating amongst them and live-marking their work. Rather than correct something, I'll send that student to another who has the right answer, thus creating a series of brief, yet effective connections and shared words.

DONATION – I know when a student has written something amazing and made a connection that most other students haven't. I also know that there can sometimes be a culture of students wanting to protect their own ideas and 'intellectual property'. Rather than simply ask a student to share their work with the whole class by reading it out loud, I'll sometimes ask them to freely share the correct comment they have in mind with an individual who I think would genuinely benefit from it.

GAMIFICATION – I use a presentation-based boardgame that involves a team of students sitting with their backs to the front wall, facing the rest of the class, and guessing what's being presented. Their progress is measured by advancing a counter through a map.

The more successful students are in these activities, the more they'll be able to cope with face-threatening acts and collaborate effectively.

edwindoran
sports tours

THE LEADING SCHOOL SPORTS TOUR OPERATOR SINCE 1974

Discover your team's full potential and create memories to last a lifetime with the UK's longest-running school sports tour operator.

With our **50 years of experience** and global network of partners, our guarantee for you is a competitive tour with well-matched fixtures and enriching activities in any destination you pick.

Visit **www.edwindoran.com** to learn more about us.

TAILORMADE ITINERARIES COMPETITIVE FIXTURES

OVER 15,000 TOURS DELIVERED

GET A QUOTE FOR YOUR GROUP'S NEXT SPORTING ADVENTURE

VISIT EDWINDORAN.COM CALL US: 020 3617 7983

Experience Education
Student Travel Group

Edwin Doran and **SkiBound** are part of the Experience Education family, enriching lives through experiential travel.

JCA travelbound SkiBound edwindoran masterclass World Challenge

SkiBound 40
SNOWSPORTS FOR SCHOOLS

40 YEARS OF CARVING MEMORIES

Boasting over 80 resorts and 177 accommodation options stretching across Europe and North America plus 3 exclusive French Clubhotels, SkiBound are the number one choice in snowsports for UK schools.

EXCLUSIVE SKIBOUND CLUBHOTELS IN FRANCE

+ Doorstep skiing
+ In-house ski technicians
+ Run by English-speaking SkiBound staff
+ Full board accommodation with en-suite facilities
+ Premier French resorts with high-altitude skiing

COVERING EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

Over 80 resorts and 177 accommodation options dedicated to school ski groups

ABTA

01273 244 570 skibound.co.uk info@skibound.co.uk

What's education for, anyway?

From facilitators for economic activity to centres of cultural enrichment, there seems to be a surprisingly wide mix of views as to what the purpose of school actually is...

I love listening to radio phone-in chat shows. Recently, though, I've noticed a trend. No matter what the topic – knife crime, drug use, the 'small boats crisis' – there comes a point in almost every debate when a certain type of person rings in.

"*What we need to do is get schools to educate people,*" they say, with the air of a prize turkey announcing to the flock that Christmas might not be ideal.

I don't know why it grates so much every time, but I've a good idea. The caller, acting with the best intentions, *genuinely believes* that schools have no interest in educating young people about the issue(s) in question. Worse still, they seem to think that we actively promote the kind of behaviour they want to see stamped out.

Do they believe we actually teach knife skills and joint-rolling techniques, or encourage an uncritical belief in anything found on social media? Even more bizarrely, they appear hold us responsible for the actions of society's older members too. When a 50-year-old businessman gets caught fiddling his taxes, somehow it's our fault – for not better educating 16-year-olds who have yet to even enter the workforce...?

School as childminding

All this got me thinking, *what do people really think education is for?* Ask 10 people that and you'll get 15 different answers. Some say it's about getting kids 'work ready'. These are the same folks who'll worry about the economy, and then complain that schools don't 'teach Council Tax', or 'how to get a mortgage' – as if the point of education is to prepare everyone to be an HR assistant in Hounslow.

Others will tell you that education is about *culture* – the passing on of shared values, great works of literature, art, science and moral thought. '*What's the point in knowing algebra,*' they'll sniff, '*if you've never read Shakespeare?*' To them, education is a civilising force, an intellectual National Service that prevents us from becoming wild, TikTok-obsessed goblins.

Then you've got the parents who, quite understandably, see school as a means to an end, a logistical necessity. Somewhere their child goes to during the day so that they can work.

Economically, at least, Early Years education is primarily seen as childcare, with nursery enabling parents to engage in the workforce. This idea, this *stigma* is hard to shake off. Even when parents understand that our job, as secondary teachers, is to develop subject knowledge and critical thinking, that sense of school simply being child-minding never fully disappears. It underpins the belief that we're just there to keep kids occupied until they're old enough to work or apply for student loans.

Of course, the government has its own ideas – test scores, performance data, outcomes, outcomes and *outcomes*. At this level, it's less about children than it is about numbers. So what *is* education for? What *should* it be for?

Messily human

The best answer is the most uncomfortable – that education is for helping people *become*. Become more informed, more thoughtful, more capable of understanding the world and acting within it with clarity and integrity.

This doesn't always look like a qualification. It doesn't have to involve knowing the GDP of China, or when the Treaty of Versailles was signed (though it might). It's something messier, more human and frustratingly hard to measure.

When you teach someone how to analyse a poem, you're not just 'teaching poetry' – you're teaching them how to spot nuance. When you explain photosynthesis, you're not just ticking off a biology objective – you're giving them tools with which to marvel at the world. When a pupil finally cracks a tricky maths problem, that's not just learning; that's resilience in action.

But try including any of that in a DfE slide deck. Doesn't have quite the same ring as '*raising attainment through targeted intervention*,' does it?

The simple fact is that we don't all agree on what education is for – and therein lie most of our day-to-day problems. Unless society can agree what education is for, we'll keep expecting schools to fix the unsolvable, while ignoring the small miracles that happen each day whenever a child learns to think that little bit more clearly than they did yesterday.

Because trust me – that's education doing exactly what it's meant to do.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
'I, Teacher' is a secondary teacher, teacher trainer and writer challenging binary teaching narratives. For more information, visit **tinyurl.com/ts-ITC** or follow **@i-teacher.bsky.social**

THE WOW FACTOR

A group viewing of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* can make for a rich, memorable, and above all, educational school trip – here's why...

19 years after saving the wizarding world, Harry, Ron, and Hermione return to Hogwarts, joined by a new generation. Prepare for dazzling spells, a race through time and an epic battle to save the future.

Based on an original story by J.K. Rowling, Jack Thorne and John Tiffany, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is a play by Jack Thorne that first premiered in London's West End at the Palace Theatre in summer 2016.

Harry Potter AND THE CURSED CHILD

Contact:
harrypottertheplay.com
groups@nimaxtehatre.com
0330 333 4815

A ONE-OF-A-KIND THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE

This award-winning stage play brings the wizarding world to life through breathtaking illusions and spellbinding storytelling. Ideal for school trips, it's an unforgettable experience that blends literature, drama and technical theatre in a way that will engage and inspire students across a wide range of subjects.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS THAT COUNT

Perfectly aligned with the English, drama and media studies curriculums, the production explores important lessons that students can learn both in and outside of the classroom. Teachers can use the play as a springboard for classroom discussion, creative projects and performance analysis, making the show both entertaining and educational.

SAFE, ACCESSIBLE AND GROUP-FRIENDLY

Located in the heart of London's West End, the Palace Theatre offers safe and accessible facilities for school groups. Group ticket rates, excellent transport links and support for educators make organising your visit stress-free, letting you focus on creating meaningful cultural experiences for your students.

INSPIRE A NEW GENERATION

Whether your students are lifelong fans, or just discovering the world of *Harry Potter* for the first time, this next chapter introduces a new generation of heroes. The play's universal themes resonate with students, sparking imagination, conversation and a lifelong appreciation for live theatre.

THIS WAY!

School improvement advice for headteachers and SLT

SUSTAINABILITY | ENVIRONMENTALISM | NET ZERO

How green is YOUR SCHOOL?

Georgina Beard and Elena Lengthorn set out what schools can do to minimise their carbon footprint, and why there should be more encouragement for them to take the necessary steps...

There's been another unprecedented, globally super-heated summer season! 2025 has seen the worst ever wildfire season in Europe. Drought conditions have been juxtaposed with flash floods caused by heavy downpours and thunderstorms, leading to wide-ranging consequences – from heat-related deaths, to the majority of British farmers reporting high levels anxiety and depression in the face of adverse weather conditions.

Children are, of course, carrying this burden too. A YouGov survey of 600 pupils aged under 12 found that over two thirds had experienced mental health symptoms in relation to their concern for the environment (see tinyurl.com/ts147-SU1).

Responsibilities and opportunities

This summer also saw the World Health Organisation and World Meteorological Organisation publish guidance on workplace heat stress, sharing evidence of the growing challenges to physical and mental health and productivity presented by our warming world.

Additionally, the DfE published a review entitled 'Impact of UK climate change risk on the delivery of education' (see tinyurl.com/ts147-SU2), which explored how climate change risk could impact upon education delivery and identified three key risks – flooding, water scarcity and overheating.

Our education system is part of the problem. As educators, we have a responsibility and opportunity to mitigate and adapt what we do in response – so let's start by considering what aspects of our schools' operations are the most environmentally damaging.

Unfortunately, however, when it comes to what schools do and the resources they require, there are few aspects that *aren't* damaging. Some of the most obvious considerations include the transport methods students use to get to school, rising energy costs and outdated buildings, with schools increasingly exposed to flooding impacts and extreme heat days.

Then there's the issue of waste, with some 22kg of waste produced per year, per secondary pupil. According to the Schools Sustainability Guide, primary pupils clock up an even worse 45 Kg (see tinyurl.com/ta147-SU3). Our schools therefore shoulder some responsibility for what's happening – but can also seize the opportunity to do something about it.

A 'nice to do'

Lack of available time and resources remains a challenge, of course. With so many competing issues placing a heavy burden on educators and education leaders, deciding where to allocate those resources is a tremendously difficult balancing act. In practice, The decision to do something often comes down to individual schools or staff members simply taking an interest.

In 2015, 193 UN member states, including the UK, signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals (see sdgs.un.org/goals), Goal 4 of which cites 'quality education', stating that "*Education is the key that will allow many other SDGs to be achieved*". Eight years later, the DfE produced a 'Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy' for education (see tinyurl.com/ts147-SU4), and recently re-committed to the introduction of a new Natural History GCSE qualification.

Yet while the DfE strategy does propose that schools take some adaptive actions, it stops short of pledging any additional funding, recommending that schools dedicate time to their implementation, and having the strategy's progress be reviewed by Ofsted. As such, delivery of the DfE's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy is broadly seen as a 'Nice to do', rather than an essential duty.

For schools on a sustainability journey, the process of identifying practical actions is just the start. Before long, a much larger challenge emerges

– that related to culture. While most individuals will recognise a need for change, actually delivering it can be a big hurdle.

Engaging and motivating your entire school around sustainability efforts will entail a huge culture shift, which should ideally be led from the top. This won't just amount to asking staff to change their photocopying habits, but rather to adapt their *core practice and routines*.

In some instances, this could have the potential to almost come across as a personal slight. In any case, there will be many senior leaders who are, understandably, cautious at the idea of changing practice in a way that's possibly liable to impact upon all pupils, all at once.

Putting it into practice

It may surprise you to learn, however, that navigating the green transition in schools isn't the alien process it's often made out to be.

The DfE strategy begins by advising all schools to appoint a 'sustainability leader', who will then draw up a climate action plan for the remainder of the year, and can turn to the Sustainability Support for Education website (sustainabilitysupportforeducation.org.uk) for advice and assistance, if needed.

Alongside this, a network of Climate Ambassadors has been recruited, whom schools can reach out to for further guidance, information, resources and mentoring. A useful template, available from climateactionplan.org.uk, can assist you with creating an individual climate action plan based upon your school's particular needs and context. The finished action plan can then be re-uploaded to the website to track progress over time.

The strategy consists of four pillars, which should ideally be reflected in your climate action plan. To help get things moving, you can turn to a range of different organisations for helpful information and suggestions – including the following:

Curriculum: By making just a few small tweaks to the existing curriculum, schools can potentially deliver some great outcomes with respect to climate

TAKING THE JOURNEY – ONE SCHOOL'S PERSPECTIVE

Sarah Dukes, English teacher and Sustainability Leader at The Chase School in Malvern, Worcestershire, recalls how the school's waste disposal procedures changed in response to student demand...

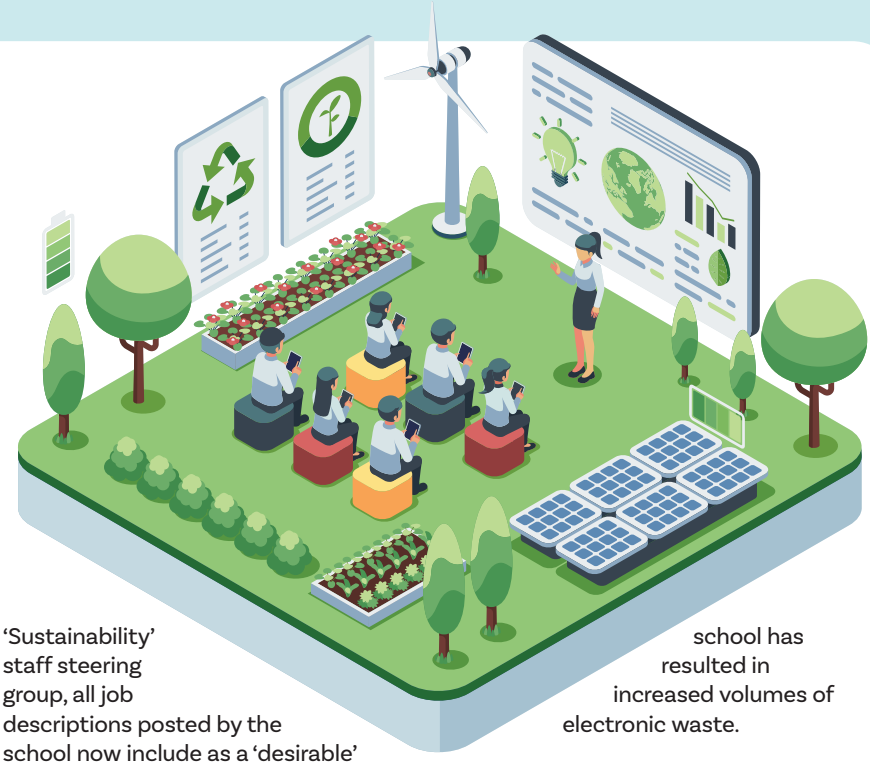
In 2019, a group of pupils concerned about paper waste asked about our school's recycling policy – and The Chase Eco Committee was born. For our first mission, pupils investigated the potential for our recycling to expand beyond just paper, to include cardboard, cans, aerosol containers, glass and plastic. Recycling bins with newly designed labels were placed in classrooms, along with themed posters, while the Committee delivered school assemblies. The local recycling centre even ran virtual workshops for us during tutor time.

Our students wanted to reduce the school's use of non-recyclable plastics, energy and water consumption, whilst encouraging greater use of sustainable transport and planting more trees.

'Greening up'

Since then, we've also increased our volume of working solar panels; banned single-use plastic drinks; enriched our green spaces by planting new trees and maintained our sedum roof. We've also expanded our science garden and endeavoured to improve the school's air quality. Our lighting systems have been linked to proximity sensors, and we've installed a new set of EVC chargers.

Thanks in part to our newly established 'Sustainability' staff steering group, all job descriptions posted by the school now include as a 'desirable' trait a willingness from candidates to help support our Climate Emergency pledge. This has helped to attract interest from a cleaning company with a commitment to reducing waste, and shown how 'greening up' school operations can help to save money. We've embedded nature connectedness and climate awareness across subjects, adapting lessons and creating new units of work.



We've face some challenges stemming from changes in staff, leadership and across wider society. A top-down push for booklets presented a struggle when trying to reduce our paper consumption. A request to plant more free Woodland Trust trees was rejected, due to lack of space. The inbuilt obsolescence of some hardware and software used across the school has resulted in increased volumes of electronic waste.

A core priority

The school's passionate sustainability lead, Eco Committee and staff steering group understand that sustainability and broader environmental concerns must become a core priority for everything taking place in school – from the planning and delivery of lessons, to how resources are delployed, behaviour is managed and attitudes are talked about.

Our students are encouraged to carefully consider their own and others' methods for getting to school and work, as well as how sustainable our choices are when it comes to what we eat for lunch. Though it's easy to forget that not everyone thinks the same way...

> *"Navigating the green transition in schools isn't the alien process it's often made out to be"*

education. The student-led climate education campaign, Teach the Future (teachthefuture.uk), uses what it calls a 'tracked changes' methodology, combined with a set of guiding principles to envisage what a new, more sustainability-informed curriculum might look like.

Net zero: Let's Go Zero (letsgozero.org) is a national campaign calling for all education settings be zero carbon by 2030. Its regional reps will help you take the steps necessary to reduce your school's carbon emissions, and you can monitor your progress with a carbon emissions calculator available from Eco Schools (see eco-schools.org.uk/count-your-carbon).

Procurement: Getting your facilities teams on board is a great place to start. The UKSSN Operations group (ops.ukssn.org) – part of the UK Schools Sustainability Network – is run by SBLs, estate managers, governors and volunteers, and can provide you with great advice and access to a wide support network.

Biodiversity: The recently opened National Education Nature Park programme (educationnaturepark.org.uk) enables schools to better engage with vibrant biodiversity sites situated in their school's local area. Schools can log their geographical location, track changes and find plenty of helpful resources for getting pupils more involved and knowledgeable about the natural wonders to be found on their own doorstep.

A failure to change

Our lives are dedicated to developing our students and equipping them for their futures – and right now, science tells us that their future is changing rapidly, yet our education system is not.

Students are witnessing climate change impacts around the world. In recent years, millions have boldly skipped school and taken to the streets in protest, wanting their voices to be heard. As teachers, this is an ongoing situation that we can't afford to ignore.

Georgina Beard is a secondary maths teacher and climate ambassador; Elena Lengthorn is a senior lecturer in teacher education

MAKING THE CHANGE

Effecting a green transition within schools will entail making a number of significant changes, in terms of both actions and mindsets.

Communicating what you're intending to do and how you plan to do it will be critical, given that the range of stakeholders involved spans staff, parents and students. Effective collaboration is essential for achieving desired outcomes within the urgent timescales involved. At the same time, it's important to be endlessly adaptable when working around the sheer uncertainties, unknowns and unpredictability of climate change.

There is no doubt that we must prepare young people to lead their future lives in a world fundamentally impacted by climate change. While many school leaders are increasingly mindful of their school's environmental impact, and are taking steps towards mitigating those effects, the biggest barrier is still the same – a lack of policy.

Without concrete policy imposed at national level, these vital measures will continue to be merely optional. Schools remain money- and time-poor, with the result that their energies will be naturally concentrated first and foremost on the government priorities of the day.

Ensuring that matters of environmental awareness and sustainability become a key feature of inspections and other accountability systems is crucial. Until the government recognises this, headteachers must use their power to enable all staff to prioritise environmentally-friendly choices.

How well equipped is your school to understand and embrace the green transition? We need to teach both literacy and carbon literacy. Discuss net zero in maths lessons. Explore the meaning of 'carbon footprints' in science lessons. Because schools are confronting a challenge of adaptability, and will need to exercise excellent collaboration and communication skills if they're to meet it.

Assert your PRESENCE

If your behaviour management style isn't having the impact you'd hope, trying injecting it with more presence and clarity, suggests **Robin Launder**...

Presence and clarity work together. When your delivery exhibits the former, your students will be more likely to give you their full attention. When you demonstrate the latter, they're more likely to understand what you're saying. When combined, there's a greater chance that your students will behave as you want them to.

This close connection is why presence and clarity have their own joint chapter in my recently published book, *Brilliant Behaviour in 60 Seconds or Less* (out now!). The tips presented here come from there – and the more you use them, the greater your presence and clarity will be.

Positioning, posture, primer, direction

Take a central and commanding position when you address the class. Stand square on and take up space. Don't fidget or pace around the room – it's distracting and conveys nervousness. Instead, own the space by remaining still and being self-contained.

Use a primer (e.g. "*Year 9s...*") and direction ("*...eyes on me.*") when issuing instructions. Be sure to include a brief pause after the primer so that the students have a moment to focus on you. That way, they won't miss or misunderstand the direction.

You could also add a gesture for added emphasis. For the below examples, these could respectively entail putting down an imaginary pen, and raising your palms upward:

- "*Class... pens down.*"
- "*Haley's group – you may now stand.*"

Eye contact and non-verbals

When addressing the class, insist on maintaining eye contact and scan the students.

Our innate tendency is to look at people when they speak to us, to the point where it feels rude not to, so let your gaze settle on a few random – and not-so-random – students. Be sure to make appropriate allowances for students with SEND.

Non-verbal communication can include gestures, facial expressions, physical movement, pauses in delivery and body posture, as well as eye contact. To be a clear and compelling presence in the class, these elements must all be exaggerated to a degree. Subtle non-verbals can be easily missed and/or misunderstood, so think of yourself as an actor playing to the cheap seats at the back of the theatre. That's the level of exaggeration you need to be going for.

"Think of yourself as an actor playing to the cheap seats at the back of the theatre"

Confident vocalising, casual confidence

Speak with the expectation that what you're saying will be listened to. Take out any nervousness, hesitancy or suggestion of an apologetic tone. Also, don't rush. Rushing tells your students that your message isn't important – because if it was, you wouldn't rush.

Instead, use a deliberate and crisp delivery. Devices such as dramatic pauses, keyword emphasis and repetition — and, indeed, repetition and repetition — can be used to highlight important content.

Most discussions about presence will tend to focus on those formal classroom elements, but you do also need presence for less formal interactions – such as when you're exploring an idea with students, or during whole class discussions. These are the times when you'll need to exude *casual confidence*.

The core elements stay the same. It's still best to face students square on, establish eye contact and take up space, but you can now be more relaxed in how you achieve those things.

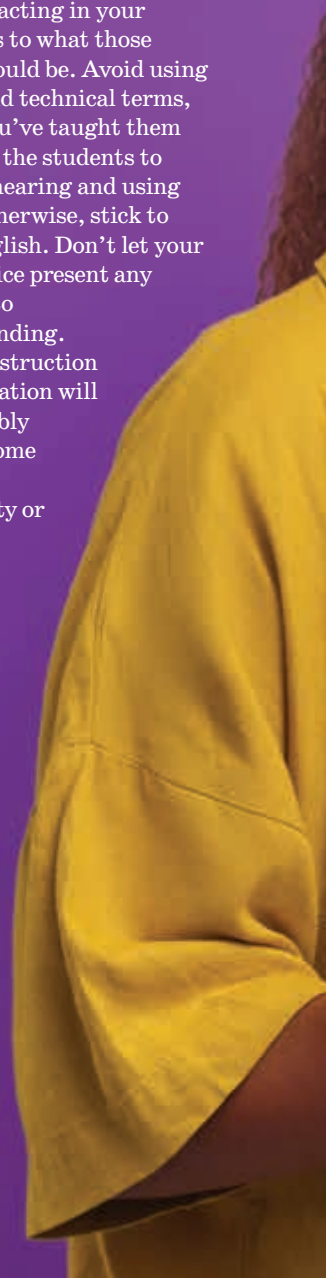
You might, for instance, lean against the side of your desk, or perhaps even perch on top of it. Your body language can afford to be more open, and the way you speak, more conversational. You'll probably smile and nod more, too. Low-key humour might also feature.

Even so, you're still very much the person in charge, orchestrating contributions from the class and managing your students' behaviour. In fact, it will be the very casualness of your approach, combined with an abundance of confidence, that tells your students *you're in charge*.

Concise precision, carefully controlled

Use as few words as possible, and be exacting in your choices as to what those words should be. Avoid using jargon and technical terms, unless you've taught them and want the students to practise hearing and using them. Otherwise, stick to plain English. Don't let your word choice present any barriers to understanding.

If an instruction or explanation will unavoidably involve some degree of complexity or



difficulty, do your best to try and give out only one item of information at a time.

If those separated items amount to very simple messages, then you can try giving out up to three items, but no more than that. Most people can (with effort) hold four different items of information within their working memory; sticking to three will ensure that you keep to the safer side of this cognitive limit.

Describe and demonstrate

Describe what you're doing, while you're doing it. This applies equally, whether you're showing students how to pack materials away, safely collecting scientific equipment or politely contributing to a class discussion. By describing and demonstrating the process in question you'll be getting *two* routes into your students' working memory – one *auditory* and one *visual*. Consequently, the students will be clearer about what to do.

Display key information visually, and then explain that information. Flow diagrams, numbered lists and bullet points can work very well for this. Here, for example, is a bullet point list instructing students how to use mini-whiteboards:

- Write your answer on the MWB
- Turn the MWB over so that it is face down
- Put the MWB pen down
- Don't look at anyone else's answer
- On my cue, show me your answer

Another benefit of displaying information is that it provides an ongoing reminder of what to do.

'Just in time' reminders, checking for understanding

The best time to remind students of what to do is *just before* the behaviour will be required – a 'just in time' reminder, if you will. Again, limit yourself to issuing three distinct pieces of information so that you don't cause cognitive overload. If the instruction will unavoidably consist of more than three items, *display* the relevant key information, as described above.

There are many ways to check for understanding (such as mini whiteboards, thumbs up/down, traffic lights, etc.), but the most common is *random sampling* – that is, getting one or two students to explain, in their own words, what it is that you've just said.

When doing this, it can be helpful to choose a student who doesn't always pay as much attention as they might. Checking for understanding has several benefits. It…

- …assesses understanding
- …clarifies understanding
- …increases retention
- …highlights the importance of the instruction
- …tells students what to do just at the point when they need to know it
- …reduces wriggle room

'Wriggle room' is the gap between what you say and what your students understand. It's the space in which students can claim – genuinely or not – that they '*don't know what to do*'.

Checking for understanding – and, indeed, every other tip in this article – will help to reduce this room to wriggle. As a result, students will be much more likely to behave as you want them to behave.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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). For more information, visit behaviourbuddy.co.uk

INCLUSIVE *by design*

If policymakers and leaders in mainstream settings want to make a real difference for students with SEND, we Special School staff are happy to help, advises **Terri Bottriell-Wyse**...

I started my career in teaching 23 years ago, as a special needs teacher in a mainstream school. It was a good job, alongside great staff. If asked back then, however, whether 'every teacher was a teacher of SEND', I would have said *definitely not*...

I worked in the SEN department. We were a small group of five special needs teachers, based upstairs in a distant corner of the building. We were accompanied by our little army of amazing TAs, who our SENCo would deploy each day in classrooms across the school. Pupils came to us in groups of 10 for lessons in literacy and numeracy, or for the occasional one-to-one intervention session. *We* were the teachers of SEND.

Tucked away

I have fantastic memories from this period in my career, and I do feel we made a difference. At the time, I believed the school was keen to meet the needs of pupils with SEND – yet when I look back now, I can see just how separate our department was from the rest of the school.

As my skills and expertise developed, so too did my career. I went on to become a SENCo myself, again working within a mainstream secondary school. Once more, I found myself tucked away, situated in a department at the topmost corner of the building, with little opportunity for interaction with staff from other departments.

One day, out of sheer frustration and a need for some creative thinking around how the school could better address issues of inclusion, the inclusion lead requested that we take a 'blue sky day', during which we would prepare and pitch suggestions for senior leadership. We were delighted to be allowed this opportunity – a chance to effect true, whole school impact.

We were, however, very disappointed to be told, following our pitches, that they wouldn't be taking us up on any of our ideas. It was demoralising.

> **"The existing system isn't based around inclusion, but exclusion"**

Perhaps by way of consolation, though, I was given the chance to provide SEND training to staff during a whole school INSET. Aware of how busy the teachers were, and their struggles at catering to pupils with SEN, I spent hours creating SEN toolkits comprising help sheets and various resources for every teacher. Once again, I was left disappointed during a learning walk a few weeks later to find that not one teacher was using them.

Setting up for failure

As a 'SEN expert' working in mainstream settings, I've often felt that I'm talking a different language, while working to different priorities, approached with a different way of thinking to most other teachers.

Things eventually got to the point where I wanted to leave, and so decided to enter the world of the Special School – and what a relief it was. I'd finally found my people, and a place where I belonged. The sad thing, looking back, is that if I felt this way as an advocate for children with SEN navigating the mainstream system, then how on earth must it have felt for a child with SEND?

15 years later and we find ourselves in the midst of a SEND crisis. Whilst I know that there are many mainstream professionals working extremely hard to meet the needs of students with SEND – having had the privilege of working with a few myself – too often, I've found myself sat on the edge of conversations between mainstream colleagues who feel completely overwhelmed, and are struggling with difficult to meet SEND requirements in their classrooms.

Many mainstream headteachers will cite the difficulties associated with SEND as one of the toughest professional challenges they face. The essence of such conversations has been that mainstream schools don't have the time, tools or budget needed for the task. Quite simply, it looks as though mainstream teachers are being made to fit square pegs into the round hole that is the mainstream education system. And it's my view that this approach does little more than simply set everyone up for failure.

Going over number

This challenge isn't going to go away. A quick Google search will show how, in the UK, we've seen an increase in overall SEND prevalence, and a significant rise in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) being issued. In the Special School sector, we're being constantly pushed to go over number by local education authorities unable to create enough places to meet demand.

The government's answer to all this will soon be published in a white paper on SEND Reform. There's been much media talk of a desire to reduce families' reliance on EHCPs, along with government promises to redirect funding towards improved inclusion in mainstream schools. There have also been hints of new

and improved SEND training initiatives, and inclusion metrics being incorporated within the new inspection framework.

While I'm certainly in favour of SEND and inclusion being made key priorities for the government, I feel these particular plans will go nowhere near far enough, or ultimately amount to much more than a rehash of past intentions and initiatives.

Fix the pathways, not the children

The notion that 'Every teacher is a teacher of SEND' centres on the belief that all educators should be trained in recognising, adapting for and supporting students with SEND. While I'm firmly supportive of ensuring that teachers know as much as possible about the needs of children with SEND, any expectation that this increased knowledge will somehow address most of the challenges linked to inclusion is somewhat problematic, to say the least.

Mainstream teachers often receive only a limited amount of training by external SEN specialists. Collaboration with the Special Schools sector is rare, despite the wealth of valuable frontline expertise available. Unfortunately, the existing education system continues to emphasise '*Helping SEND students to keep up*' through interventions delivered outside the classroom, rather than considering the idea that school environments and curriculum design could be vastly improved to enable *all* children – including, but not just those with SEND – to thrive in the same lessons.

The goal of having all teachers become SEN teachers will never work as a standalone objective. Why? Because the National Curriculum isn't designed for students with SEND. Traditional pathways through assessment and accreditation were originally created to measure the progress of *neurotypical students*, thus resulting in the vast majority of children with SEND being identified as 'failing'.

Rather than conceding that how we teach and measure children's progress may need fixing, we instead conclude that the children themselves need fixing! The existing system isn't based around inclusion, but *exclusion* – and until that's addressed, it scarcely matters how much teachers learn about SEND. Because they'll never be able to truly deliver on inclusion.

A genuine revolution

If we really are in the midst of a SEND crisis, then now is the perfect time to make some big changes. We need a government that's brave enough to genuinely revolutionise education. Mainstream education shouldn't just work ever harder to make square pegs fit; rather, it should be able to flex to fit the needs of every child, in all their wonderful shapes and forms.

Rather than revisit the same old unsuccessful, albeit well-intentioned aims of the past, I'd suggest that the government should include within its plans a look at the Special Schools sector, as part of wider efforts to revolutionise the education system. As part of improving inclusive practice in mainstream environments, let's examine existing practice in SEND schools that might benefit mainstream practitioners and have the government fund this accordingly.

Neurotypical and neurodiverse children alike would both gain from making inclusive educational design a key goal. This would also enable teachers to refocus on what they originally set out to be – not 'teachers of SEN', but excellent teachers of *all children*, irrespective of their differences.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Terri Bottriell-Wyse is the headteacher of a special school, as well as a satellite provision based within a mainstream secondary school, supporting pupils with learning and additional needs

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

5 considerations in special schools that could benefit all learners...

1 SAFE ENVIRONMENTS
Before expecting anyone to learn anything, teachers must ensure their students' physical and emotional needs are being met. Schools should feel like safe, comfortable spaces. When a child feels they can trust the adults around them, and can discern clear structures, manageable expectations and predictable routines, they can better focus and learn.

2 ACCESSIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
The vast majority of children, regardless of need, enjoy learning through doing – so let's make it an expectation that all subjects can be taught using practical strategies. Also, never tell yourself that a child 'cannot access the learning' in your lesson. It's your job to find a way. Be creative, and work out *how* you can change the way you're teaching, so that every child in your class can gain from the learning experience.

3 CLEAR COMMUNICATION
No one ever learned less because their teacher communicated both verbally and visually. During lessons, ask yourself if there's anyone in the room who might benefit from a different style of communication. Remember that the same principle can also apply to your various communications with parents and carers.

4 NO TWO CHILDREN ARE THE SAME
Regardless of need or neurodiversity, every child is unique, so focus on getting to know and understand each child – their experiences, strengths, interests, the challenges they face, etc. With that in mind, there should be enough bend and flex in your system to adjust and respond to the different types of learners we teach. Methods of assessment and accreditation should always allow for progress and achievement at all levels to be properly measured and appropriately celebrated.

5 PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD
In a Special School, we have the luxury of being able to adapt our curriculum to cover only what's relevant to the students attending. When our young people leave us, they need more than just the knowledge of how to pass exams; they need the skills and knowledge to navigate the world around them, and find success in their careers and social relationships. Is what you're teaching purely about passing tests and assessments? Or are you also preparing the students to be good, happy and successful citizens?

Hitting *the mark*

With its capacity to unlock students' reserves of resilience, articulacy and emotional literacy, drama is a subject that still matters, writes **Martin Matthews**

Drama often exists as an enigma in schools, especially at KS3. It's a subject that appears sporadically on KS3 timetables, but which can also stretch into the extracurricular realm – that 'other opportunities' area of school life.

It's a subject that's very much present in schools, but also somewhat elusive. Images of the school production will typically adorn corridor walls to celebrate students' performances, but drama itself will often lack presence in students' learning diets.

Given the push that STEM subjects have seen in recent years, coupled with the EBacc, drama has only become even more 'extra' with regards to curriculum time. As a noun, 'drama' can evoke many ideas as to what it actually means, and what its role on the curriculum ought to be, thus begging the question – what exactly *is* drama, and what is it for?

The 'other' space

At KS3, drama teachers will often find themselves stuck between preparing students for potentially taking KS4/5 qualifications in drama and the performing arts, whilst also focusing on what drama can do for individuals more holistically. Unfortunately, the latter is often immeasurable, and as such, can lead to drama's place within school being undervalued.

Drama is usually taught in open spaces, such as drama studios, school halls and canteens (though I was once timetabled to teach a Y9 drama class for a year in a science lab). This 'other' space, coupled with good teaching can give drama a unique power to develop resilience in students.

At the same time, it can also unlock students' articulacy and emotional literacy, and help them develop capacities that other subjects will rarely explore, or even touch on with comparable depth and immediacy. Yet these capacities are increasingly vital for young people, as they grow up in a complex, high-pressure world.

> **"In the open space of the drama class, failure isn't just predictable, but perhaps essential"**

Drama often positions students not just as learners, but as *participants* who can create, collaborate, interpret and take risks. It can engage the whole person – the intellect, as well as the body – spark imagination and heighten emotions in ways that make its impact both distinctive and lasting.

Learning to fail

In the open space of the drama class, failure isn't just predictable, but perhaps essential. Performances aren't always successful – improvisations can go wrong, and group work often doesn't go exactly to plan. These failures, however, should become a springboard to learning and developing resilience.

In a drama lesson, students will be invited to reflect, revise their ideas and try again. They'll learn that growth can come from reflecting and reworking, and that mistakes are opportunities, rather than dead ends.

This experience can be transformative. A student who might have once hesitated to speak in front of their peers can grow through devising a scene with others, while realising that their ideas have value and that their voice matters. In drama, students should discover that creativity is inherently uncertain, and that confidence comes not from avoiding difficulty, but from embracing it.

'Creativity', of course, is notoriously difficult to pin down. As a word, it's become ubiquitous and overused, to the point where it has no clear meaning. Creativity is an enigma. No one knows where it comes from, though it may, perhaps, be a key part of being human.

Individuals may believe they are not creative when comparing themselves to creative greats, while not realising the importance of their own creative practice. What drama can do is enable a creative outlet, often through small acts of creativity that can grow in the open drama space and help a person to grow too. This can leave a lasting impact in other parts of students' lives, and indeed their experiences across the school curriculum.

'Soft' skills

In English, students are required to be creative when writing, but creativity in that subject can sometimes be restricted due to the nature of written assessment. Drama spaces aren't subject to the same pressures, particularly at KS3. Giving students space to experiment, without fear of judgement, can create a safe environment in which risk-taking is rewarded and determination is celebrated. These safe spaces that allow for risk-taking can, and perhaps should be mirrored in other subjects.

Questions continue to swirl around artificial intelligence and what role (if any) it should have in schools and across society as a whole. It could be argued that this development, coupled with the earlier growth of social media

platforms and other forms of online communication, has reduced people's ability to think, and to speak clearly and thoughtfully.

Drama offers a path to supporting articulacy, since the subject is centred on communication in the living, human space. Drama focuses on performance skills, such as voice projection, vocal experiments and using the body to convey meaning, as well as language itself to good effect.

Closely tied to that is the importance of listening effectively and responding appropriately, while not forgetting the non-verbal need to communicate via gesture and movement, and convey expression with deeper meaning.

These skills can tend to be seen as 'soft', but are, in fact, needed across the curriculum and wider society perhaps more than ever. Articulacy becomes entwined with confidence – not just having the ability to speak, but to know, understand and 'own' one's voice.

Becoming the character

Oral communication is a highly desirable skill among employers, and yet many students will leave school lacking confidence in their ability to speak at all, let alone compellingly – especially in front of others.

By giving students reasons to express themselves in the drama space, we can embed articulacy as an integral part of selfhood. Not just as a test requirement at the end of a scheme of work, but as an *essential life skill*.

As well as supporting resilience and articulacy, drama can nurture students' emotional literacy in profound and distinctive ways. Every time a student steps into a role, they are invited to inhabit a perspective that's beyond their own – an act of imagination that helps to develops compassion and understanding.

It's different to simply reading about a character in a novel; students in drama *become* the character, both physically and emotionally. They will get to actually live out dilemmas, rather than merely analysing them from a safe distance behind a desk.

As students rehearse a scene, they will experience emotions that are visceral, yet safe, being part of a work of fiction. In doing so, however, they will build the capacity to better recognise and regulate emotions in themselves, and respond more thoughtfully to those of others.

Most importantly of all, drama creates these opportunities within a *community of practice*. Performances are inherently collaborative processes, where meaning is made alongside others. This nurtures connectedness, helping students feel seen, valued and understood. For some, the drama space can become a sanctuary.

Performative measures

Other subjects can do all of this too, of course. And drama spaces, if managed badly, can have negative outcomes. But it is the *living space of the drama room* that makes drama different.

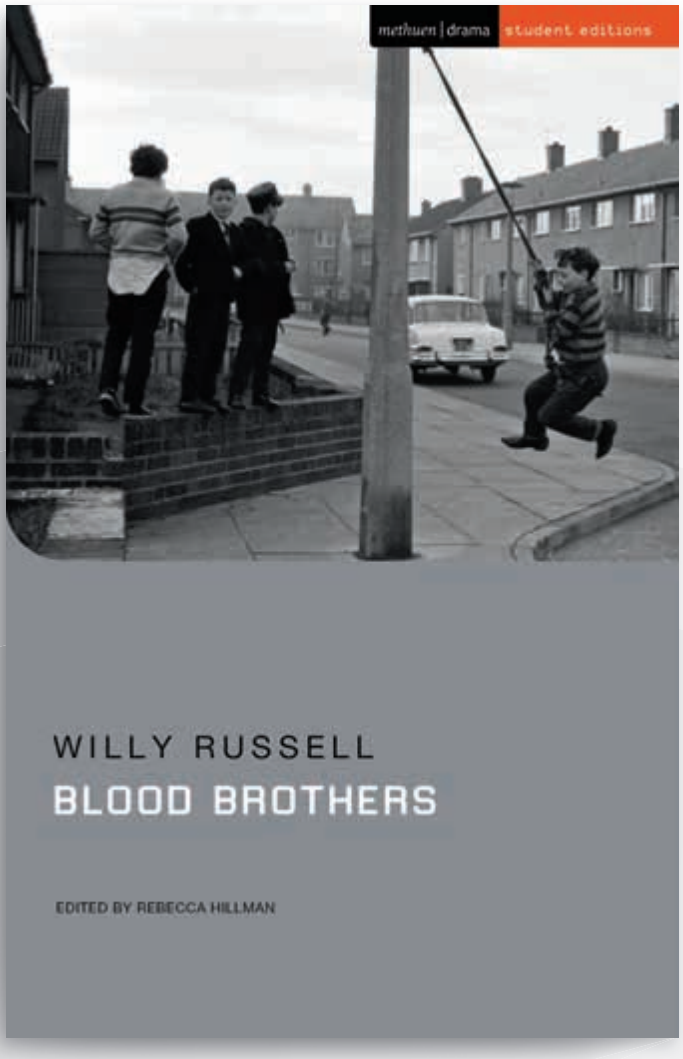
Drama is perhaps unique in that it requires and engages the whole person. In the drama space, we practise the kinds of human capacities that will sustain students far beyond school, and which can help young people develop in ways that can't always be calculated or neatly measured.

In an age of performative measures and high stakes, end of year written exams, drama can often be at risk of yet further marginalisation – but the skills it cultivates are among those now most needed in the world beyond the school gates.

Employers greatly value effective communication skills and capacity for empathy and resilience among their employees. The human skills drama aims to develop are inherently *human*. They're important, transferable and can endure.

Drama offers a counterbalance. It reminds us that education isn't just about 'information giving', but about helping young people to grow and develop. Drama can exist in the drama studio – but perhaps the best classrooms generally are those that hold a little of the essence of drama within them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Martin Matthews teaches in a secondary school in the north west of England



BLOOD BROTHERS

Methuen Drama Student Edition

Willy Russell

Edited by Rebecca Hillman

A revised Student Edition of Willy Russell's landmark play, *Blood Brothers*.

Includes the full play text and introductory commentary by Rebecca Hillman, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Communications, Drama and Film at the University of Exeter, UK, which offers accessible and vivid insights into the play and the context in which it was written through a 21st-century lens.

As well as helping students appreciate the play today, it also conveys how ground-breaking *Blood Brothers* was at the time in representing working-class lives on stage, as well as explicitly exposing the flaws of the British class system.

9781350386198 | £10.99

WHAT YOU GET WITH THIS STUDENT EDITION:

- The complete play text of *Blood Brothers*
- Introduction to the play's context, main themes and production history (including the first performance of *Blood Brothers* in a classroom)
- Chronology of Willy Russell's life and work
- Bibliography of primary and secondary materials to aid revision

Find out more at **bloomsbury.com/blood-brothers**

BLOOMSBURY

FOCUS ON: HUMANITIES

Why the term 'natural disaster' is an oxymoron; what schools can do to reveal the true nature of worship in their local area; and how to balance the teaching of historical fact with the need for students to apply their interpretive skills...

How can the study of humanities help us question our assumptions and see the world anew?

THE AGENDA:

Tracing the FAULT LINE

Steve Brace considers the framing at work when geography classes study 'natural disasters' – and why even the term itself is up for debate...

"*There's no such thing as a natural disaster.*" So says Ilan Kelman, professor of disasters and health at University College London. The study of natural hazards – popularly termed 'natural disasters' – their impacts and peoples' exposure to them has become a popular part of the geography curriculum. Case studies might feature as tectonic and flooding hazards in KS3, extreme weather at GCSE, or more in-depth study of what can cause natural hazards at A Level.

In connecting physical and human processes, such hazards provide a context for better understanding how geographical processes are both interdependent with, and an influence on different areas locally and globally.

Choices and decisions

However, geography teachers will be mindful of the need to bring careful nuance to bear on how they teach about hazards – and particularly how and when a 'hazard' becomes a 'disaster'.

Professor Kelman reminds us of this in his seminal work, *Disasters by Choice*. The book argues that it is the actions of *humans*, through peoples' choices and decisions, that can turn a natural hazard into a catastrophe. He observes that there is no such thing as a 'natural disaster'; rather, it is "*Nature that produces phenomena – such as earthquakes and floods. But they are only hazardous because of human choices*."

He illustrates his argument by citing the hypothetical example of a housing development – without earthquake proofing – being approved in an earthquake zone. Were this to occur, would the resulting hazard be the fault of the earthquake, or actually the fault of the people who made the decision for the development to go ahead? (see tinyurl.com/ts147-G1)

> **"Natural hazards are likely to have greater impacts for poorer people"**

Variable risk

There is also spatial difference in how vulnerable different types of people will be to the risks presented by a natural hazard. This might result in some people being harmed and their properly damaged, whilst others might only experience low impact, despite comparable levels of risk.

Dr Martin Parham, a lecturer in disaster management, has argued that natural hazards are likely to have greater impacts for poorer people, those who might be displaced, children under 5 and disabled people. Factors that can help to reduce such vulnerabilities include effective and working infrastructure; access to healthcare; water and sanitation; disaster preparedness; and access to communications that can inform and warn people, support decision-making and facilitate responses by emergency services.

Given the ready availability of social media and 24-hour news coverage nowadays, it might be tempting to believe that the world is constantly beset by an almost perpetual series of disasters. A useful corrective to this mindset is the work of geography teacher David Alcock, whose Hopeful Geographies approach highlights how positive progress can be explored in the classroom (see tinyurl.com/ts147-G2).

Elsewhere, Dr Hannah Ritchie, via her Our World in Data website (ourworldindata.org), has shown that there has, in fact, been a steep fall in the number of fatalities resulting from such disasters over the last 100 years.

As she points out, "*Deaths haven't declined so steeply because disasters are becoming less frequent or intense. The main reason that fewer people are dying is that we've gotten better at protecting ourselves and each other.*"

Partial views

This positive trend is further illustrated by the way in

which Bangladesh has reduced its exposure to cyclones. 50 years ago, more than 300,000 people were killed when a cyclone hit Bangladesh's coast. Cyclones continued to be responsible for high levels of fatalities into the 1980s and 1990s, but there was a markedly different impact when Cyclone Amphan struck Bangladesh's coast in 2020.

This was a category 5 cyclone – the strongest type of cyclone, with wind speeds reaching 160mph/260kph in the Bay of Bengal – yet the number of subsequent fatalities were far lower, with only 26 deaths recorded. This reduction had been achieved through the use of improved cyclone detection and early warning systems, the construction of 12,000 shelters and more effective community preparedness and response plans – including the successful evacuation of over 2 million people.

A further consideration for geography teachers is how their study of natural hazards might represent different locations around the world. For example, it's not uncommon for Haiti to feature only once on a geography scheme of work, and then only in relation to its experience of the 2010 earthquake.

This characterisation of places solely in relation to high profile disasters runs the risk of leaving pupils with very partial views of certain countries. Ofsted has picked up on this, noting in its 2023 geography subject report that the tendency "*Was most common in schools where leaders had not considered the dangers of teaching single stories about places in their curriculum*." (see tinyurl.com/ts147-G3)

Direct exposure

Nor should we be blind to misconceptions that might pertain to comparatively prosperous countries. For example, according to the government's Environment Agency, 6.1 million British people currently live in areas that are exposed to flood risk, amounting to roughly 10% of the country's population. Over the next 25 years, as a result of climate change, this is set to rise to 8 million people – at which point, 1 in 4 English properties will be located in areas of flood risk. (see tinyurl.com/ts147-G4)

Yet when people are asked about this risk, many will discount their own direct exposure. When surveyed in 2023/24, around half of the respondents who were currently living in a flood risk area did not believe that flooding would happen to them.

Flooding is just one of the natural hazards to be found in the UK. An up-to-date overview of them all can be found in the National Risk Register (see tinyurl.com/ts147-G6), which considers a range of natural and environmental hazards including wildfires, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, storms, high temperatures and heatwaves, low temperatures and snow – as well as flooding, drought and air quality. Each risk is analysed in terms of its likelihood and possible impact. The likelihood of an earthquake occurring in the UK, for instance, is low, and any that did would be unlikely to cause severe damage. Conversely, the National Risk Register identifies air quality as "*The largest environmental risk to UK public health and linked with reduced lifespans*".

To this, we can add peoples' differing levels of vulnerability to such risks. As noted by Professor Danny Dorling, it's predominately Black British children living in high rise buildings on estates without greenery who will typically be exposed to the highest levels of air pollution (see tinyurl.com/ts147-G7).

Your pupils could therefore be studying natural hazards that affect populations in distant localities, or ones they may soon be faced with on their own doorsteps, such as local air quality or flood risk. By exploring those issues of vulnerability, risk, human agency and progress, pupils can assess for themselves whether there really is anything 'natural' about a so-called 'natural disaster'.

COULD YOUR SCHOOL BE AT RISK OF FLOODING?

The DfE and The Environment Agency have co-produced a resource that lets schools enter their postcode to check whether they may be exposed to flood risk – and if so, sign up for flood warnings.

The guidance also encourages school leaders to incorporate flood risk into their emergency planning, and to consider appropriate actions in relation to flood preparations, insurance, potential responses, best practice and recovery.

The level of risk is higher than you might expect, with the guidelines stating that, "*Nearly half of English schools (10,710) [are] at risk of flooding... this is expected to increase to at least 13,662 by the 2050s, or 16,394 at worst.*"

The full guidance and postcode tool can be accessed via tinyurl.com/ts147-G8

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Steve Brace is chief executive of the Geographical Association; for more information, visit geography.org.uk

REASONS TO TRY...

5 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

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

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

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

From the pavement to the pews

Nikki McGee explains how local worship links can turn RE lessons into living, breathing encounters with belief...

As an RE teacher, I want the subject to act as both a window and a mirror; a window that looks out on the unfamiliar, and a mirror that reflects students' own lives and communities. Local worship communities provide both, changing how students view their surroundings while turning everyday streets into stories and familiar buildings into sources of new meaning.

Local links also show how diversity isn't something distant or abstract, but present within their own community. At a time when community relations can feel fragile, that's significant. Starting with what's familiar gives students a firm point of reference. From there, they can make connections, add new layers of learning and develop a richer understanding of both religious and non-religious worldviews. With only an hour a week, every point of connection matters.

Authentic experiences

Students are often proud of their local area, and curious about it too. That curiosity leads to greater engagement than a textbook alone can achieve.

At present, I am designing a new RS curriculum that incorporates local links throughout. It hasn't been straightforward. I moved to Norfolk from Dorset during the COVID lockdown, knowing no one. Every connection was built from the ground up, but the process has been worthwhile.

A good way to start building local connections is to get involved with your local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. which can be invaluable for putting you in touch with representatives of local faith communities, both religious and non-religious, as well as other schools in your area.

Most areas also have an interfaith group that will welcome involvement from RS teachers, making for another excellent way of meeting local faith representatives and learning more about the communities your students are part of.

Lasting relationships

The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (natre.org.uk) runs groups for RE teachers across the country. Some are cross-phase, while others focus on primary or secondary. Joining one helps you share ideas, access contacts and hear about local communities. You can also use the RE Hubs website (re-hubs.uk), which is a goldmine for those looking to establish local links. As well as offering an events calendar, it also features a directory of speakers and places of worship.

Run trips when you can. These can be a logistical challenge, and coaches can be costly, but they're invaluable for giving students authentic experiences of local communities. Too often, we'll rush to organise trips to big cities, but going local can keep costs down. A visit can also be the start of a lasting relationship with that community. Many places of worship now offer virtual visits, or will come to your school, which can be a useful first step.

Even when trips are difficult, it's important to be present in the community. I'll attend walking tours, open days, festivals, talks and other events in my own time to deepen my subject knowledge and strengthen local links.

Local and social media

Local newspapers and websites often share stories about faith communities. Near me, for example, there's Network Norwich (networknorwich.co.uk), which gathers news from Christian groups. These stories can be used when teaching about religious practices, such as Passion plays at Easter or community events at Christmas.

I also follow and interact with local faith groups on social media, which keeps me informed and helps build relationships. Remember that your students and their families are part of your local community as well. Conversations with them have previously led me to valuable contacts and opportunities.

The Religion and Media Centre (religionmediacentre.org.uk) provides resources for RS teachers and also runs roadshows that bring together local faith communities. I attended one in Norwich recently and made several meaningful connections.

Building local links takes time and commitment, but the rewards are significant. It enriches your teaching, engages your students, and helps them see the diversity and depth within their own communities. In my view, it's time well invested.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Nikki McGee is the trust lead for RE at Inspiration Trust; as well as teaching three days a week and leading a SCITT programme, she is a curriculum writer and leads RE CPD for teachers across all Key Stages. Follow her at @re-mcgee.bsky.social

Presenting the PAST

History isn't fixed, observes **Philip Arkinstall** – which is exactly how we should teach it...

Last year, one of my Y7s looked up from their Pompeii worksheet and said, "*Sir, I thought everyone died in the eruption?*" It was a moment that perfectly illustrated how easily students can absorb information and form their own neat, fixed versions of the past – and how it's my job, as their teacher, to show that that history is rarely ever that simple.

For most KS4 students, the security of knowing facts and being able to showcase evidence in lessons helps to confirm their knowledge of the past. It makes it neat, tidy and safe. Yet as teachers, we know that this is only part of the story.

History is written through many interpretations, and constantly rewritten as new evidence emerges. Interpreting the past is a prime skill we need to foster within our young people – and where better place for that than in the history classroom, where the bread and butter of our interaction with the past comes from these interpretations? Done well, teaching students the power of interpretation will spark their curiosity, sharpen their critical thinking and equip them with the means to track the warping of history to suit modern politics.

Changing the story

New scholarship will often result in not just a delightful summer read, but a more nuanced and better understanding of *how the past is written* – not just a change in how we view the events in question.

Take Mary Beard's *Pompeii*. Most students (and plenty of adults) believe that the city was obliterated overnight, that thousands perished, and that the site lay largely untouched until the 1800s. Beard reveals, though, that people knew of Pompeii before its 'discovery' in the 19th century.

She writes of how the city's residents knew the eruption was coming, which led to many escaping. Sharing this with Y7 turns what could be a tidy tale into a entry point for launching an investigation into '*How do we know that...?*'

"What's crucial is for teachers to show students that history can be legitimately reinterpreted"

Rewriting certainties

Introducing the concept of new evidence into historical certainties enables history to be seen more like a science. The invitation of new scholarship lends itself well to taking what we 'know', and creating a new history that alters the way the past can be seen.

Hallie Rubbenhold's 2019 book *The Five* is a strong example of this. It's groundbreaking work that explores the lives of the women murdered by Jack the Ripper, but was met with anger from those in the 'Ripperologist' community. For them, these women were sex workers. Rubenhold's investigations, however, opened up new lines of enquiry which showed how several of his five victims, although living in Whitechapel at the time of their murder, were, in fact, variously a domestic servant, the manager of a coffee house and a professional seller of ballads. It remains a striking example of how fresh research can challenge assumptions while enhancing our knowledge – in this case, of the struggles commonly faced by Victorian working-class women.

Historical revisionism

Building upon the Pompeii example, teachers could consider developing an awareness of historical revisionism with their students. Examining how Oliver Cromwell has been viewed during different time periods is a fun way to explore how interpretations are formed.

Post-1660, he's besmirched and ridiculed for his seizure of power, and labelled a tyrant. His body is exhumed, put on trial and beheaded. Yet by the 19th Century, he's seen by Victorian Whig historians as one of the 'Fathers of Democracy'. Consequently, his statue is placed outside the Palace of Westminster.

Following WWII, however, the winds of favour shift *again*, with Cromwell now compared to dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini. Today, modern historians like Ian Gentles tend to take a more balanced approach to his life, as seen in Gentles' 2025 book, *Oliver Cromwell: God's Warrior and the English Revolution*.

Setting students loose on these contrasting interpretations makes a powerful point. The same man, the same events, but *very different histories*, depending on when the story is being told and by whom.

Risks and rewards

Of course, showing students that history is up for debate can feel risky. Will they come away from the lesson feeling confused and doubting everything they've learned? That may be overstating the issue, though, since over the years I've found pupils to be more than capable of processing differences in time, and recognising the re-writing of historical certainties when they see it.

Some of these risks can be associated with a lack of support for different needs within the

classroom. Scaffolding the information and chunking the detail are effective ways of slowly taking pupils' 'known' knowledge and playing around with what the evidence presents.

What's crucial is for teachers to show students that history can be legitimately reinterpreted when new evidence arises, whilst at the same time demonstrating how history can be distorted for political ends.

Misrepresenting the past

To take this one step further, we could look at how historical events have been used to write a new narrative with a distinctly political agenda.

In 2007, Vladimir Putin saw to it that a wave of new statues dedicated to the last Romanov Tsar, Nicholas II, were sent to countries across eastern Europe. These statues have come to be seen as a means for Putin to connect his modern Russia with an earlier period of history, in a way that downplayed the role of the Soviet Union. They show Nicholas II as a powerful ruler, which isn't how history has recorded the end of the Romanov dynasty. In fact, that isn't even how Nicholas saw himself at the time.

Is this an example of a leader trying to paint a picture of his country's past in a more powerful light, so as to draw connections between Russia and Europe prior to the Ukrainian war? From this vantage point, the statues certainly seem to presenting a more romanticised version of events that sidelines the reality of Nicholas' rule while airbrushing the Soviet experience.

Uncomfortable to teach

Within our own country, the revisiting of historical topics such as the British Empire has caused a great deal of debate among historians, teachers and politicians. In 2018, a tweet posted by the HM Treasury Twitter account stated that, "*Millions of you helped end the slave trade through your taxes*". This led to an outpouring of hostility, and the deletion of the tweet hours later.

Many wonderful books have been published about Britain's role in the transatlantic slave trade, and the world that has been created because of it. The odd lesson looking at the Windrush generation, or schemes of work that address the transatlantic slave trade will often miss the chance to look at how this period of British History has been interpreted in years gone by.

It may be uncomfortable to teach, but it's necessary if we're to make our students rounded individuals, and able to move on from '*This is how things were...*' to '*This is how history is written...?*'

Why it matters

History taught as fact is safe, but can often be misleading in terms of the truth it presents, and in how we present the subject in the classroom.

History taught as something that's dynamic, contested and, yes, sometimes uncomfortable is far more realistic and powerful. It not only makes our students better historians, but equips them with the skills to be discerning citizens, and alert to how the past can be written, rewritten and manipulated.

So, next time a Y7 insists that '*Everyone died in Pompeii*,' stop and think. You don't just want to correct them. This is your chance to open the door to a journey that your history lessons should be taking. It isn't just what happened, but '***How** are we sure?*' and '*Why are they writing that, in that time period?*'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Philip Arkinstall is a lecturer at the University of Gloucestershire, Secondary Partnership Lead; prior to this he was a head of history in secondary schools for 19 years

What's New?

Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education

1 Everything you need to teach media and information literacy

In a world where anyone can publish anything, young people are growing up in an environment where information is fast, fragmented and not always trustworthy. The First News TeachKit: MIL makes teaching media and information literacy easy, with clear progressive frameworks, fully resourced schemes of work, dynamic teaching packs and plenty of teacher support.

Lessons are updated fortnightly using the latest news – even difficult events – to spark safe, meaningful discussion; visit **firstnews.co.uk/mil** to find out more about how to develop your students as capable and confident consumers, and creators of media and information who will be ready to question, challenge and positively shape the world around them.

2 Transform your sports experience

Looking to enhance your sports facilities this year? Check out education canopy provider Fordingbridge's growing range of all-weather sports solutions:

- Join the padel boom: Adding all-weather padel facilities to your site creates a coveted new facility for students and an exciting new revenue-driving opportunity.
- Make existing facilities all-weather: Installing a canopy over existing courts is an investment that reaps instant rewards, enabling your school to hold and host year-round sports lessons, clubs and events.
- Encourage fitness: Add covered gym facilities to your playground to encourage students to develop a daily fitness habit.

Find out more about Fordingbridge's sector leading sports solutions today at **www.fordingbridge.co.uk/sectors/canopies-for-schools**

3 Enhance your history teaching

Join the Historical Association's 6-week Experienced Teacher Programme for subject-specific professional development tailored to Key Stages 3 to 5. Running online from February until May 2025, this evening course is designed for teachers who want to stay in the classroom while engaging with the latest thinking and debates in history education – without being talked down to as if they lack experience.

Explore cutting-edge debates, access a wide range of research and resources and collaborate with colleagues to enrich your practice. This is no one-size-fits-all course, but an invigorating dive into history's biggest questions. Visit **history.org.uk/go/ETP** to secure your place today!

4 Free SEND training

The Universal SEND Services programme offers free, flexible training around SEND to help the education workforce identify and meet learners' needs effectively, resulting in a more inclusive mainstream system.

A range of opportunities are available, including an award-winning series of 20 online units exploring some of the most commonly observed barriers to learning – regardless of age, label or area of need. Each unit takes under an hour to complete, and provides clear guidance on adaptations to help meet the needs of all learners. There's no need to study in order, and each can be completed across a number of sessions. To find out more, visit **bit.ly/4nuwReD**

5 Unbeatable residentials

Porthpean Outdoor in Cornwall offers schools an unbeatable residential experience that inspires learning beyond the classroom. Thanks to being just a 5-minute walk from our beach, we can provide exciting water, beach and land-based activities such as kayaking, coasteering, stand-up paddleboarding, climbing, archery, and bushcraft, with opportunities to build confidence and resilience every step of the way.

The cosy on-site accommodation at our secure site with catering facilities means we can take the stress out of your residential. With safety, inclusivity, and education at the core, Porthpean Outdoor gives teachers peace of mind and pupils memories that last a lifetime. You book the coach – we'll do the rest! For more information, visit **porthpean.com** or call **01726 72901**

6 Refresh your teaching

Upskill your team and overhaul your RE teaching with subject-specific, adviser-led INSET days, tailored one-to-one support and CPD from RE Today.

We understand the challenges involved in equipping staff with the skills and subject knowledge needed to navigate the complex topics of RE. RE Today is at the forefront of the subject, empowering schools and teachers with the latest forms of training, valuable consultancy and expertly designed classroom resources. Our National RE Advisers are fully equipped and ready to deliver bespoke support.

Whether you need team-wide training or tailored advice, we will help you tackle today's RE challenges with confidence. Find out more via **bit.ly/3K5Nv5J**

7 Make your mark

Introducing the new YPO whiteboard markers – refillable, reusable and remarkable, to help keep every lesson flowing so you can make your mark – lesson, after lesson, after lesson.

Carefully engineered to write for up to 300 metres before needing a top-up (that's the same height as the Eiffel Tower), they're capable of being refilled up to 35 times and are completely recyclable! Plus, they're made from 90% recycled plastic, which saves 76 tonnes of plastic from going to landfill each year – thus enabling your school to do even more to help protect our planet. Find out more at **ypo.co.uk/refill**

8 Inspiring tech talent

Tech She Can is the tech careers inspiration charity dedicated to inspiring the next generation of tech talent. We create and deliver free, engaging and inclusive resources for children, teachers and parents, aiming to spark interest in tech careers from an early age.

Our mission is simple, but powerful: we want to help build a future where everyone has the opportunity to participate in developing technology. For more details, visit **techshecan.org**

9 Will you host Willy Russell in your school?

The Methuen Drama team over at Bloomsbury Publishing has just launched an exciting competition for all secondary school students aged 14-19. Continuing the celebrations around their newly published Methuen Drama Student Edition of *Blood Brothers*, they're encouraging all students to write their own scene on the theme of social class. The winning entry will host Willy Russell in a live Q&A session at their school, PLUS win a *Blood Brothers* workshop from Stage-Ed (**stage-ed.com**) and a class set of the *Blood Brothers Student Edition*! Download your entry pack at **bloomsbury.com/Blood-Brothers** – the closing date for entries is 17th April 2026.

10 Under one roof

Imagine a school day where admin, people management, finances, and parent communication flow together in perfect orchestration. That's the reality with Access Education's fully integrated suite: one platform that brings everything under one roof, from staff management and budgeting to student curriculum resources. It's easy to set up, and backed by expert support that keeps your team smiling. And with Access Evo – our software engine that turns data into action – it helps you adapt in real time and keep every student on track. This is school life, amplified. Access Education, growing with you, giving you the freedom to put education first. Find out more at **theaccessgroup.com/evo**

Help their ABILITY BLOOM

Christian Friday outlines his approach to building students' confidence in maths lessons...

"Failure is the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently."

Henry Ford's words capture an important truth when encouraging pupils to believe in themselves – that each attempt brings them closer to success, and that with persistence, they will 'get it' in the end.

My time working as a leader across multiple schools has not only allowed me to observe how teaching takes place in a range of different settings, but more importantly, how pupils can engage, flourish and sometimes avoid doing any maths at all costs. It's a confidence issue.

For me, building confidence in others must start with you. Everything you say and do has the capacity to project onto pupils, so your best arsenal for tackling low confidence is your own example, slowly chipping away over time at the negative stigma.

What I offer here are three areas which I believe are vital for helping to build confidence in the classroom.

How often do we praise?

Being a dad of two primary-age children has shown me that primary colleagues are excellent at dishing out praise, whether in the form of certificates, positive comments or stickers placed in pupils' books.

Consequently, my kids will tell us at the dinner table, "*Mrs A said I did brilliantly in my homework,*" or, "*Two of us challenged Mr B and Miss C in a Times Tables Rock Stars race during assembly, and we won!*"

Now, I'm not suggesting that you take over a Y10 assembly, fire up a couple of laptops and challenge the front row to a Pythagoras race – but do think about the kind of opportunities you can offer for recognising effort, progress and, most importantly, those pupils whose work is consistently strong every lesson.

"Think about the kind of opportunities you can offer for recognising effort and progress"

In my experience, most of the pupils in a class will get on with what's expected of them without any fuss – and it's often these pupils who will receive the least attention. So find opportunities for recognising these pupils. I've tended to find that even simple comments, like '*I'm really impressed with how you always attempt every question*' or '*It's really clear how much pride you take in your work*' go a long way.

Think about what 'success' might look like for the pupil or class in front of you. For some, it might entail being more consistent in their basic numerical skills. For others, it might be finding the perseverance to tackle a multistage problem in a methodical way.

There are times when I have to make difficult phone calls home. However, I always endeavour to make a number of positive calls to parents, too. I might sometimes only be on the phone for less than a couple of minutes, but there's nothing better than hearing the pleasure in a parent's voice after you've acknowledged the efforts and dedication of their child.

It produces a feel-good factor for you as well, and makes for an uplifting end to a busy day or week. Even as adults, we still love nothing more than some positive recognition – so let's project some of that onto others too!

Misconceptions – classroom culture or taboo?

As maths teachers, I believe we've become much better at addressing misconceptions. But how often is this able to develop into a classroom or departmental culture in which pupils feel safe to make mistakes? After all, misconceptions are embedded throughout the curriculum.

Some of the best teaching I've ever seen is where a pupil offers a solution to a problem presented on the class board that is incorrect – immediately followed by the teacher lighting up and seeing this as the perfect opportunity to address a common misconception. A basic example of this could be finding the area of a circle, with a diameter denoted on the diagram, resulting in a simple input error when using the formula.

Imagine a response that sounds something like this: "*Even though the answer isn't correct on this occasion, I was really hoping someone would give this answer, because this is the number one mistake people make, and probably 50% of the class will have made it. Can anyone in the class identify where the misconception might be?*"

There are a plethora of ways to go about this. We could deliberately make a mistake when writing a solution on the board and wait for someone to pick up on it. We can demonstrate how we *all* make mistakes – yes, even if we're a teacher. Or we could arrive at the final modelled solution, and say to the class, "*Can anyone spot any possible steps in my solution which are vulnerable to mistakes?*" If the process of identifying misconceptions becomes a regular routine in your classroom, pupils will become more and more confident in telling you what they're thinking.

Communication, communication, communication

If anyone was to ask me, "what are the essential skills of a strong leader"? communication would be in my top three. This starts with the classroom teacher, looking out at 30 pupils sat in front of them.

Returning to the 'circle' example above, I imagine that a typical sequence of lessons would include a wide variation of micro topics – from finding the area or circumference, to working backwards to find the radius or diameter, if an area is given. This might even link to a problem-solving question, such as, '*John needs to build a fence around his farm, which happens to be in the shape of a semi-circle. How much will it cost?*'

But do we spend time explaining what the next few lessons will cover, why we need to be able to tackle this variation, and how this might link to other topics? We all like to know the plan and the reasons why, so keep talking to your students about what you're teaching and why it matters.

Finally, as any other teacher-parents of primary-age children will know, it's common to receive regular communications from school detailing what your child will be taught over the next term, along with some skills to practise at home. Is that a strategy that secondary maths departments could – or should – also adopt?

It could take the form of a termly newsletter that similarly details upcoming topics and essential skills to practise at home, alongside some supporting examples. I'm not saying this would suddenly transfer confidence overnight, but it may increase the frequency of maths-related conversations around the dinner table, or in the car, for those interested and motivated parents who are currently out of the loop.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Christian Friday is a Trust-wide Maths Strategy Lead across 14 secondary schools in the South-East of England

4 REASONS TO TRY... London's Science Museum

Reveal a world of exciting technical careers for KS3 and KS4 this autumn

SCIENCE MUSEUM

Contact:
Visit: **sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups/formal-education-groups**
Email: **info@ScienceMuseumGroup.ac.uk**
Call: **033 0058 0058**

At a glance

+ Bookings are open for British Science Week and National Careers Week – build your itinerary on our website

+ Completing a risk assessment? Follow our useful guide under the Groups section of our website

1 TECHNICIANS: THE DAVID SAINSBURY GALLERY

Step into a world of STEM careers in our free, interactive gallery exploring the vital role of technicians. Recreating the workplaces of technicians across multiple sectors – including health science, creative arts and renewable energy – students will get hands-on with exhibits that introduce technical roles across almost every kind of industry.

2 CAREERS UNCOVERED

Join a free, 60-minute *Careers Uncovered* session in our STEM careers gallery and meet technicians working for top organisations. Through hands-on activities and Q&A sessions, students will take part in activities independently and discover careers that make a real difference.

3 SPACE

See iconic spacecraft and out-of-this-world objects in our exciting new free gallery. Discover inspiring stories of human achievement in space travel and see the spacesuit worn by Helen Sharman, the first Briton in space, as well as a 3 billion-year-old piece of the moon.

4 MANAGE YOUR BOOKING ONLINE

With our online group booking system, teachers can check availability, plan an itinerary and book a visit. You'll just need the date of your visit, the number of adults and children in your group, their age range and any specific requirements.

[MATHS PROBLEM]

PROPORTIONALITY

Proportionality is a notoriously difficult idea for students, observes Colin Foster...

In this lesson, students see how the speed at which they listen to a podcast affects how much time they save.

THE DIFFICULTY

Yesterday, I listened to a podcast at $1\frac{1}{2}$ speed, rather than at normal speed.
It saved me 15 minutes.
What can you work out from this?

This is a hard question that students will likely struggle to answer. Part of the difficulty is that the question doesn't even tell you what it wants you to work out – only that ***something*** can be deduced!

If your students are completely stuck, then it's fine to leave this question hanging, because by the end of the lesson they ***will*** be able to answer it.

THE SOLUTION

What does '$1\frac{1}{2}$ speed' actually mean?

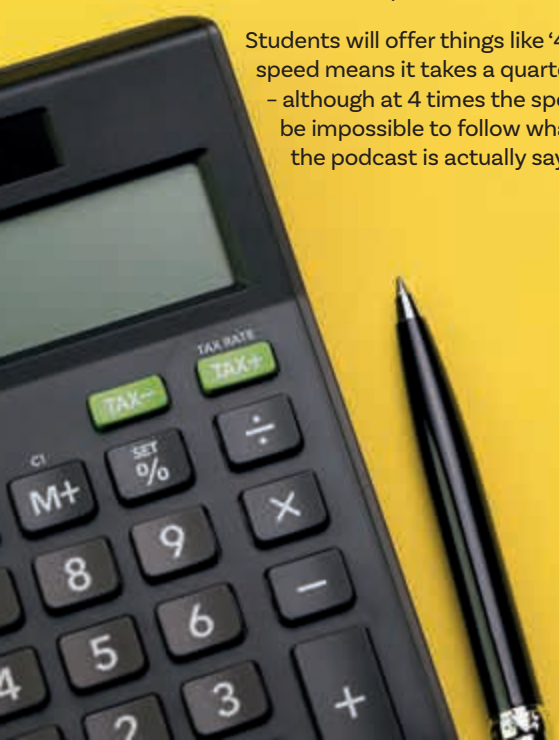
If this is too hard for students to express, try this instead:

What does 'double speed' mean?

This is easier. It means the podcast will take ***half as long*** to play as it would at normal speed.

Give me some more examples like this.

Students will offer things like '4 times the speed means it takes a quarter of the time' – although at 4 times the speed, it might be impossible to follow what anyone on the podcast is actually saying!



Students could make a table with some examples, like this:

speed	*time reduction*
1	0
1.5	?
2	$\frac{1}{2}$
3	$\frac{2}{3}$
4	$\frac{3}{4}$
5	$\frac{4}{5}$

Note that if the podcast runs 4 times as fast, it takes $\frac{1}{4}$ of the time. That's a reduction in time spent of $\frac{3}{4}$, not $\frac{1}{4}$.

Clearly the ? in the table needs to be a fraction between 0 and $\frac{1}{2}$. This is a good way to think about reciprocals. The time it takes to listen to a n-speed podcast is $\frac{1}{n}$ of the normal speed. So, the time it takes to listen to an $\frac{n}{m}$ speed podcast is going to be $\frac{m}{n}$ of the normal speed.

This tells us that for a $1.5 = \frac{3}{2}$ speed podcast, the listening time will be $\frac{2}{3}$ of the normal speed, so the reduction will be $\frac{1}{3}$. Don't rush through this – let students create lots of examples to see why it works.

With a $\frac{1}{3}$ reduction corresponding to 15 minutes, in the original question, the original podcast time, at normal speed, must have been three times as much, so it was a 45-minute podcast. That's the thing we can deduce.

Checking for understanding

Can you invent a similar problem to this one that has a nice neat answer, like this one did?

Students will need to think of a speed that has a 'nice' reciprocal in order to make this work.

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

Terminal *decline?*

Rob Wraith looks at whether the rise of AI should prompt us to reconsider our approach to the teaching of coding – and if so, how...

It's now been more than 30 years since a powerful consensus first emerged across the education and technology sectors that '*Everyone should learn to code*'. It was hailed then as an essential skill for the 21st century – a valuable process that would teach you how to think.

Schools duly began to introduce programming classes, since an understanding of coding seemed to be the passport to a range of lucrative careers open to anyone able to master the likes of Python, C++ or Java.

From craft to discipline

However, the developments we've seen in artificial intelligence technologies, and increasing access to them has shaken the very foundations of that old model. The astonishing rise of generative AI in recent years – to the point where it's now capable of producing functional, complex code from simple, natural language prompts – has led some to wonder whether there's now any use in learning programming languages at all.

On the one hand, yes – we *do* need to reconsider our previous approach to the discipline of coding. The end results of coding are still as omnipresent as they ever were, if not more so. The operating systems in our phones, the apps that run on them, the websites and social media platforms we all use; we're well past the point where coding has become an essential component of the modern world that we simply can't do without.

At the same time, though, we're currently witnessing the practice of creating code evolve from being a *manual craft* to a *calculated discipline*. The rise of AI hasn't made programmers and developers obsolete; if anything, it's enabled some to automate the more monotonous aspects of coding, and elevate the very best to a status comparable to that of an architect or creative director.

This will, however, entail revising how we think about coding as a taught discipline. It may be that we see a shift away from the memorisation of coding syntax, and towards making students more aware of the underlying principles of computational thinking and system design, while treating AI as a powerful collaborative tool, rather than a replacement.

> **"If you think AI-generated code will be immune from bugs, think again"**

Core coding skills

It's easy to see why perspectives are shifting. With tools such as Copilot and ChatGPT now able to automate repetitive coding tasks, produce reusable code and offer solutions to intricate challenges, some people are starting to question whether human programmers are still required, and whether careers in coding are even viable any more.

However, this viewpoint overlooks what coding truly represents, and the essential role it continues to play within STEM disciplines. As AI becomes ever more integrated into development processes, the core skills that coding cultivates are becoming *more* critical, not less.

While the naming conventions might vary, the elements that make up *computational thinking* (see panel) are foundational to all STEM disciplines. A chemist 'decomposing' a chemical reaction; an engineer designing a complex circuit; a data scientist analysing a certain dataset – all will be utilising computational thinking in some capacity.

AI can certainly help to complete some steps of those different tasks, but the chemist's initial decomposition? The strategic design of that algorithm? Those are still human tasks that require a certain level of knowledge and experience to complete.

The art of debugging

As anyone who has ever written code will know, a significant portion of development time is spent on debugging, and finding and fixing errors. And if you think AI-generated code will be immune from bugs, think again.

I've seen this for myself, having previously used AI to develop a mobile app. AI-generated code can not only introduce errors, but subtle, complex errors that are especially difficult to detect. The ability to read, analyse and critically evaluate code is therefore still very much a crucial skill for – at least in my case – getting a mobile app to perform as intended.

Debugging code requires knowledge, logic, experience and a good understanding of the systems or applications being developed. This is an investigative process that AI is more than capable of assisting with, but one that it can't lead, since arriving at the correct answer will involve first asking the right questions.

Invisible force

In STEM fields, coding isn't some abstract exercise, but rather a primary tool for discovery and innovation. Its use is woven into the very fabric of modern science and engineering.

Contemporary scientific research would be impossible without coding. Biologists use Python scripts from libraries like Biopython to perform bioinformatics tasks, such as

analysing large datasets. Physicists will regularly use code to create and run complex simulations, analyse data and complete various data visualisation tasks. Climate scientists are modelling Earth's climate systems using code-driven simulations.

Outside of the science lab, the software that powers our world – from mobile apps, to the vast infrastructure of the wider internet – is entirely built from code. The AI tools that are supposedly making coding obsolete are, of course, complex software systems themselves, built by teams of expert human programmers.

Continued development, maintenance and improvement of these AI models will furthermore call for a skilled understanding of machine learning algorithms and software engineering – all of which are, once again, rooted in the practice of coding.

Code is everywhere in engineering, too – from the embedded software systems in your car, to the control software governing the robotic manufacturing arm that helped build said car in the first place. Code is the ever-present, invisible force that enables our modern machinery to do what it does. Electrical engineers will regularly use code to design and test integrated circuits. Aerospace engineers write the flight control software that prevents our aircraft from falling out of the sky.

And let's not forget how code gives us a way of expressing and experimenting with various mathematical concepts. It can enable mathematicians to explore new theories, create visualisations and solve problems that would be far harder and slower to attempt by hand.

Capable collaborators

AI is a powerful assistant that can be harnessed and managed. It can assist scientists with writing data parsing scripts more quickly, or suggest the best algorithm that an engineer should use. Even so, those scientists will still need to understand the basics of data analysis in order to create the right kind of prompt. Our engineer will still need to thoroughly understand their system's physics if they're to accurately check whether the AI's suggestions are viable.

The question we should be asking is not whether we should stop teaching coding, but how we should adapt our teaching, across all subjects, to this new reality. The long-term aim must be to move away from developing coders who rely on memorising syntax, to developing technical directors who can devise complex systems while using AI as a powerful collaborative resource.

AI is indeed transforming the nature of coding – automating repetitive tasks, and allowing the human intellect to focus even more on creativity, architecture and complex problem solving. The future of STEM will be shaped by those capable of collaborating effectively with AI, using their own knowledge, experience and computational thinking skills to guide these powerful tools towards new groundbreaking discoveries and innovations.

The process of learning to code will no longer revolve around communicating with a computer, but instead centre on understanding the fundamental logic of the world we will build together.

COMPUTATIONAL THINKING

Coding is a practical application of *computational thinking* – a term that doesn't refer to a single skill, but rather a problem-solving framework that involves the following:

- **Decomposition**
  The breaking down of a complex problem into smaller, more manageable parts
- **Pattern Recognition**
  Identifying similarities and trends within a problem or across different problems
- **Abstraction**
  Focusing on essential details while ignoring irrelevant information in order to reduce complexity
- **Algorithmic Design**
  The development of a step-by-step solution, or set of rules in response to a specific problem

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Rob Wraith is head of learning technology and digital learning at NCG – a group of seven colleges across the UK; for more information, visit ncgrp.co.uk

FirstNews

Teach them to read between the headlines

New Media & Information Literacy TeachKit

1 in 3 young people believe most social media content is accurate*

Our TeachKit provides everything you need to equip pupils to grow into confident, responsible creators, contributors, and sharers of information.

"It's clearly very comprehensive and well thought out. It offers an off the shelf spiralled curriculum with clear objectives and links to a workable framework."

Daniel Love, Secondary Teacher

**Ofcom, 2025.*

Download your free KS3 framework

Created in association with the Media and Information Literacy Alliance

16 with a ballot

Karl Sankey considers how educators should respond to the prospect of their classes including not just young people, but potential voters, too...

In its 2024 manifesto, Labour pledged to lower the voting age to 16 if they came to power. In July 2025, the now Labour government announced it will meet that commitment by seeking to lower the voting age in time for the next General Election, as part of a larger package of electoral reform.

'Votes for 16' has long been a staple debate of the politics classroom, with arguments for and against being raised by the very people who would be enfranchised by such a change. So with the debate now seemingly settled, a new question arises for politics teachers and educators at large – *how do we prepare young people for this new responsibility?*

Party policy and ideology

The stated aim of extending the franchise to 16-year-olds is to 'increase young people's engagement with politics'. Well, if that's to happen, then they'll need to be taught about it.

At present, politics teaching is largely confined to KS5, meaning it will need to extend into KS3/4 if it's to serve students properly. The easiest way of doing that would be for schools to dedicate space to political education in their PSHE content, which many already do, but typically with a focus on the structures of government.

In a world where students are voting, this content will need expanding into examinations of party policy, ideology and the big debates of the day – which will, of course, come with its own issues. One of which is that PSHE tutors may feel they may lack the knowledge needed to answer some of the questions that will arise.

Bridging the 'specialist gap'

We can also expect to see some fears emerge around teachers' ability to remain politically neutral, but these can be neutralised if politics teachers take a more active role in PSHE development.

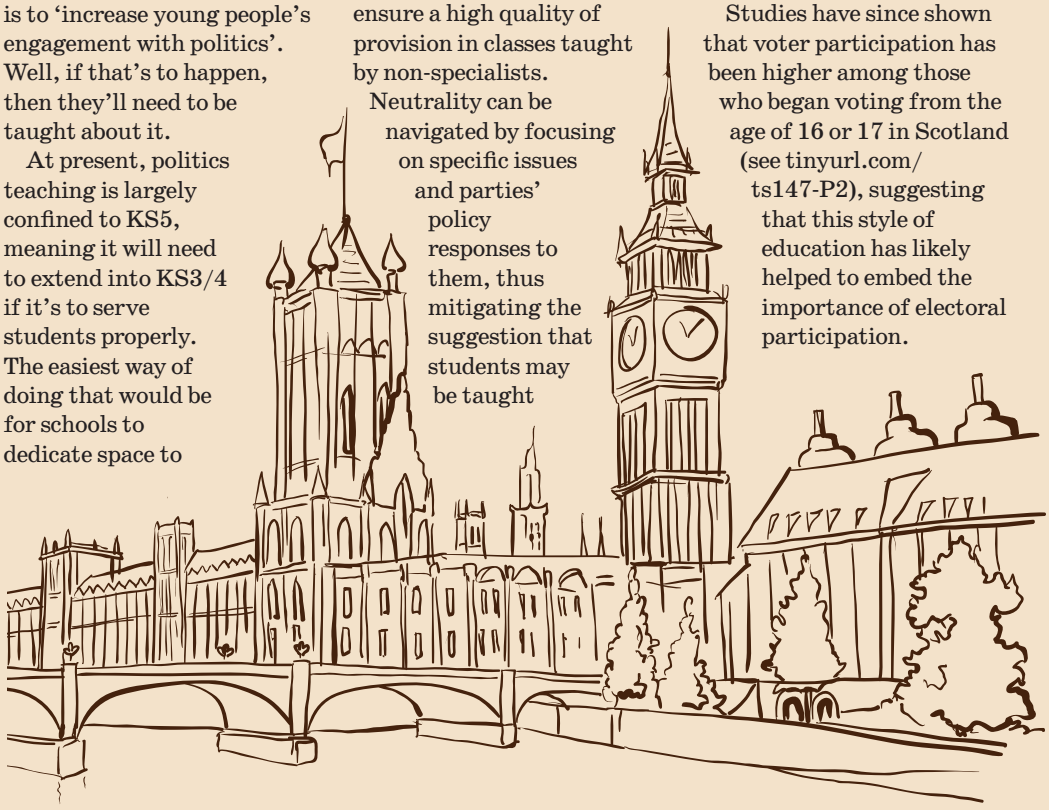
Having politics teachers lead staff CPD before units are taught could help bridge this 'specialist gap', to ensure a high quality of provision in classes taught by non-specialists.

Neutrality can be navigated by focusing on specific issues and parties' policy responses to them, thus mitigating the suggestion that students may be taught 'biased lessons' if said lessons are focused on the parties themselves.

Another area to look at would be expanding citizenship as a subject, or going further and offering politics as a discrete KS3 or even GCSE subject. Citizenship education is mandatory in maintained schools – though not in academies – which seems worth keeping in mind as we await the first major update to the National Curriculum since 2013.

When Scotland legalised votes at 16 in 2016, it released guidance on political literacy through the 'You Decide' resource (see tinyurl.com/ts147-P1). This guidance placed an emphasis on citizenship education across primary and secondary, utilising research and debate to bring about achievable participation outcomes, such as surveys, speeches and media creation.

Studies have since shown that voter participation has been higher among those who began voting from the age of 16 or 17 in Scotland (see tinyurl.com/ts147-P2), suggesting that this style of education has likely helped to embed the importance of electoral participation.



Extending participation

Dedicating mandatory time to this style of teaching will be a harder battle than the PSHE route, however, since any additional citizenship or politics lessons will naturally create timetabling issues and require a pipeline of specialists that's sparser than it should be.

The final thing for politics teachers to consider is utilising currently underused external sources of political education. UK Parliament Week (ukparliamentweek.org), Democracy Classroom (democracyclassroom.com) and The Politics Project (thepoliticsproject.org.uk), plus newer ventures such as Political Education for Students (pefs.co.uk), all provide resources and guidance that can help build a base for curriculum expansion whilst minimising teacher workload.

There's no one-size-fits-all solution to this issue, as regional context and demographics vary from school to school. Yet regardless of the path we choose, it's clear that politics teachers have a major role to play in developing a curriculum that serves our students – and, indeed, all of our futures at the ballot box.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Karl Sankey specialises in UK politics, political ideology, and classical and medieval history; follow him via tinyurl.com/ts147-P3 (LinkedIn)

rise

CHAMPIONED BY ICAEW

Equip your students with essential career skills

- Free KS3 and KS4 career-themed classroom activities
- Maths, English, Science, Business and Economics
- Linked to the national curriculum
- Skills Builder accredited
- No registration required
- Career spotlights

rise-initiative.co.uk/resources

rise.initiative@icaew.com

LEARNING LAB

IN THIS ISSUE

CONTRIBUTORS

PAUL BANKS
CEO, Chelmsford Learning Partnership

BEN LINDSAY OBE
CEO, Power The Fight

ROBIN LAUNDER
Behaviour management consultant and speaker

MADDIE MICHIE
Private tutor

SARAH TEMPLETON
Managing director, Headstuff ADHD Therapy

Thinking about ...

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

"*We're not just adults-in-waiting; we're active members of society.*"

Those are the words of Alex Nurton, vice-chair of The UK Youth Parliament's Campaign Committee. It perhaps shouldn't come as a surprise to see the government lower the legal voting age, partly in recognition of the role young people now play in their communities – but in the face of the biggest change to UK democracy since the late 1960s, how can we ensure that children and young people possess the skills and knowledge they'll need to make responsible use of the ballot box?

A school's role is to prepare students for life beyond the classroom. This includes developing social and emotional skills, and cultivating an understanding of societal values and expectations. And since we now live a world where we've never been more connected, it's vital that our young people can think critically, analyse information and solve problems.

At Chelmsford Learning Partnership (CLP), we believe that the process of empowering students to create positive change begins by mastering active citizenship skills, such as communication, collaboration and empathy. This way, students will be equipped to address some of the biggest challenges the world currently faces – not least climate change – and will leave a tangible impact.

One way of fostering these skills is to encourage student-led conversations – via a debate club, for example, which would help students develop agency and a better understanding of different perspectives by discussing real-world issues and analysing opposing beliefs.

A simple research project on a topic affecting young people – such as '*Should mobile phones be banned?*' – will show them how to challenge misinformation, and could be useful for encouraging independent research and evaluation.

Our schools also encourage students to volunteer within their local communities, be it through The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, or via other organisations. One of our schools recently formed a 'Be Their Lead' group composed of young female and gender-diverse students, whose aim was to learn more about civic responsibility through direct community engagement.

For its latest project, the group collaborated with our local authority and law enforcement, as well as a support charity, to explore ways of creating safer public spaces for female and non-binary people. Projects of this kind empower students to find and use their voice, but also serve to strengthen their feelings of belonging and community responsibility.

We can also create opportunities for students to apply what they've learnt in the classroom to practical scenarios, so as to deepen their understanding of the electoral process and its impact on millions of lives. Student councils and committees can provide meaningful ways for students to voice their opinions and influence decisions that affect them within the school. By communicating clearly with student representatives and factoring their feedback into the decision-making process, schools help to build trust and prevent apathy.

Today's students have the potential to become powerful, positive change-makers. If we want to ensure that they leave school as active and engaged citizens, then we'll need to help them build the necessary skills and knowledge – ideally before they use a ballot box for the first time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Paul Banks is CEO at the Chelmsford Learning Partnership; for more information, visit clptrust.com

FOCUS ON...
CHILD Q

There are some stories you can't unread. For me, the Child Q case sits in that category – a horrifying moment where the failings of schools, the police and local authorities collided with the body of a 15-year-old Black girl in the most brutal way.

Stripped, searched and humiliated by officers in her own school. And worst of all? No one in that room thought to stop it.

We need to sit with that for a moment. Because the truth is, what happened to Child Q didn't come out of nowhere. It was the result of a deep-rooted cocktail of adultification bias, systemic racism and institutional tunnel vision that sees some children – particularly Black girls – as less deserving of protection and more deserving of suspicion.

And, if we're being honest, many of us in education either missed it, misunderstood it or quietly moved on. But we can't afford to move on. Because if safeguarding means anything, it must mean safeguarding *all* children – especially those who society too quickly frames as threats, rather than in need of care.

WHEN 'SAFEGUARDING' FAILS

In an incident that took place in 2020, Child Q was suspected by staff at her school of smelling of cannabis. Based on that suspicion alone, teachers called the Police, and the Police – without an appropriate adult – proceeded to conduct a strip search on school premises. No drugs were found. The girl was left traumatised. The adults responsible either failed to see her vulnerability, or chose to overlook it.

Now, imagine if it had been a white child. The likelihood is that the situation would have been handled very differently. That's not a radical statement – it's backed by a report subsequently published by the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (see tinyurl.com/ts147-LL1), which found that racism was 'likely' to have been an influencing factor in how she was treated.

The uncomfortable truth is that Black children are not always afforded the same innocence as their peers. They're more likely to be excluded, more likely to be stopped and searched, and, as in this case, more likely to be 'adultified' – that is, perceived as older, more responsible and less in need of care.

Racism should be treated as a safeguarding issue. As made clear in Power The Fight's 2024 'Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals' report (see tinyurl.com/ts147-LL2), when young Black people experience racism in schools – whether overt or systemic – it has real safeguarding consequences that impact upon their mental health, sense of safety and long-term outcomes. A failure to address racism amounts to a failure to protect.

The fallout from Child Q's experience should be a sharp jolt to schools across the country. This isn't about a rare 'mistake' that happened in a London borough, but a call to reflect on our school cultures, safeguarding policies and unconscious biases.

FROM OUTRAGE TO ACTION

Safeguarding isn't a passive process. It requires teachers to challenge, question and sometimes obstruct authority when a child's welfare is at stake. It means asking whether calling the Police is the right step. It means pushing back when a proposed solution could cause more harm than good. It means seeing Black girls as children first.

So, here's the challenge – schools, are you ready to embed anti-racist, culturally sensitive practice in every part of your safeguarding? Local authorities – are you prepared to co-create solutions with the young people you claim to serve? This isn't about removing 'a few bad apples', but real systemic work leading to sustainable change.

Because Child Q deserved better. And so do the children walking through your school gates today.

BEN LINDSAY OBE IS THE CEO OF POWER THE FIGHT – A CHARITY DEDICATED TO EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO END VIOLENCE AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE. HIS SECOND BOOK, *WE NEED TO TALK... ABOUT RACE*, IS AVAILABLE NOW (SPCK PUBLISHING, £10.99)

DO THIS
CONSISTENTLY HIGH EXPECTATIONS

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

You must maintain consistently high expectations of all your students – that's academic, behavioural and social expectations (social expectations being how the students interact with you and with each other).

High expectations tell your students that you fully believe they have what it takes to achieve, behave and interact in the ways that they should. Low expectations convey the precise opposite – that they *can't* achieve, *can't* behave and *can't* get along with each other.

But how can you know if your expectations are genuinely high? After all, every teacher you'll ever meet will tell you *they* have high expectations – yet expectations between teachers can actually vary wildly.

So here's what you do. In any given situation, try to imagine what the *best possible* student behaviour looks like, and make that your expectation. Whether it's students entering the classroom, following instructions, paying attention, answering questions, working in pairs, working in fours, doing homework and so forth – imagine the best possible scenario and then aim squarely for that.

Because here's the key point – whether high or low, students' behaviour will move in the direction of the expectations placed upon them. So keep your expectations consistently high.

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)

6.1%

Of the United Kingdom's GDP is being spent on education – third behind South Africa (6.9%) and Norway (6.2%), and tied with Israel among the OECD countries investing the most

Source: 'Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators' report produced by the OECD

Amid the fevered discourse surrounding teacher recruitment issues, curriculum changes and Ofsted's inspection framework is a commonly recurring question – *what would a truly sustainable education system for England actually look like?* The Association of School and College Leaders has recently weighed in with 16 proposals of its own, based on a year-long consultation with the 60 school and college leaders making up its ASCL Council policymaking body.

As detailed in its 'Roadmap for a sustainable education system' paper, those proposals include increased public investment in children's services so that they're better able to meet pupils' various health and social care needs, as well as mapping out the entities overseeing standards of education, health and social care at a local level, and providing clarity for the public as to precisely which bodies are responsible for which areas.

ASCL is also calling for all Ofsted inspections and league tables for schools and colleges to be based solely on core education responsibilities. At the same time, it's mooted the idea of extending accountability in the opposite direction, by introducing a new system that would give schools, colleges and other local agencies a means of officially registering any concerns that another agency might not be fulfilling its remit effectively.

According to Julie McCulloch, director of strategy and policy at ASCL, *"More needs to be done to clearly distinguish where the core responsibilities of education staff start and end. It is time to rethink exactly what we expect from schools and colleges and how they should be resourced to meet these demands."*

ASCL's 'Roadmap for a sustainable education system' can be read in full via tinyurl.com/TS147-LL4

THAT TIME WHEN...

THE HEADTEACHER WITHHELD MY REFERENCE

Have you ever faced the prospect of being unemployed just for forgetting some photocopying?

Seven years ago, as I neared the end of my two years as a Teach First participant, that was the position I found myself in. It was my last day at the school where I'd been training for two years, and I was feeling pretty pleased with myself for getting to the stage where I could start applying for other teaching jobs.

At first, I'd been unsure whether I had what it took to teach, but as the writing of the students in my class improved, so did my self-confidence. It was a proud moment for me when the children's work was moderated and judged favourably by other members of staff, including the headteacher herself.

On that final morning, I'd been told to expect a meeting with the headteacher. I'd thrown myself into the task of teaching creative writing, but had forgotten the memo to photocopy the final work the students had produced.

Thus, it was with a mixture of anticipation and fear that I sat in the final school assembly of the year, anxiously awaiting my fate. Towards the end, the headteacher affably presented me with a box of chocolates, wishing me luck with my future career in front of the staff and children, all looking on fondly.

Assembly over, I soon found myself face-to-face with the headteacher, now sat in her office with the chocolates perched squarely on my knees. I can't recall if any pleasantries were exchanged, but what was firmly implanted on my memory were her words, "*You are never to approach me for a reference.*" Such was the gravity of my offence in forgetting to do the photocopying that I now found myself essentially unemployable.

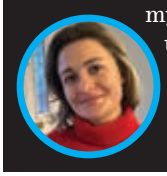
Given that a fellow Teach Firster had been given the boot just four months into the job, I'd always been keenly aware of how precarious my situation was, and how disposable I was personally during my time at the school.

The role of headteacher is undoubtedly one accompanied by a degree of stress, but her reaction seemed to be beyond belief. If it wasn't before, it was now glaringly obvious how the stress of running a school generated its own momentum, and could impact upon those on the lowest rungs of the school hierarchy.

In the years that followed, my teaching ambitions would often be frustrated by the lack of a reference from this headteacher, my first employer. While I was still able to find work in schools, it wasn't easy for subsequent employers to overlook this anomaly whenever they perused my CV. Each time it happened, I was reminded of the circumstances that led to it. I couldn't have predicted that the headteacher would react as she did, but lamented my administrative error all the same.

If my knowledge and experience of teaching since then has taught me anything, it's that schools are often, by their nature, chaotic places. The person in charge of steering the ship usually has a big job on their hands – but should that excuse the sternness, severity and even shamelessness of the behaviour I've described here?

Probably not.



MADDIE MICHIE IS A FORMER ENGLISH TEACHER, NOW PRIVATE TUTOR; FOLLOW HER AT @MISS_MICHIE_TUTORING (INSTAGRAM)

14%

of teachers say they are 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to still be in the classroom in two years' time

Source: Nationwide survey of 1,800 teachers carried out by Kahoot! at the start of the 2025/26 academic year

Need to know

The Social Market Foundation has published a 'Perspectives Paper' that critiques the government guidance issued earlier this year, advising schools and colleges on how they should be using AI tools. Authored by former DfE advisor Tom Richmond, the pointedly titled 'EducAItion, EducAItion, EducAItion' paper cautions that the government's AI guidance has thus far neglected the impacts of generative AI technologies on key learning processes, focusing instead on areas such as data protection, safeguarding and matters of intellectual property law, while championing its potential for relieving the administrative burden currently placed on teachers.

Richmond proceeds to cite several studies, including one '*Finding a significant negative correlation between frequent AI tool usage and critical thinking abilities*', and another suggesting that frequent use of ChatGPT can create a dependency on the technology among learners, leading to poorer academic outcomes in the long term.

The full paper can be downloaded via **tinyurl.com/ts147-LL5**

THE BENEFITS OF... SUSTAINABLE BUILDING

Think sustainability and you probably also immediately think about the costs involved. Over the years, sustainable products and services have become associated with big budgets, and therefore out of reach for many schools.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Whilst some sustainable building solutions are undoubtedly costly – especially those that are groundbreaking or niche – there are many achievable ways of making a meaningful sustainability commitment across your school's site...

1. SMALL SEEDS, LARGE IMPACT

A key mistake schools make when considering sustainable building is thinking too ambitiously. Scale back those plans, and it's amazing the impact you can have – a case in point being Sedum roofs. Just one square metre of green roof can capture 5kg of CO2 annually. No wonder 'urban greening' is such a huge movement. In fact, a green roof map released by the Greater London Authority's Environment Team recorded almost 700 green roofs across London, covering an area measuring larger than 25 football pitches.

The beauty of Sedum roofs is that any area, however tiny, can be covered to achieve a triple sustainability win – a more attractive environment, richer biodiversity *and* effective carbon removal. We've covered everything – from bike shelters at the University of Cambridge, to walkway roofing for schools, and even the roof of the Reptile Centre at London Zoo.

2. HARNESS THAT SUNSHINE

We spend so much of our time gazing up at grey skies in the UK, it's easy to overlook solar panels as a sustainability solution – but one of the biggest myths out there is that you 'need sunshine' to generate power. If there's enough light to see, then there's enough to generate power – and the amount of power that panels can generate may surprise you. We installed solar panels at our head office two years ago, and they now generate 32% of our power.

Even better, solar panels can be easily incorporated into any all-weather canopy design – from canopies covering sports courts, to all-weather dining canopies and walkways. The possibilities are endless, and the presence of panels can be a powerful way of conveying your sustainability commitment (while also saving you money on your heating and lighting costs in the longer term).

3. THINK 'TOMORROW'

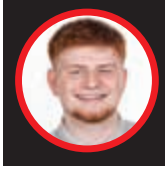
When undertaking any on-site building project, a key sustainability win is to think into the future. Ask yourself two key questions: '*Is this structure futureproof?*' and '*How will we dispose of the materials used in the structure at the end of its lifetime?*'

When designing a new structure, any responsible supplier should work with your team to ensure that it can be adapted or converted as your school's needs change. This flexible building approach helps ensure longevity – a key sustainability win. It's also worth checking that any materials used will be fully recyclable at the end of your structure's lifetime.

4. PLANT, PLANT, PLANT

Finally, remember to think not just about the buildings on your site, but also about what surrounds them. Trees, for instance, will remove carbon from the atmosphere, re-green and elevate your environment, provide powerful aesthetic and wellbeing benefits, and have a quantifiable impact on your school's sustainability.

Building and thinking sustainably needn't be a chore. Nor does it have to negatively impact upon your finances. If you can stay open-minded, partner with like-minded suppliers and embrace imaginative solutions, then thinking sustainably can prove to be an exciting, achievable and ultimately transformative thing for your school to do...



ETHAN MORRIS IS A TECHNICAL SALES EXECUTIVE FOR THE UK'S LEADING EDUCATION CANOPY PROVIDER, FORDINGBRIDGE, AND HAS WORKED WITH HUNDREDS OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES TO TRANSFORM THEIR SITES WITH IMAGINATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ALL-WEATHER SOLUTIONS.

The case for...

Earlier ADHD interventions

Having worked in the British criminal justice system with young offenders, I can tell you that the school-to-prison pipeline is real. Almost every young offender I've worked with left school early, and almost all had undiagnosed ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, autism or some combination of these. This isn't a complex mystery needing endless research and funding, though. The solution is right in front of us, in that it all starts back in the classroom.

Let's start with the behaviours that often lead to exclusion: disrupting lessons; talking too much; interrupting the teacher; shouting out; restlessness; fiddling/doodling; struggles to sit still; prone to distraction; difficulties in staying focused – every one of those is a trait of ADHD.

Now, consider the child who struggles with writing and spelling, or who performs well in every subject except maths. Or the child who seems lost in daydreams, rather than causing disruption. These can all be signs of dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia or of ADHD Inattentive type – far less visible, but just as significant.

Identifying ADHD doesn't need to be complicated. Free ADHD screeners available online or in print form can be used at the start of each school year, enabling ADHD to be medicated or managed sooner, the identification of any coexisting learning difficulties, and support to be put in place for lessons and exams. This way, pupils feel included, not excluded.

The change in self-esteem when a child realises they aren't a failure, but simply learn differently is transformative. That confidence is what keeps them in school, engaged and ultimately out of the criminal justice system. Imagine a system where school exclusion doesn't exist, because every child's needs are recognised and met. It's possible, if we equip teachers with the right tools.

Sarah Templeton is managing director of Headstuff ADHD Therapy and CEO of ADHD Liberty; her memoir, *The Prison Counsellor: Her Only Crime Was Caring* is available now (Gemini Publishing, £12.99)

TRENDING

Our pick of the recent resources and launches teachers might find useful...

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Entries are now open for the inaugural Global Schools Prize. Organised by the Varkey Foundation in partnership with UNESCO, the contest will be looking to honour schools demonstrating 'World-class impact' across 10 categories, including 'AI transformation', 'sustainability', 'peacebuilding' and 'teacher development'. The closing date for entries is 30th November 2025.
globalschoolsprize.org

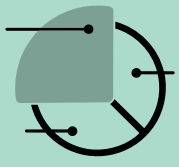
PUPIL PREMIUM UNPACKED

The Education Endowment Foundation has updated its 'Guide to the Pupil Premium' resource, originally published in 2021, and made it freely available via a dedicated page at the EEF website. The updated guide now includes a suggested 5-step Pupil Premium strategy, expanded advice on practical implementation and informative video presentations from school leaders across the country.
tinyurl.com/ts147-LL6

TEACHER WALKTHROUGH

4 TIPS FOR CLEARER PRESENTATIONS

ZEPH BENNETT OFFERS SOME PRACTICAL POINTERS FOR ADDING CLARITY TO YOUR NEXT CLASSROOM PRESENTATION



1

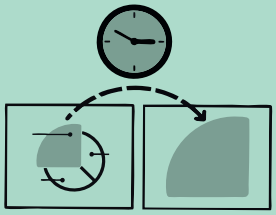
KEEP IT SIMPLE

Present one core idea per slide – potentially with a breakdown of what the idea entails, or by revealing one element of the idea at a time.

2

CHUNK FOR CLARITY

New ideas are often best conveyed by chunking them into smaller parts, using concrete examples where possible.



3

PAUSE

After each new concept or chunk, pause to allow your students to digest the information – then ask if they need anything repeating.

4

USE YOUR WORDS

If you can effectively combine use of graphics with careful wording, your audience will be engaged in both visual and audio processing, thus increasing their working memory capacity.

ZEPH BENNETT IS A PE TEACHER AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT LEADER WITH 25 YEARS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE; YOU CAN FIND MORE OF HIS EDUCATIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY FOLLOWING @ZEPHBENNETT.BSKY.SOCIAL

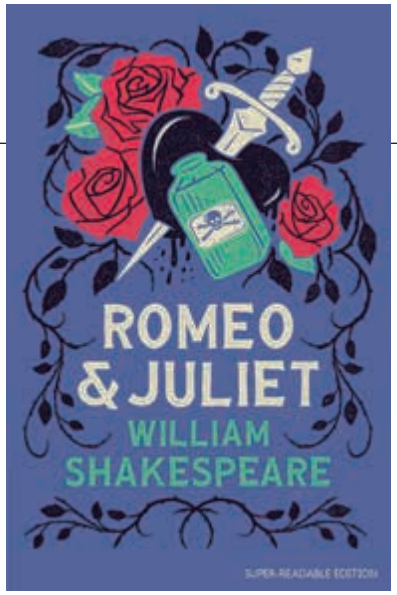
Got a great learning idea? Email editor@teachsecondary.com or tweet us at @teachsecondary

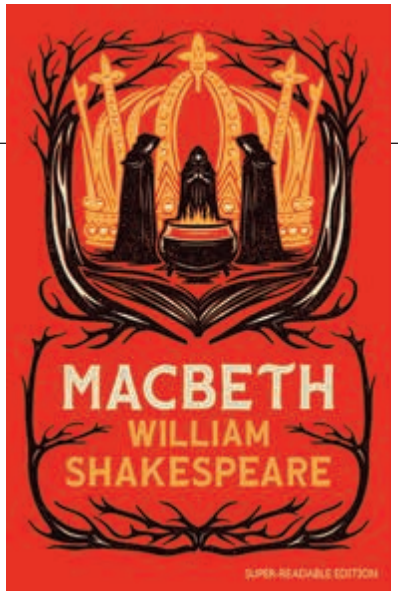
ENGLISH

Collins

Barrington Stoke Editions – Shakespeare

Open up The Bard's words to everyone with these dyslexia-friendly books





AT A GLANCE

- **Super-readable, dyslexia-friendly books for students studying Shakespeare**
- **Visually optimised for dyslexic readers**
- **Both feature a specially designed font and use of tinted paper**
- **Thoughtful layout choices remove barriers to reading**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Without the right kind of support and resourcing in place, students with dyslexia risk falling behind academically and facing reduced life chances. Given the poor outcomes and personal struggles typically associated with dyslexia, teachers are understandably keen to make use of interventions and supports that can successfully improve reading outcomes for this group – and yet in the majority of schools you're unlikely to encounter an especially wide choice when it comes to dyslexia-friendly books.

Thankfully, however, Barrington Stoke is on hand to help plug the gap, being a specialist publisher of books produced with the needs of dyslexic readers of all abilities very much in mind. As such, it knows full well that students with dyslexia specifically experience difficulties with *processing written information*, and gives this due consideration when it comes to the 'user experience' of its titles.

The books under consideration here – specialist editions of those Shakespearean mainstays *Romeo & Juliet* and *Macbeth* – therefore employ a unique, dyslexia-friendly typeface to facilitate smoother and easier reading, combined with highly accessible, clutter-free layouts and generous spacing to allow for student notes. Moreover, the pages in question are printed on an off-white heavier paper stock designed to reduce visual stress and improve focus by preventing overleaf print from showing through.

Seemingly small features like this ultimately combine to make a huge difference, by removing barriers to reading, building confidence and promoting inclusion in the classroom.

As for the *content* of these recent additions to the Barrington Stoke catalogue, you'll already know that they're two of Shakespeare's most famous plays. Both include the full, unabridged text, based on the 'Alexander Text' of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (but no foreword or explanatory content, making them suitable for the exam hall), and are presented as fully accessible versions, complete with larger print, easy-to-read fonts and expanded line spacing on matt buff paper.

At the end of the day, all reading is good reading, right? Not if you happen to be dyslexic, and only have access to texts that are at odds with your needs. What makes these books stand out is that they emphasise accessibility first and foremost, attend to the considerations that really matter and go all-in on friendly formatting.

The publication of dyslexia-friendly books like this is an essential step towards making great literature available to everyone. They're the sort of thoughtful, yet essential resources that can facilitate an easier reading experience and greater inclusion at a stroke – when used by capable teachers implementing carefully considered practice, of course...

teach SECONDARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Reduces visual noise and supports comprehension
- ✓ Excellent use of design, layouts and paper selection
- ✓ Generous line, character and word spacing
- ✓ Ideal for all students with additional literacy or neurodiversity needs
- ✓ Effective, accessible and enjoyable

PICK UP IF...

You're looking for accessible Shakespeare editions optimised for dyslexic readers, by specialists with considerable expertise.

For more information, visit **collins.co.uk/pages/barrington-stoke**

EAL

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.

teach SECONDARY

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

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** or follow **@johninpompano**

THE LAST WORD

"Nothing ever gets done, Sir..."

If the profession wants to boost those teacher retention numbers, it needs to ditch the cynicism and take some concerted steps towards curbing the worst student behaviour, says **John Lawson**

Given that this an era that's seen the adoption of 'chainsaw politics' and the attempted axing of an entire federal education department in America, might I suggest adopting a radical new approach to addressing England's 'teacher retention' crisis?

There's always been a vast epistemological disconnect between educators and the bureaucrats running the education system in this country. The latter rarely understand how poor behaviour drives away even excellent teachers. Working so far from the frontline makes it difficult for them to comprehend those long, demoralising days of being ceaselessly abused by unruly teenagers. Abuse that can, and *must* stop.

So, here's a plan. Scale down the DfE for a month, and dispatch its staff into a series of challenging schools to work as temporary supply teachers. It doesn't matter that the majority won't be skilled teachers, since most management strategies will often prove ineffective when faced with wilful and aggressive teenagers.

Because only then will that crucial '*Ah, **now** I understand*' epiphany occur. Behaviour must become a key priority, because it's a key reason for why capable teachers are quitting. The presence of three 'unteachables' in any given lesson will quickly disrupt learning, and duly shred the morale of exhausted teachers.

Paper planes and 'porn artists'

Upon returning to England from Florida in 2019 to care for my elderly mum, I began supply teaching in West Sussex. I love teaching, and wanted to continue, but was saddened to realise that even a dedicated 'A' grade teacher with years of outstanding success behind them often couldn't prevent unacceptable behaviour.

I remember distributing worksheets on Guru Nanak to a Y9 RE class, who promptly turned them into paper planes barely 10 minutes into the lesson. (The worksheets were a necessity, due to the textbooks having previously been defaced by 'porn artists' wielding crayons).

I was then subjected to a sexually explicit dance routine by three girls, who cranked up a speaker and provocatively exposed themselves before a braying audience of boys. It took 10 minutes to remove them from my class with the assistance of two world-weary teachers.

'We've given up'

Most of the words directed at me were expletives, insults, threats and insinuations – '*What's your handle on Grindr, Sir*?' Six boys set up a card game and told me to '*f*** off, paedo*' when I asked them to desist. Bathroom passes weren't requested; the children simply headed for the conveniences at their convenience. Not one child was on a behaviour plan. A few compliant students assured me that this was a typical day. "*Nothing ever gets done, Sir – we've given up.*"

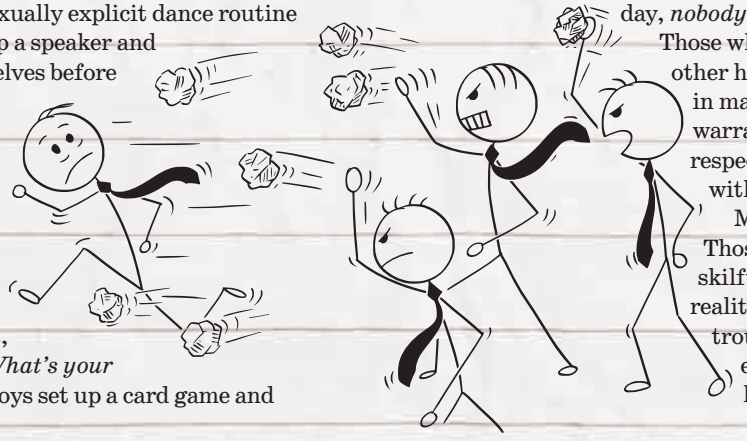
Are you outraged? I hope so. In the 60s and 70s, this kind of behaviour at my grammar school would have prompted mass floggings, expulsions and days of whole school sackcloth and ashes penitence. (Though to be clear, the only aspects of that response I'd support would be student penitence and teachers' outrage at such abysmal behaviour).

Why are schools still accepting this as 'acceptable'? Because it's not. Nor is it acceptable for a deputy head, when I voiced my concerns to them, to respond with, "*Welcome to my world*". After witnessing how such cynicism had become seemingly ubiquitous, I quit teaching myself and took up journalism. Oh, and while my pique is peaking, let's stop blaming COVID-19 lockdowns or social media for this kind of thing. Disgraceful behaviour is, after all, a hardy perennial.

An urgent reality check

It might be extremely difficult to achieve perfection with behaviour, but we must keep improving. In my experience, one practical strategy that consistently works is for students who exhibit disruptive behaviour to be placed on simple report cards that are signed after each lesson by their teachers. These cards grade their behaviour from 1 to 5, with 1 being exemplary and 5 unacceptable.

No time-consuming explanations are required. If students get 1s and 2s all week, it shows that they *can* behave, and will therefore come off report. Teachers and parents know they're not being affected by severe mental health issues, since these aren't conditions that are easily switched on and off. Many thousands of teens persist in being disruptive and just plain naughty because it's *gratifying*, and because at the end of the day, *nobody stops them*.



Those who *cannot* behave, on the other hand, will be unable to remain in mainstream classrooms, thus warranting a compassionate, respectful and caring Plan B within the school.

Most teens are teachable. Those who aren't will need both skilful support and an urgent reality check – before they become troubled adults who will rarely experience the kind of happiness everyone deserves.

Refillable. Reusable.

Remarkable!

Make your mark, lesson after lesson...

writes* UP TO 300 metres

refillable* UP TO 35 times

90% recycled*

ypo.co.uk/refill

ypo®

* Figures per pen derived from standard usage patterns and manufacturer data

HACHETTE LEARNING ACADEMY

Adaptive, interactive online professional development for today's teachers

- Short, practical online courses
- Can be completed in one sitting or in your own time and at your own pace
- Mapped to key teaching competencies
- New courses to help you support EAL learners and teacher and student wellbeing
- Practical strategies to support your teaching

Our consultants are always happy to help you or answer any questions.

Scan the code to find out more.

hachettelearning.com/academy

hachette LEARNING