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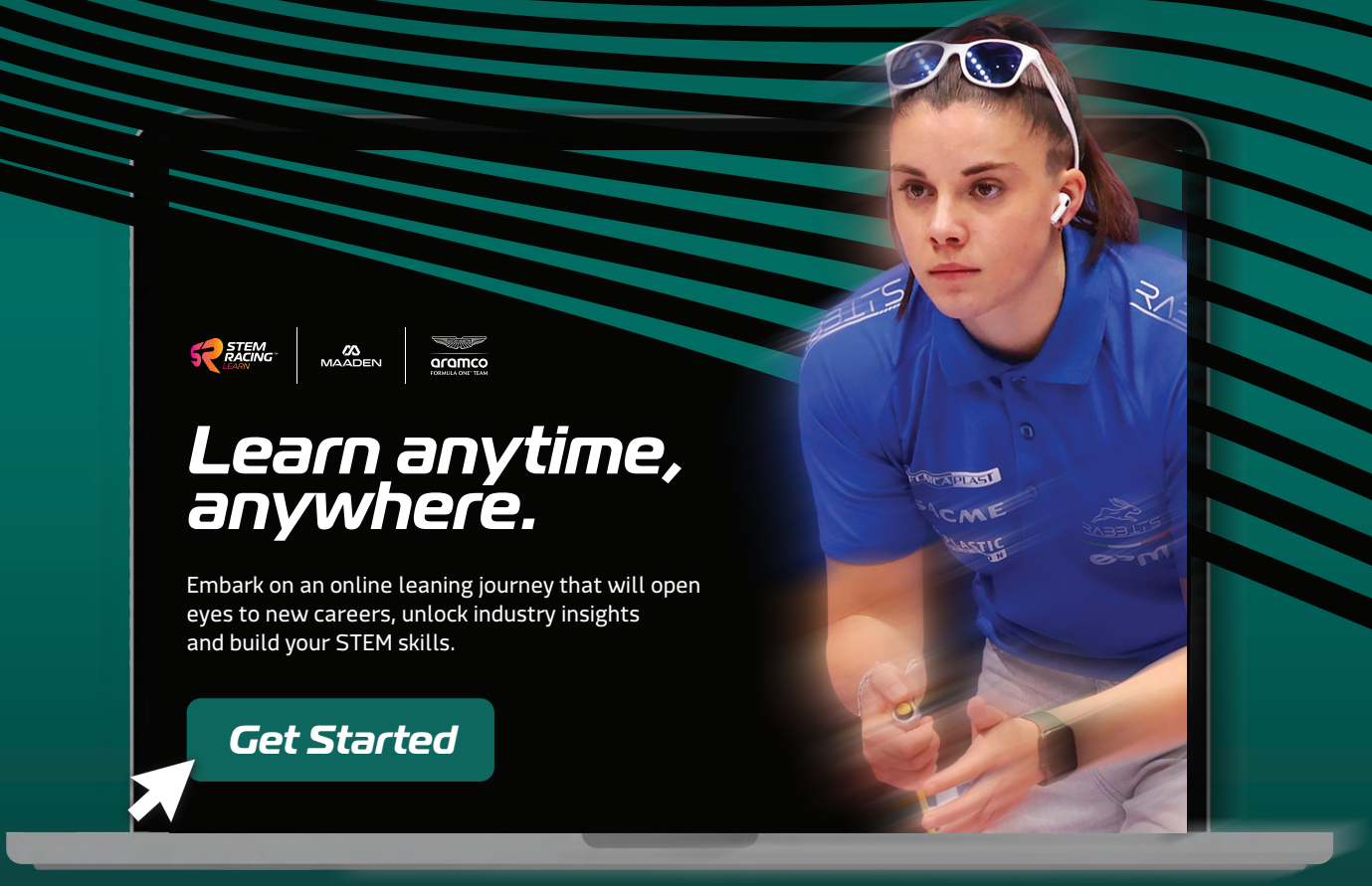
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FROM THE EDITOR

"Welcome...



One of the things we do here at *Teach Secondary* is keep tabs on matters relating to edtech. We publish a dedicated *Technology and Innovation* supplement, are regular visitors to Bett (look out for our preview coverage next issue) and make a point of highlighting the most impressive edtech offerings of the moment in our annual Teach Awards – which, as it happens, concluded just recently, with details of this year's winners starting on page 30.

You could say that we broadly consider developments within the edtech space as something to be welcomed, but we're also cognisant of how edtech can present problems, as well as solutions. I expect many of you will have encountered your fair share of incompatibility issues in the classroom, hardware failures and problematic software rollouts over the years.

Lately, however, one can sense the early stirrings of what could be a major shift in attitudes towards edtech. At a recent meeting of the Commons Science Committee, Labour MP Emily Darlington called out the makers of apps intended for educational use for including unlockable costumes and other incentives designed to keep kids playing. She was subsequently quoted by the BBC as saying, "*When gamification is used, children spend hours online to 'earn' the latest outfit*."

On the one hand, it's quite startling to see a member of the governing party push back against the edtech tide like that, after two decades of IWB installations, widespread iPad adoption, domination of the learning platform market by Google and Microsoft and all the other ways in which tech has taken hold in the classroom.

Then again, we should have perhaps seen that a reckoning was due. Augmenting your maths app with some of the pernicious 'FOMO' mechanics now commonplace across the wider video game industry might seem like a good idea – '*Kids love character skins, no money's changing hands and there's learning occurring, so we're all good, right?*' – but a compulsion loop is still a compulsion loop, however well-intentioned.

Then there's the teacher-turned-neuroscientist Jared Cooney Horvath, who has been making waves with his book *The Digital Delusion*, in which he argues that the supposed learning benefits of edtech are starkly at odds with noticeable declines in adolescent IQ scores and international measures of student attainment.

For now, it seems unlikely that schools will have consigned their screens to landfill and swapped out the tablets for mini whiteboards en masse by 2040 – but if we're witnessing the start of a more considered and thoughtful conversation about the tech we're using in schools and why, that can only be a good thing.

Enjoy the issue,

Callum Fauser
callum.fauser@theteachco.com

On board this issue:



Anthony David is an executive headteacher



Meena Wood is a leadership coach, speaker and school adviser



Aaron Swan is an English teacher and Language for Learning lead



Zoë Thornhill is an associate tutor in Higher Education



Paul Smith is a head of languages



Terri Bottriell-Wyse is a special school headteacher

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Essential reading:

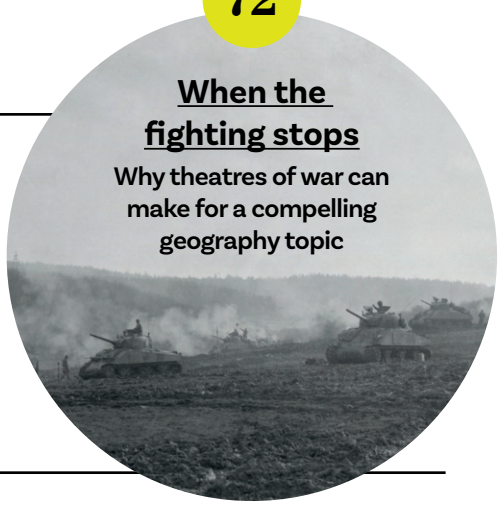


46 **No fear**
Make your PSHE lessons prurience-proof



Different strokes **68**
How should you go about teaching a mixed-ability MFL class?

72 **When the fighting stops**
Why theatres of war can make for a compelling geography topic



NOV/DEC '26

CONTENTS



Regulars

11 DICTIONARY DEEP DIVE
David Voisin examines the hidden origins and surprising behaviours concealed within our everyday vocabulary

14 NATASHA DEVON
If we want to close the girl/boy attainment gap at GCSE, we need to show boys that we're invested in their outcomes

15 MELISSA BENN
We need to stop viewing comprehensives as the poor cousins of independents and grammars, and start freeing them up to do what only they can...

43 MAKING SENSE OF...NEGATIVE NUMBERS
Colin Foster demystifies the processes involved in subtraction using numbers below zero...

50 OFF THE SHELVES
Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore

82 JOHN LAWSON
Why educators should confront the challenges that ail them with a 'Repair Shop' mindset...

Features

16 A STEP TOO FAR?
Why we should all be wary of the government's impending ban on social media access for under-16s...

18 WHO'S AFRAID OF FACILITATION?
Aaron Swan on why facilitation is nothing to be scared of – particularly when working with 'unteachable' students...

30 AND THE WINNERS ARE...
We unveil the school resources that did most to wow the judges of this year's Teach Awards

44 WATCH OUT FOR WEARABLES
Your students' phones might now be safely under lock and key, but what's your policy with regards to the smartwatches on their wrists and the recording-capable glasses they might be wearing?

46 SPARE THE EMBARRASSMENT
If your students' awkward RSHE questions have left you feeling tongue-tied, Elanie Ademokun has some practical advice to share

53 DENTAL DAMAGE
Would you know what to do if approached by a pupil who's had a tooth knocked out? Dr Yousuf Ibrahim gives his advice on what those first steps should consist of...

55 PLAN AHEAD
It's the point in the year when Y11s are lavished with attention ahead of their exams – but also the perfect time to establish positive routines with your Y10s that will pay off in 12 months' time...

60 OFF THE BEATEN PATH
Meena Wood makes the case for why we need technical learning pathways for ages 14 and up sooner rather than later

72 SCARS THAT WON'T HEAL
The impact of conflict on landscapes and population centres can be devastating, making it a difficult, yet important topic to cover in geography lessons, writes Zoë Thornhill

TS Special – SEND

22 A SPACE OF OUR OWN
Lindsay Cooper-Smith explains how inclusion rooms can directly address some of the key SEND challenges faced by teaching staff

26 PARENTAL GUIDANCE
Terri Bottriell-Wyse highlights the steps teachers and leaders must take if they're to engage effectively with the parents and carers of SEND pupils

29 PUT IT IN WRITING
Stephen Kilgour questions the wisdom of requiring all schools to publish a formal Inclusion Strategy

TS Focus – MFL

64 ALL-ENCOMPASSING
Dalia Abourgess shares her advice on how to place students in environments where the only language spoken is the one they're studying

67 ON THE UP
It's been a tough few years for MFL teachers, concedes Paul Smith – but things may soon be turning a corner...

68 SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE
Teaching mixed-ability classes at GCSE is never easy, but there are some things you can do to make the process that little bit more straightforward...

Learning Lab

75 BE INSPIRED
Some home truths regarding the teachers' group chat; a 5-point plan for taking charge of your classroom – and how one school went about crafting an 'irresistible curriculum'...



teach SECONDARY

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The newsletter

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

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



FRICTION-MAXXING

Readers of a certain age may still recall just how magical the iPod seemed when it first appeared. Even those early models, with their relatively limited storage capacities, presented a tantalising offer – *'Your entire record collection – or at the very least, a hefty chunk of it – with you at all times, wherever you are.'*

One streaming media revolution later, and we now have access to the majority of all music recordings created within the last five decades from our pockets. But when you can instantly listen to so much, so easily, do those songs, artists and albums mean as much to you as they once did? Do you still listen attentively? Or are you more likely to just reach for the nearest curated playlist, zone out and let the content™ wash over you?

Enter friction-maxxing – the practice of deliberately eschewing modern tech-enabled conveniences in favour of developing more meaningful relationships with the items we use and the media we consume. If you've overheard your students excitedly discuss their recent vinyl purchases, second-hand DVD finds and charity shop paperback book hauls, that'll be why.

Because if you've spent your childhood having your cultural tastes shaped by online algorithms, push notifications and endless scrolling, dropping the needle on an LP and giving it your full attention can almost feel like a radical act...

DO SAY
"Is that a first pressing or a reissue?"





DON'T SAY
"What does 'rewind' mean?"

BEAT THE BUDGET

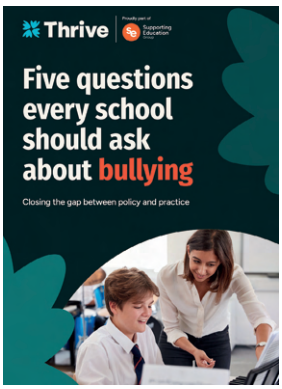


What are we talking about?
'Five Questions Every School Should Ask About Bullying' – a guide from the organisation Thrive on how bullying can be perceived and experienced by different groups within school settings.

Who is it for?
Senior leadership teams

What's on offer?
Advice on how to assess the effectiveness of existing anti-bullying approaches, improve policies, identify the effects of bullying and build more inclusive learning environments.

Where is it available?
tinyurl.com/ts158-NL1



WHAT THEY SAID...

"Boys and men are not the problem. The problem is the conditions that leave them isolated and without a secure future, and the companies that profit from their anger and insecurity."

– Professor Kent Buse, co-author of a recently published Lancet paper calling on the government to treat online misogyny as a public health issue, comparable to smoking and obesity

Think of a number...

58%

of teachers take school devices home at evenings and weekends

Source: YouGov survey of 1,013 UK teachers commissioned by ASUS Education

67%
of young people would turn to a teacher for help if needing support from an adult outside their family
Source: The Children's Society's 'Good Childhood Report'

25%
of Y8s in England have a probable mental health condition
Source: 'Growing Up in the 2020s' study led by the children's mental health charity, Anna Freud

ONE FOR THE WALL

"Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."

– Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr



Inspections inspected

As readers will be aware, September 2025 saw Ofsted introduce a new inspection framework which included, among other things, new areas for evaluation, the scrapping of overall effectiveness grades and a greater focus on inclusion and wellbeing during inspections. So, one year on – how are school leaders and teachers feeling about the changes made?

To find out, Ofsted enlisted the services of market research agency IFF Research, which carried out a series of focus groups and online surveys involving leaders of EY settings, schools and colleges, and proceeded to publish its findings in a 10-page report (see tinyurl.com/ts158-NL2). At first glance, the framework's reception appears to have been broadly positive, with three quarters of all respondents agreeing that their latest inspections had been carried out respectfully, and only 3% strongly disagreeing. Many further found the inspections to be more collaborative than previously, and doing more to account for their setting's specific context.

EY providers seemed to take a more favourable view of the new inspections than schools, however. Among schools, 65% agreed that inspectors sought to understand their context, but only 44% agreed that their inspections had been tailored accordingly.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the biggest sticking point remains workload, with a substantial 50% of schools surveyed disagreeing that their inspections-related workload was manageable. 39% of providers moreover felt that the mental wellbeing of their staff and assistants taking part in inspections was 'negatively affected a fair amount, or a lot', compared to 24% who felt that their staff's mental wellbeing had not been negatively affected at all.

SPEECHES AND CORRESPONDENCE

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



THE SPEECH:

Education Secretary addresses Confederation of School Trusts' annual conference

WHO? Lucy Powell, Secretary of State for Education
WHERE? International Convention Centre, Birmingham
WHEN? 15th October 2026

"I won't be an education secretary who just tinkers at the margins. I won't sit still and polish the status quo. I will listen, but I will act – and I won't be afraid to do what needs to be done.

Not while one in five children are persistently absent from school still. Not while so many children with SEND have their needs unmet. Not while the disadvantage gap remains so wide.

My vision is built on the belief that every child matters, on the promise that no young person will be left behind, and on our commitment that everyone will get the opportunity to fulfil their potential. That means we need to go beyond a one-size-fits-all system that sets too many up to fail.

We need to widen the narrow view of what 'good' is, and give our young people something to believe in again – hope for the future. That is my mission. I've dubbed it as me leading 'The Department of Hope'. That is our mission, all of us here today. Every child growing up knowing that success belongs to them, no matter their talents, needs or postcode. That's my promise.

And my promise to you is also a new way of working. Rather than beaming policies in from Whitehall, or imposing my own ideology, it'll be about evidence and what works – and you know what works in your schools and communities.

Backing you with over £2 billion more funding this year, I won't shirk the hard stuff. And I won't leave you to hold the line alone when big societal challenges show up in your schools. Whether it's misogyny and antisemitism, polarisation and division or misinformation, I will back you."

THE RESPONSE:

NFER comments on government's 'vocational GCSEs' plans

NFER National Foundation for Educational Research

FROM? Jude Hillary, co-head of policy and practice at the National Foundation for Educational Research
REGARDING? The government's proposed introduction of new vocational GCSE options at Y10
WHEN? 24th September 2026

"NFER's research on international evidence suggests that earlier tracking can increase socio-economic inequalities, with choices at younger ages more likely to reflect prior attainment and family background. It will therefore be important that these qualifications have high status, are taken by a substantial proportion of young people, and that they are able to change direction later."

SAVE THE DATE

18-19 NOVEMBER 2026 Schools & Academies Show | 20-22 JANUARY 2027 Bett UK 2027 | 12 FEBRUARY 2027 Queer Youth Summit 2027

18-19 NOVEMBER 2026
Schools & Academies Show
NEC, Birmingham
schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk

SLTs wanting to inject their school improvement plans with some fresh thinking will find plenty of inspiration at the Birmingham leg of the 'SAAShow' (its sister London event typically falling in May). As ever, expect lots in the way of expert-led CPD, an extensive line-up of engaging speakers and numerous education suppliers exhibiting their wares, as well as digital/online insights aplenty at the co-located EdTech Summit conference.

20-22 JANUARY 2027
Bett UK 2027
ExCeL London
uk.bettshow.com

As seasoned educators will know, Bett is where you go to get hands-on with the very latest edtech innovations. From time-saving administrative tools to cutting-edge audiovisual solutions designed for the classroom, there's a plethora of discoveries waiting to be uncovered at the event's sprawling exhibition floor, plus all manner of inspiration to be had from the show's extensive programme of speakers and drop-in CPD sessions.

12 FEBRUARY 2027
Queer Youth Summit 2027
Venue TBD
theproudtrust.org

Organised by the Proud Trust LGBT+ youth charity, the Queer Youth Summit 2027 will be a day of celebration and discussion taking place in Central Manchester. Schools, colleges, youth groups and community organisations in particular are invited to attend the event, which will see participants being encouraged to share their experiences and insights, and contribute to the Proud Trust's development of a Queer Youth Manifesto.


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TEACHER TALES

True stories from the education chalkface

But is it art?

I've long felt that much modern art can be both pretentious and lacking in creative skill. As a mild protest, I once entered a painting into our school's local art exhibition that had been created by my then 3-year-old daughter – a mass of colour with no structure. We named it 'Dancing in the Dark', gave it a high price tag, mounted it in a posh frame and invented a profile for a fictitious artist to sit alongside it.

It was duly sold in no time at all, thus confirming my long-held suspicions of modern art and its devotees. Two days later, however, I received a message from the art show organiser, asking me to contact the woman who'd bought the painting as she 'wanted to know more about the artist'.

I then proceeded to have a very awkward extended conversation with the lady in question, before finally having to admit that the artist was, in fact, my 3-year-old daughter and resolving to return her money.

Later, I discovered that the 'purchase' and subsequent phone call had actually been arranged by one of my work colleagues, who knew what I'd done and decided who should have the last laugh...

Fit for Christmas

I was preparing some Y7s to demonstrate circuit training at a forthcoming Y6 open evening. I explained to them in detail about how we'd be moving around on the whistle, the physical benefits of circuit training and so forth. When I asked at the end if they had any questions, one boy raised his hand and asked, *"Will we be using real turkeys, Miss?"*

Mystified by the question, I asked what he meant – to which he responded, *"For the turkey training, Miss..."*

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

ENOUGH AS YOU ARE

#3 – NOV/DEC, DUE TO THE PRESSURES MANY TEENS CAN FEEL OVER THE FESTIVE PERIOD...

The graphic below comes from 'ENOUGH AS YOU ARE' – a deck of 52 affirmation cards intended for pre-teens and teenagers created by 12-year-old Marco Ruggieri.

Each card carries an original message – one for each week of the year – written in the style of a supportive peer to help navigate areas such as anxiety, exam stress, friendship challenges, body image concerns and peer pressure. The full deck can be ordered from **enoughasyouare.co**, priced at £14.99.



Get Into Film



OCR SYLLABUS: BRITISH SHORT FILMS (RATED 15, SEVEN SHORTS / 62 MINUTES)

Curriculum Links: *Film studies*

We are thrilled to announce that Into Film has recently added seven short films to Into Film+, our free streaming service for schools. The films feature on the Cambridge OCR A Level film studies syllabus, giving teachers and learners access to key set texts, and supporting close analysis of narrative, genre, representation and film form.

With the films now available to stream together in one place for the first time, teachers should also keep an eye out for the free resources we'll be developing alongside these films to aid in classroom discussion. The films include:

- **The Arrival (pictured)** – A pregnant woman named Anna sits in a café, waiting for her lover while wrestling with a life-changing decision.
- **Operator** – An emergency line operator races against time to help a terrified mother and her child, knowing that their survival depends entirely on her instructions.
- **Tight Jeans** – Three young men hang out on a street corner, killing time with talk about girls and what a man's fashion sense can say about him.

Head online to intofilm.org to stream any of these shorts (plus four others) for free, and be sure to check out OCR's analysis and study guide.

Like and subscribe

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

Adam Boxer @adamboxer1
Facebook has started serving me videos of teacher influencers and their teaching tips and MY LORD there is a lot of bad advice going to young teachers

Natasha Porter OBE @NPorter_
English and maths GCSE is the best protective factor against being NEET, and one of the most common shared factors for those in prison is illiteracy. Schools are best placed to deliver educational outcomes, and these can make a huge difference to life chances.

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Promoting good practice

Better *Handwriting* Starts with the Right Foundations

Three practical videos from edding × National Handwriting Association

Handwriting matters, from developing early motor skills to building fluency, stamina and confidence for extended writing. That's why edding, writing-tool specialists, has partnered with the National Handwriting Association (NHA), the UK's handwriting experts.

Together, we've created three practical, expert-led videos that turn trusted handwriting guidance into clear, actionable classroom strategies for every stage of a pupil's writing journey.



EARLY YEARS

For early years teachers and leaders

Building the Foundations: Preparing Children to Write

Before children can write letters, they need to develop the movement, coordination and confidence to do so.

This video explores:
- Big movements before small movements
- Playful, multi-sensory mark-making
- Talking and rehearsing ideas before writing



KEY STAGE 2

For KS2 teachers and leaders

Building Fluency From Pencil to Pen

The move to pen should be about fluency, comfort and confidence — not perfection.

This video explores:
- Making handwriting increasingly automatic
- Comfort and choice of writing tools
- Rethinking the traditional "pen licence"



SECONDARY

For secondary teachers and leaders

Building Endurance & Expression: Writing in the Digital Age

Students still need handwriting that is legible, efficient and sustainable, particularly for extended writing and exams.

This video explores:
- Building writing stamina
- Writing efficiently, not perfectly
- Posture, grip and comfort
- The continuing role of handwriting alongside technology

Watch the video most relevant to your pupils and discover practical, evidence-based strategies to support handwriting success in your classroom.

www.edding.com/en-uk

nha-handwriting.org.uk



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



Dogs are great for pulling us out of a sedentary lifestyle. However, taking your canine friend for a 'promenade' could lead you on a 'geolinguistic' journey. Many breeds are named after French regions, including the Norman Hound, Pyrenean Shepherd, Beauceron, Briard (cf. Brie), Brittany Spaniel and Alsatian. Others evoke famous wine regions, such as the Dogue de Bordeaux and Burgundy Hound, while the Artois Hound recalls beer. Dogs can even teach us French – 'basset' means low ('*bas*'), while '*terrier*' comes from the French word for 'burrow'.

LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS



English is a formidably flexible language partly because its *inflectional morphology* – a variety of verb endings – is particularly light. Consequently, words can often shift from noun to verb, or vice versa, without changing their spelling.

Common nouns, for example, can thus become verbs by simply adding the infinitive marker 'to'. In this way, 'author' becomes 'to author', while also taking the usual verb endings (*-s, -ing, -ed*). Similarly, 'pocket' becomes 'pocketed' by adding the past-tense marker '*-ed*'.

(Stephen Fry famously lent his avuncular voice to the original audiobook recordings of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, but complained that 'pocketed' was a difficult word to pronounce. Rowling then ensured that 'pocketed' appeared at least once in every book thereafter...)

Sometimes, however, spelling changes are needed – as with 'practice/practise' (in British English) or 'effect/affect'. 'To effect' also exists, as in '*to effect radical changes*'. The word 'change' itself exhibits some remarkable grammatical versatility, with other examples including 'bath/bathe', 'breath/breathe' and 'belief/believe'. Hundreds of nouns can become verbs – from 'amount' and 'average' to 'zoom' and 'zero'.

This flexibility also embraces proper nouns and neologisms ('to Google', 'to WhatsApp'), as well as foreign borrowings, such as 'to flambé' and 'to sauté'. English actually turns '*sauté*' into 'sautéed' (literally 'frieded'), showing that linguistic flexibility often matters more than linguistic fidelity.

BREAKING THE SPELL



The start of this academic year coincided with the release of the 2025 PISA scores. While England's reading scores remained reassuringly stable, reading performance across the OECD appeared to be in steep decline. After years in which many argued that correlation shouldn't be conflated with causation, it now seems that some sober conclusions can be drawn. Screens – and social media in particular – *are* part of the problem.

We must recognise that no amount of preventive messaging will persuade young people to swap pixels for printed pages. It's also clear that the focus on phonics has had a positive effect.

School time is the pivotal window of opportunity, but as one literacy specialist recently asked, *when is the cut-off point*? If there are struggling readers in KS3, then there ought to be secondary phonics programmes in place. We must also accept that repeating the mantra '*Reading is fun!*' isn't enough, and may even be counterproductive by making reluctant readers feel yet more marginalised.

Children develop a love of reading at different stages. Fluency takes priority over fun, purpose comes before pleasure, and reading alone is no panacea. We must abandon this romantic idea that children will develop a love of literature or poetry simply because they're taught it well. They must first be able to access the curriculum without cognitive strain.

It may be an English teacher's job to ignite an interest in literature, but it's the job of every teacher to promote reading through their subject. Reading isn't just about vocabulary, writing proficiency and grammatical accuracy; these things must be taught explicitly *in support of* reading.

SAME ROOT, DIFFERENT WORDS



The earthquake had a **mag**nitude of 6.2



Be **mag**nanimous and forgive others



Use a microscope to **mag**nify the cells

The Inside Story

JAIME JOHNSON
younggiants.co.uk

We hear how AP provider Young Giants came to be, and how it's seeking to distinguish itself within the SEND sector



Jaime Johnson is the founder of Young Giants Education, having previously taught in primary and FE settings both in the UK and abroad.

[MEET THE TEAM]



Franciele da Silva, Head of Education Service
Franciele brings extensive experience in education delivery, quality assurance and the operational standards that keep young people safe and well-supported.



Ashley Jones, Named QTS Lead (NQL)
Ashley holds NPQSL and NPQEYL leadership qualifications, in addition to holding QTS, and specialises in behaviour, diversity and inclusion.

Young Giants Education is an alternative provision (AP) provider, specialising in tuition and mentoring support for SEND learners spanning EYFS to KS5 and beyond. It was founded in 2016 by qualified teacher Jaime Johnson, expanding over the decade since to become a trusted provider of AP to schools and local authorities across the UK.

"When I worked in AP as a tutor, I saw very able children and young people failing through a lack of consistency and oversight in their education," Johnson recalls. *"While one tutor might be fantastic, another may fall short and there was little, if any accountability from anyone involved once the learner had come out of school – I felt sure it didn't have to be that way."* As a mother of two, Jaime is highly driven and passionate about inclusion in education.

The service she has developed is overseen by a head office team of QTS teachers, offering bespoke yet flexible interim programmes of educational support that can assist learners with a wide range of SEND and SEMH needs – including those with profound and multiple learning disabilities, EBSNA and those at risk of permanent exclusion.

"The name 'Young Giants' reflects my belief that every child can become great when given the right support," Johnson explains. *"Coming from a schools background, the team and I have a deep understanding of safety and compliance in education, and have designed a responsible service that works on a case-loading basis to ensure that progress, attendance, engagement, pathway planning and reintegration are centrally monitored for every learner."* In terms of qualifications, Young Giants offers exam bookings, access to Employability qualifications, ASDAN courses and Arts Awards. Moreover, it's a managed service, as opposed to a tuition agency, providing the education, not simply the tutor.

"We know our learners well," notes Johnson, *"By attending professionals meetings and annual reviews, and conducting regular check-ins and supervisions, we're able to pick up emerging barriers to learning before they become too great, adapting our provision to meet the needs of our learners."* Looking ahead then, what are Jaime's hopes and goals for the company over the next 10 years?

"My ambition is for Young Giants to reach more young people across the country, and prove what AP tuition can really achieve for the children who find themselves in need of it. By raising our own standards, we can show the sector what is possible. We will continue to welcome all new regulation, including the Non- School AP Voluntary National Standards, and hope that one day the DfE will recognise our work and enable services such as ours to become registered."

"A central promise from the beginning has been to never refuse a referral. I believe strongly that all risks can be mitigated if the adults around the child collaborate effectively. And I'm proud to say that in over 10 years we have indeed never refused a referral."

Contact:
0208 068 6803
enquiries@younggiants.co.uk
younggiants.co.uk
@Young Giants Education (LinkedIn)

Our Journey

2016
Jaime founds Young Giants Education, aiming to drive up AP industry standards

2020
Worked hard throughout the pandemic to keep learners moving onto next steps

2024
Expanded out of the South East, delivering in Newcastle, Nottingham and more

2026
Established as a trusted provider to local authorities and schools nationwide



The solution to resolving the GCSE attainment gap between girls and boys doesn't lie in pandering to gender stereotypes, but in assuring boys that those around them are invested in their success...

Natasha Devon

For the past three decades, girls have outperformed boys in their GCSEs. 70% of female pupils pass with a grade 4/C or above, compared to 64.4% of their male counterparts. In fact, girls surpass boys in 40 out of 47 available subject categories.

Unfortunately, this discrepancy in academic attainment – particularly as it applies to white, working-class boys, of whom only 36% acquire a grade 4 or above in English and Maths – has been hijacked by right-wing politicians and commentators. Much like the relatively high suicide rates amongst men, it only ever seems to be raised when someone is attempting to justify their opinion that '*feminism has gone too far*', or that '*male/white privilege doesn't exist*'.

This can leave many progressives feeling that if they engage with the issue, they're somehow 'siding with the enemy'. There's also the concern that any attempts at rewiring the system to advantage boys must necessarily mean disadvantaging girls. All of which goes some way to explain why I picked up Mike Bell's new book, *Yes He Can: Closing the Attainment Gap for Boys at Secondary School* with some trepidation.

Over-praising, over-punishing

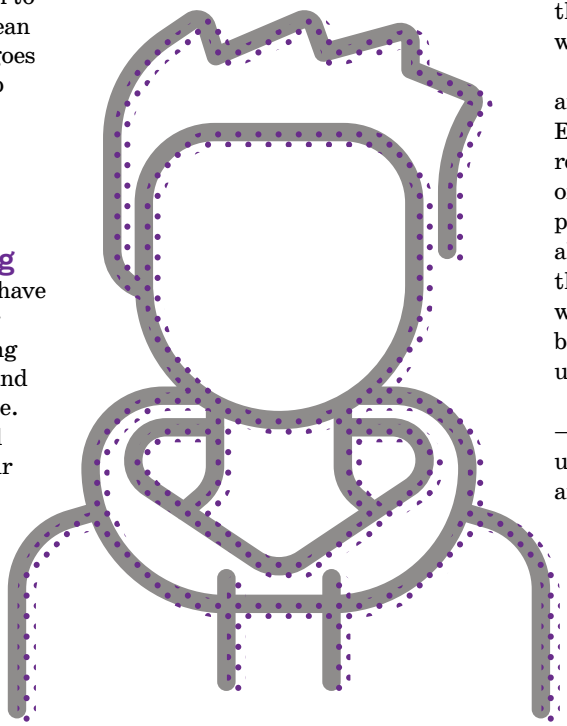
The book examines six schools that have managed to eliminate GCSE gender performance gaps, with staff sharing insights into how they managed it and how other schools might do the same. The first thing I was relieved to find was that all six schools brought their boys' performance up to match the bar set by their girls, rather than the other way round.

The second pleasant surprise was that none of the tips shared involved what one might (lazily) assume was the step of somehow relating their lesson content to football. In fact, Andy Eadie – deputy head at a Rochdale school featured in the book – told me directly that such interventions are actually the precise opposite of what's needed.

"It's actually about not treating 'boys as boys'," he remarked, before explaining how at his school there had been a pattern – one I'm certain remains fairly widespread – of both over-praising and over-punishing male pupils. "*Boys are rewarded for doing the bare minimum*," Eadie said. "*When girls sit quietly and get on with their work, no one even notices. Boys are rewarded for that, but then the boys are also over-sanctioned for fairly low-level disruption*."

A culture transformed

The net result is boys who exist in a culture of low expectation, albeit one in which many also feel as though they're constantly being told off. The first step towards fixing this, Eadie believes, is to name it. It's then a question of "*making the pupils feel cared about*".



At his school, they adopted a trauma-informed and relational approach to teaching, and used the expertise of their SENCo across the curriculum. "*Of course, some of the older teachers said 'We've always done it this way' and didn't like the change – but other than that, we've had very little resistance*."

According to Eadie, this approach took around two years to embed, but has completely transformed the culture of the school. All pupils have since benefitted, "*Especially those with barriers to learning. We have a high proportion who are on pupil premium, or ECHPs, or have other vulnerabilities*." He told me that when people visit his school now, many will often remark that the atmosphere feels welcoming and caring.

Everything I learnt from Bell's book and my subsequent interview with Eadie makes total sense to me. Whilst I remain a firm believer that children will often behave in line with our preconceived expectations of them, I also know I've been guilty of assuming that groups of boys will misbehave in ways I wouldn't with groups of girls. I'll be making efforts at tackling my unconscious bias in future.

I'm also struck by a certain irony – that this solution to addressing underachievement among boys would be anathema to many of those individuals who shout about the issue the loudest, i.e. the aforementioned opportunistic right-wingers. Yet if we truly care about engaging boys in education, we need to abandon the culture war politics and start listening to those schools that have done so successfully.

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. *Yes He Can: Closing the Attainment Gap for Boys at Secondary School* is available now (Routledge, £15.99)

WHY I LOVE...

Find out how Academy 21's support for students struggling to access mainstream education helped Jaya reconnect with learning and rebuild her confidence

ABOUT JAYA:



NAME:
Jaya is a former Academy21 student who joined us for GCSEs after a period of severe disengagement. She is now studying for her A Levels and has ambitious career goals in law.

TALKING ABOUT: ACADEMY21'S ONLINE ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Finding a way back

After missing almost three years of formal education, I joined Academy21 through my school. I had always enjoyed the academic side of school, but the social demands, crowds and pressure of a mainstream environment had become overwhelming. My confidence had gradually disappeared, and eventually I just couldn't keep attending.

Academy21 gave me a flexible learning space that felt manageable and achievable. I could work towards my GCSEs at a pace that felt comfortable for me. That flexibility gave me a way back into education without feeling like I had to overcome everything at once.

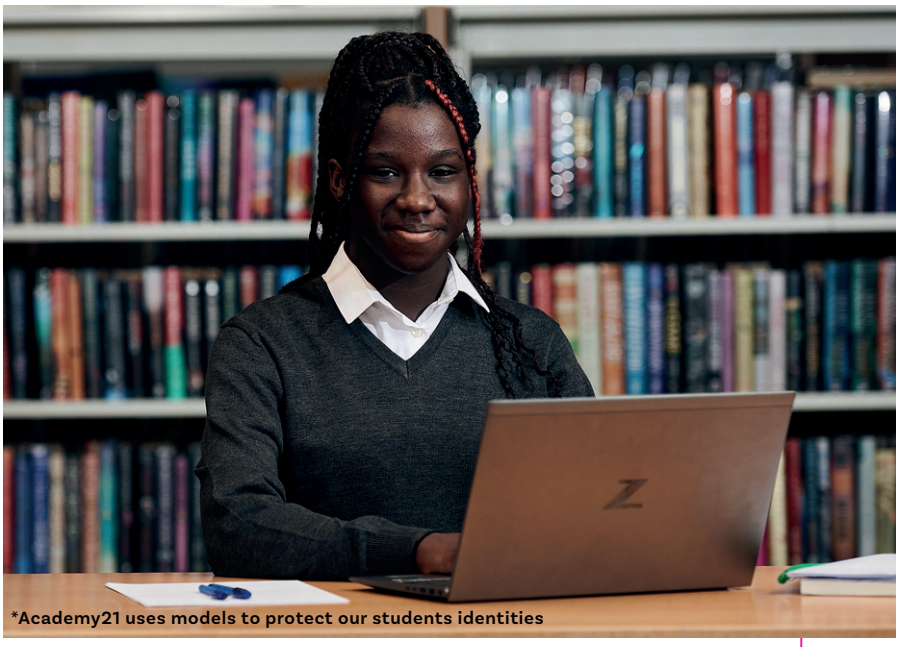
Feeling seen

My teachers acknowledged my contributions and showed genuine interest in my thoughts. This made me feel seen and valued as a student, and helped me become more confident in my abilities.

The online group lessons made it easier for me to participate and engage with learning. I had teachers who knew me, and helped me understand where I could improve.

Learning how to learn

Academy21 also helped me develop skills that went beyond individual subjects. Before joining, I really struggled with time management. Over time, I became more self-motivated, organised and able to manage my time more efficiently.



*Academy21 uses models to protect our students identities

Academy 21
The Online Alternative Provision Experts

Contact:
0800 208 8210
contact@academy21.co.uk
academy21.co.uk

Listen to The Alternative Provision podcast on Spotify here:

The tutorials were particularly useful. I could revisit content, practise exam technique, review feedback, and consolidate my understanding before assessments. Accessing recorded lessons through the lesson library meant I could return to material when I needed to, helping me feel more prepared and in control of my studies.

Setting ambitious goals

Despite missing nearly three years of education, I achieved excellent GCSE results, including a grade 9 in English Literature. My experience with Academy21 transformed not only my outlook on learning, but my outlook in different areas of my life. It gave me a new perspective and helped me advance academically and personally.

One of the moments I'm most proud of was having my analysis of *Macbeth* and poetry used as exemplar material for current literature students. Knowing that my work could help other students understand the course was, and still is, a huge honour. I'm now studying A Levels in psychology, law and politics, and hope to become a barrister specialising in criminal law.

Academy21 helped me reconnect with education. More importantly, it helped me believe in what I could achieve beyond it.

WILL IT WORK FOR YOU?

- **Live education** that provides structure and adapts to individual needs
- **Interactive teaching** with opportunities to contribute and ask questions
- **Tutorial and revision support** to help students practise their exam technique
- **Recorded lessons** give students the opportunity to revisit topics

Why should comprehensive schools keep emulating the priorities and aspirations of grammars and independents, when they have the potential to do so much more?

Melissa Benn



Andy Burnham is the first Labour leader for a very long time to offer unequivocal support for the principle of comprehensive education (see tinyurl.com/ts158-MB1).

As is so often the case in politics, this passion stems from deep human experience. Burnham's father was a clever working-class boy who failed the 11-plus and didn't get the chance to attend university. Comprehensive reforms under a series of Labour governments, however, enabled his three sons to have the higher education denied to him.

Andy went to Cambridge to study English, becoming one among millions of working-class children for whom non-selective education proved to be a life-changer.

Vexed conditionality

And yet, comprehensive education still remains an oddly controversial topic within British culture, forever having to justify and continually prove itself. This vexed conditionality was on full display during a recent Radio Four documentary written and presented by the ex-*Financial Times* journalist turned maths teacher, Lucy Kellaway (see tinyurl.com/ts158-MB2).

The documentary was a mix of interesting (if well-trodden) political history and continued interrogation of the non-selective principle. The programme's title, *Comps*, was regrettable, since the term – usually wielded in the singular – is almost always used to casually diminish one of the most profound public service reforms of the post-war period.

Kellaway was clear on the illogic and cruelty of the old tripartite system that divided children at the end of primary school, but made no reference to the impact of today's grammars on surrounding schools. Nor did she mention the continuing existence of private education.

Irreconcilable truths

What did come across, however, is the extent to which the political right have come to accept the comprehensive principle – albeit with some unbending notions about what makes for a 'good education'…

In Kellaway's telling, comprehensive education is an attempt to reconcile two conflicting ideas: "*It's hard to oppose the basic idea of every child having access to the same education in the same place, but children aren't all the same. They have different talents, interests and aptitudes.*

"*Much of the last 50 years of education policy has been an attempt to reconcile those two truths – equal access to all, while recognising individual differences. When the pendulum swings from one priority to the other, some children are always on the wrong end of it.*"

Better models

It's unclear why comprehensive schools should have to cater only to one particular set of talents, in a way that mimics the culture and aspirations found at old-style grammar and private schools. It's an approach that's clearly not serving a significant minority, and which has contributed to British teenagers being among the unhappiest in Europe (see tinyurl.com/ts158-MB3).



Kellaway is sympathetic to recent political reforms. Much of *Comps* came across as a thinly-veiled love letter to a certain controversial north London MAT at which she once taught – one characterised by both strict discipline and a heavy academic focus.

But why do that when there are so many other models for what good comprehensives can do? Models which, I would argue, do more to meet the needs of a broader group of children – the highly academic included?

The pendulum swings

One of the most interesting interviews in the programme was with Sammy Wright – headteacher at a Sunderland secondary school, a former social mobility commissioner and author of the book *Exam Nation*. In his view, "*That period between the age of 12 and 18 isn't just about the acquisition of knowledge. It's about a whole bunch of other dispositions and attitudes and characteristics… about finding fulfilment [and] creating good citizens. All of those things are really important.*"

We're at a point where we may be about to see the educational pendulum swing once again, this time under a (relatively) new Prime Minister and with a fresh emphasis on technical qualifications. But as Sammy Wright and others have argued, more radical reform is required – including a more flexible National Curriculum, greater freedom for teachers to adapt lessons to the interests of their pupils, and less unnecessary, sterile and expensive testing.

If comprehensive education fails to modernise and adapt its offering to the society it presently serves, then programmes like Kellaway's, with their rehashing of all that familiar ambivalence, will continue to dog us for the next 50 years or more.

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

ACCESS DENIED

The government wants to be seen as taking action on youth stress and anxiety with its under 16s social media ban, but they don't seem to have thought through the implications of what they're doing, says **Emma Gilland**...

The 26-year-old Labour MP, Josh Dean, recently decried his own party's social media ban for 'missing the point' on how to protect young people (see tinyurl.com/ts158-SM0), thus prompting the question – does the government actually understand the relationship between social media and younger generations' use of it?

Speaking as someone who grew up with social media, it's long been clear to me that it entails both benefits and potential harms. Many children today live in much more isolated social environments, lacking access to public spaces and activities in which they can socialise away from the classroom and adult supervision.

Yet while many might class that as a consequence of social media, it could just as easily be argued that social media use came about as a *byproduct* of existing trends towards social isolation. Young people increasingly state that the reason they're unable to meet up with friends independently is due to them taking part in too many extracurricular or scheduled activities, and an inability to find transportation.

In this sense, social media over the last 15 years has therefore been crucial in providing teenagers with a space in which to interact among themselves, away from adults – a freedom that's now become a key expectation of adolescence.

This year's social media ban was overwhelmingly backed by parents, yet with many teenagers still able to access social media sites in Australia – and relatively little explanation as to how else teens are meant to socialise independently with their friends – has the policy been sufficiently thought through?

The social media advantage

None of this is to say that there are no issues with social media or the power it's come to wield over young lives. The widespread concerns over content algorithms, untrustworthy information, and the potential for social media platforms to exacerbate mental health issues are all well-founded.

> **"There's been a broader loss of trust and belief in teenagers' abilities to critically engage with the world around them"**

Even so, I've seen for myself how the majority of young people haven't been left damaged or broken by our use of social media. We've emerged from our social media-assisted adolescence perfectly okay – perhaps even strengthened by its use.

Many in my cohort have managed to use social media to their advantage. University societies, businesses, political organisations and sports clubs have all made use of social media platforms to build shared social and community spaces from scratch, with very little outside or state support. The ability to promote events to wide audiences connected via common interests makes it easier to self-organise, even when in a new city and environment. This experience of building online communities based around similar interests has then often been successfully transferred into the organisation of in-person activities.

Real-world spaces

The social media ban arrives after a period in which young people's social environments have undergone a radical shift. Research conducted this year by the Centre for Social Justice (see tinyurl.com/ts158-SM1) has shown that there are over a thousand fewer youth centres now compared to 10 years ago – indicative of a broader decline in the social spaces available to young people.

With that in mind, issues arise when we focus solely on those arguments in Jonathan Haidt's book *The Anxious Generation* that are rooted in social media, over and above what Haidt and others have observed regarding wider societal transformations, and the steady disappearance of independent social spaces for under 18s.

We also can't ignore how increased anxieties over letting young people meet outside the home without adult supervision have inevitably resulted in fewer spaces in which young people can build 'real-world' relationships.

Indeed, there seems to have been a broader loss of trust and belief in teenagers' abilities to critically engage with the world around them, combined with a tendency to see them as particularly susceptible to assorted social dangers and risks. Yes, there remains the possibility that today's teens will make mistakes, but that's often how they learn. How else are they meant to build the resilience needed to deal with the much greater challenges they'll face as adults?

Deeply embedded, more aware

A 2024 study by UC Berkeley found that the best way of guarding children against the dangers of misinformation is to expose them to more misinformation, not less (see tinyurl.com/ts158-SM2). Young people are more aware that not everything they see



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online is true and can be trusted, and more adept than adults at picking up on AI content despite, or perhaps because of, being more deeply embedded in the world of online media.

YouTube and other social media platforms have given young people plenty of opportunities to identify with like-minded peers and explore shared interests. A key concern of the social media ban highlighted by many is that taking away these resources does a disservice to those keen to explore subjects that don't often figure in the mainstream education curriculum, such as philosophy.

The problem, however, is that keeping YouTube available would effectively undermine the arguments being made in favour of the ban, since doing so would give children access to the same kinds of short-form videos said to be causing such harm to attention spans (YouTube's 'shorts' being directly comparable to Instagram's 'reels'), while being driven by the same self-serving algorithms.

Driven underground

Another example of the ban's short-sightedness is that today's children will eventually grow up to become adults living in a society that's still going to include social media. The benefit to them being socially online while still at school and living at home is that their media consumption can be mediated and controlled by their parents, and safely restricted during school hours.

At this point in their lives, they'll be surrounded by trusted adults who can support them in the event of any problems arising. If you then bar them from social media completely until they become adults themselves, any related issues become much harder to deal with when the time comes, due to their lack of prior experience – just as they're being expected to now deal with 'adult' issues by themselves.

A related concern sees the ban as potentially driving social media use underground. If those internet-savvy young people determined to continue using social media encounter any problems online, they'll end up contending with the resulting challenges alone, unable to speak to a trusted adult in their lives, lest they incriminate themselves.

Moreover, teenagers already routinely deal with having much of their independence and autonomy taken away from them – especially outside the home. When concerns are raised that nearly three-quarters of children in the UK spend more time inside than *prison inmates*, we often forget that a key driver for this has been the fall in numbers of children being left unsupervised outside the home.

Yes, there should be some limits on social media use, for younger children especially, but these restrictions should carry the authority of trusted adults (parents, teachers) able to decide on and enforce what's best for the young people *they are responsible for*.

More importantly, there needs to be a larger conversation with teenagers concerning their use of social media platforms and how they feel about them. Discussions should be had over what can be done offline to encourage teens to spend less time on their phones – but for that to happen, teens must first be trusted to build spaces, communities and activities for themselves, without them having to fear the prospect of being subjected to near-constant surveillance.



IN BRIEF

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

The Labour government plans to introduce a sweeping ban on social media use for all under 16s, after a similar policy was enacted in Australia.

WHAT'S BEING SAID?

Social media use is thought by some to be responsible for lowering children's attention spans, establishing unrealistic life goals and driving an epidemic of youth anxiety.

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING?

Young people have come to rely on social media for connecting with peers, maintaining friendships and seeking support at a time when their access to physical social spaces has diminished considerably – a trend that has already been underway for some time. Post-ban evidence from Australia would also seem to suggest that the most determined underage users have been able to continue accessing social media networks, despite the preventative measures that have been put in place.

THE TAKEAWAY

The government's decision to opt for a comprehensive social media ban has been welcomed by parents, but fails to acknowledge the important role that such platforms have played in helping young people make friends and develop their sense of identity outside of adult supervision – at a time when the real-world spaces that might enable such interactions are increasingly thin on the ground.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Emma Gilland is the programme coordinator for Ideas Matter, where she works to expand public debate and discussion

Teaching the 'UNTEACHABLE'

Facilitating can reach 'unteachable' students in ways other approaches can't – so why has it acquired such a bad rap over the years?

A student is presented with a learning procedure. It's willingly accepted. Guidance is then offered by the teacher, but it's denied. Some failed attempts later, and the working model is pressed as urgently as the actual solution that will stave off failure.

Again, the student refuses to take on board the wisdom of the subject expert. The teacher looks aghast as the tutee denies the need for any scaffolding or support. The mindset on show doesn't just present an academic risk, but potentially a physical one too...

The credulous and incredulous

"*He doesn't listen, does he...*" says our friend Jamie to my partner, while I repeatedly attempt to climb and fall off my brand new Penny Farthing. Last year, as a 40-year-old cycling enthusiast with a new toy to play with, I began to learn the balance of the 'big wheel'. And despite often complaining about my students who refuse guidance and go on to struggle with the activities they're set, I have to admit that like them, *I don't want to be taught by a teacher*. I want to be left alone to work things out for myself.

Back in the classroom, there are many students who, like me, could be described as 'unteachable' in certain respects – and that's not intended as a criticism. They might be seen as 'defiant' of directed teaching (as I too often am). They're increasingly distant from centres of knowledge and proximate to other non-conformists.

Things have got to the stage where I'll now conceptualise students as fitting into one of two camps – those who are credulous towards notions of teaching and learning, those who are incredulous (the camp I'd put myself in). Similarly, education practitioners will tend to follow one of two different approaches in the classroom – *teaching* and *facilitating*.

"Almost no one I've worked with has ever described themselves as a 'facilitator'"

Credulous students can be taught because they have faith in what they perceive as the experience, qualification and authority of the practitioner. Those who are *in*credulous will prefer to rely on their own instincts and problem-solving skills, perceiving themselves as equals to the practitioner. The journeys for this group will need to be *facilitated*.

Application and autonomy

The traditional 'teaching practitioner' will possess within them a body of knowledge that they draw upon and disseminate downwards, according to their evaluation of the students' success. The pedagogy they follow will broadly consist of a set of instructions – passively receive this content, comply with the instructed activity, and then demonstrate your progress against closed criteria.

Facilitators are different. They'll present the class with a series of tools and the material that students need to work with. They'll then describe what the tools do, and instruct the pupils to apply them to the material until they can't any more – after which, the facilitator says, "*I'll come and give you some motivation to try something you haven't yet.*"

Textbooks function as a kind of halfway house between teaching and facilitating, by giving students material and a methodology that they must apply themselves, while allowing for some limited autonomy over the learning experience. It's not so far removed from the verbal language of instruction, but presented in a written form with the same closed criteria outcomes. True facilitation will have much more open-ended outcomes – think coursework, or expressive/creative assignments.

To practitioners who would describe themselves as teachers first and foremost, the language of the facilitator can seem quite alien. This language will typically be used so infrequently around a school that facilitation can even appear alien at first to those incredulous students who will benefit from it most.

Idiosyncratic paths

The credulous student will have a natural aversion to giving wrong answers, favouring compliance within accepted approaches above all else. They concentrate their attention on the process of making notes, and trying to transfer the teacher's knowledge into their own learning.

The incredulous student, on the other hand, will refute accepted sequences and time frames, preferring instead to



forge idiosyncratic paths of their own. These students will need the tools used in their learning to be carefully presented, so that they're able to understand the task's requirements through handling and use; the tools must work upon first use, or else we risk conditioning students to think that the tools are ineffective. The incredulous will quickly encounter processes that don't work, since it's in our nature to assume that tools are capable of being inefficient.

Facilitating, however, has a bad reputation. Almost no one I've worked with has ever described themselves as a 'facilitator', while some senior leaders have actively told me '*We are not facilitators here – we are teachers*'.

Why is that? It's our intention for A Level students to become more independent in their learning. Our end goal is for higher level students to be facilitative in their learning, rather than dependent on being taught. We surely want our students to be eventually capable of independent research, exhibit rigour and discipline, and become more active participants in lessons.

What do we want learners to be?

At a recent conference of grammar schools, the merits of facilitation came up for discussion. Those present came to a general agreement that education effectively creates a path that leads *from* teaching *to* facilitating. In Y7, there's a high degree of controlled, managed teaching. By KS5, this approach will have likely turned into facilitation, with direction and dependence largely replaced by provision and independence.

But, we hypothesised, this path isn't guided according to age or year group, but by *educational factors*. A higher ability student may accelerate faster down this path and find themselves taking on certain elements of the facilitative approach in lower year groups.

It can also depend on the quality of resources and scaffolding the school is able to offer, or even the experience and confidence of individual teachers, some of whom may foster more facilitative discovery than others. Just as we came to criticise a syllabus for using Key Stage or age to gatekeep facilitative methodologies, practitioners must ultimately reflect the skills and motivations of the students in front of them, regardless of Key Stage.

Displays as instruction

In recognition of those students who, like me, would rather be 'left to it', I've been experimenting with lowering the threshold of facilitative learning. A Level groups have had their work presented via my own online resources, supported by filmed tutorials and student projects. KS3 groups have had entire lessons written down, alongside a bank of clearly presented and defined tools with which to carry out the work.

My classroom displays no longer consist of student work, but rather tools and descriptions of their use (though this is something I'm still working on). I've come to think of my displays like those that surround the workbenches of a gym, displaying explanatory diagrams of how the apparatus should be used. As such, my classroom displays have come to serve as reference material for the learning that might ordinarily be buried inside PowerPoint presentations and concealed until the teacher deems the class as ready to see it.

What I've learnt over these past few years of seeing myself as an incredulous learner is that *not everyone wants to be facilitated*, in much the same way that not everyone wants to be taught. On reflection, it's entirely possible that *there is no path* wherein students gradually become more independent and discovery-driven; that their learning style may be fixed. Or, it could be that learning styles are actually fluid, and that some students naturally transition to more facilitative learning when conditions are right.

As things stand, I can create lessons that are taught and I can create lessons that are facilitated. The next step will be to design a lesson with a core learning objective that can be approached from either style, without having to double my planning time.

Picture a Penny Farthing cycle. On one side is a step and a helping hand, offering to instruct students how to ride it safely. On the other side is nothing – just a lamppost further down the street that students are instructed to cycle to. Some students won't want to be hurt while trying to succeed at the task, while others will prioritise their autonomy above all else.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Aaron Swan is an English teacher, Language for Learning lead and has been a head of department; for more information, visit **disciplineofenglish.co.uk**

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THE TS GUIDE TO... SEND

The key to using inclusion rooms successfully; how to cultivate good relationships with the parents of SEND pupils; and the new inclusive teaching curriculum that prioritises breaking down barriers to learning...

IN THIS SECTION

22 EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION
Lindsay Cooper-Smith shares how the mainstream schools within one trust have made effective use of inclusion classrooms

26 PARENT PARTNERSHIPS
Terri Bottriell-Wyse shares her thoughts on how school staff can go about positively engaging with the parents and carers of children with SEND

29 LESS WRITING, MORE DOING
If we want to improve inclusion, writes Stephen Kilgour, we should ask schools to show us how it's embedded, rather than simply requiring them to write about it...







IN FIGURES:

WHAT ARE THE KEY SEND CHALLENGES THAT SCHOOL STAFF ARE DEALING WITH?

538,547
pupils in England currently have an Education, Health and Care Plan – up 11.6% from 2025

65%
of teachers and education professionals worry about being able to keep children with SEND safe due to lack of capacity

Source: National survey carried out by the National Autistic Society

89%
of teachers believe that class sizes are too large and preventing settings from being properly inclusive

Source: Online survey of members by the NEU, including 10,311 teachers

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EXCLUSION *to inclusion*

Lindsay Cooper-Smith shares how the mainstream schools within one trust have made effective use of inclusion classrooms

"My son seems calmer, more secure, and far better supported in managing the moments that used to overwhelm him."

This feedback from one of our parents seems to capture the essence of what it means for a child with SEND to feel included – because all too often, it's those overwhelming moments that prevent children from learning alongside their peers, and put students at risk of low school attendance or exclusion from mainstream education.

If we can turn overwhelm into calm, we take a giant step towards helping a child learn, communicate and make friends in a mainstream school.

Rising incidence of need

Almost 60% of students with an education health and care plan (EHCP) are currently in mainstream education (see tinyurl.com/ts158-MS1).

"I've seen for myself the degree to which inclusion bases can transform the entire school experience"

Teachers are increasingly supporting children with SEND in their classrooms and it's a trend that's set to continue, driven by rising numbers of students with additional needs.

The level of need is becoming more complex too, with a rise in diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which now account for around a third of all EHCPs. We're also seeing unprecedented increases in speech, language, and communication needs, as well as social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs.

Inclusion remains important, because when children with SEND learn alongside their neurotypical classmates, they gain significant social, academic and practical advantages that help prepare students for life beyond the classroom. Yet inclusion isn't without its challenges.

Barriers to learning

Secondary schools are busy spaces. Often, they'll work well for those children who naturally thrive in such environments, but for students with sensory differences, the hustle and bustle of the corridors, bright classroom lighting and noisy dining areas will present significant barriers to inclusion.

Navigating a complex timetable, and working out where and when lessons will take place, is an important organisational skill for young people to learn, but for some students it can pose a significant challenge. Similarly, discussion-based lessons, question and answer sessions, and subject-specific vocabulary can all make it harder for students with communication difficulties to access the curriculum.

In order to create more inclusive environments for students with additional needs, schools are having to actively remove barriers to learning, adapt their curriculums and provide appropriate support so that students can fully participate in school life.

Inclusion classrooms

One of the recommendations in the SEND White Paper the government published earlier this year is for mainstream schools to establish inclusion bases – dedicated, specialist spaces designed to support students with additional needs.

I've seen for myself the degree to which inclusion bases can transform the entire school experience. We set up inclusion classrooms across our trust for students who find mainstream school challenging, and who need different approaches to help them through their education journey.

Our teachers and SENCos work together to identify which students will benefit from the inclusion classrooms, and to see how we can use various resources to help them access learning more easily.

The smaller class sizes, additional communication support and clear, structured boundaries of our inclusion classrooms have helped students better manage the social aspects of attending school. These spaces can





bridge the gap by giving children opportunities to eventually transition into full mainstream classes, or the option to access them flexibly throughout the day. Moreover, our inclusion classrooms have helped students with complex SEND stay connected with the wider school community.

'Communication first' techniques

One of the key roles performed by our inclusion classrooms is to support young people with their communication needs.

Some of our pre-verbal students use Makaton signing to communicate with adults and peers within their inclusion groups. One especially positive impact of this is that many of our neurotypical students are now keen to learn Makaton too, so that they can communicate with friends who have additional needs. That's true inclusion.

For students who might be further along the journey of building up their vocabulary, grammar and language skills, 'Colourful Semantics' can help organise their sentences. These are the building blocks that can help students access the curriculum and participate more fully in mainstream lessons.

Consistent use of visual support is essential in helping students build communication skills. One way we do this is by using Widgit Symbols – a structured visual language with symbols that represent objects, concepts and feelings. These have made a significant difference in supporting language development, and enabling students to access the curriculum and regulate their emotions.

Existing expertise

Not all schools have the space to set up dedicated inclusion classrooms, yet the techniques described above can be similarly embedded within mainstream classes to support students with SEND.

It's also a good idea to let students take short, structured movement breaks, and provide quiet time or 'regulated breathing' periods for those students who experience sensory overload or anxiety. When students feel calm and comfortable, they'll be much more able to thrive within a secondary school environment.

With school budgets already stretched, however, schools are having to dig even deeper to support students with SEND and help them thrive in mainstream education. Fortunately, most schools and trusts have a strong existing talent pool to call upon, which includes staff who can use their prior knowledge and experience to build genuinely inclusive learning environments.

To find out where your own school's talents and expertise might lie, consider carrying out skills audits among your teaching and support staff. These will help determine who may be best placed to lead certain interventions, or support individual students with their needs.

Effective collaboration is a key factor in the success of any inclusion policy. Our SENCos work together as a mutually supportive team and all attend monthly trust-wide SENCo meetings, which include focused CPD sessions. Recent months have included sessions on using symbols to support communication, learning and emotional regulation.

On a less formal note, we have also encouraged school staff to exchange bite-sized lesson plan videos with their colleagues, which have proved to be a great way of sharing best practice without taking up too much time.

Far-reaching impact

Ideally, a school's inclusion strategy should provide its young people with individualised SEND support while simultaneously ensuring that they're still firmly part of the school community.

In our trust, students with communication difficulties are continuing to find their voice. Children who were once regularly dysregulated and at risk of suspension are now successfully recognising and managing their emotions. Students who were previously only accessing part-time learning have since returned to full-time education.

With a truly inclusive approach in place, no student should ever feel anxious or overwhelmed while at school. Instead, they should feel fully supported on their learning journey, and empowered to achieve their true potential.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Lindsay Cooper-Smith is director of inclusion at St Christopher's Academy Trust




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REASONS TO BUILD...

5 Lasting autism expertise

Find out how National Autistic Society: Learn can help you develop your staff's knowledge and skills and ensure students receive the support they need

30 SECOND BRIEFING

Secondary pupils encounter different teachers, subjects and environments each day. National Autistic Society: Learn supports schools and trusts to build autism expertise through professional learning, Licensed User programmes and consultancy.

1 BUILD CONFIDENCE ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Secondary pupils may work with numerous teachers, subject departments and support teams in the course of a single day. If autism knowledge remains concentrated within the SEND department, approaches can vary widely between lessons. Building shared understanding will give teachers and support staff a firm foundation for recognising individual differences and considering adjustments, while supporting conversations across departments around what works for particular pupils. The goal isn't to make every classroom identical, but to ensure that inclusive practice is understood as a shared responsibility.

2 CREATE CONSISTENCY THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL DAY

Consistency can help pupils navigate a busy timetable, but autistic young people have different communication preferences, sensory experiences and learning needs. A strategy that supports one pupil may not suit another. Shared PD can establish useful principles without encouraging one-size-fits-all responses. Staff might review how instructions are communicated and transitions are managed, or whether learning spaces create avoidable barriers. When departments exchange insights and listen to pupils, schools can provide joined-up, personalised support across subjects, classrooms and the wider school day.

3 STRENGTHEN PASTORAL SUPPORT

Moving between lessons, managing social expectations and preparing for new stages of education can place different demands on autistic young people. Teaching and pastoral staff need opportunities to understand these experiences without making assumptions about individual pupils. Developing autism expertise can support conversations with pupils and families, more effective planning and closer collaboration between teams. It can also help staff consider sensory environments, communication and predictability when planning transitions. The aim is to identify barriers early and respond in ways shaped by each young person's needs.



National Autistic Society

Contact:
National Autistic Society: Learn | naslearn.org.uk

4 MAKE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUSTAINABLE

Staff turnover and competing demands can make it difficult to maintain expertise across a large school or trust. One-off training has value, but longer-term development requires ways of refreshing and sharing knowledge. Flexible online learning can help colleagues access professional development around their schedules, but Licensed User programmes serve a different purpose – to develop practitioners who can deliver specific programmes within their organisation. Together, these routes can build workforce understanding and specialist capability. For trusts, they may also create opportunities to share learning across settings, where appropriate.

5 CONNECT LEARNING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Inclusive practice is shaped by leadership decisions, as well as classroom interactions. Policies, pastoral systems, learning environments and staff development all influence autistic pupils' experiences. School leaders can ask where practice is consistent, which barriers remain and how pupils' views inform improvement. An external perspective may help teams review their approaches and identify realistic priorities. National Autistic Society: Learn's consultancy can support this work alongside professional learning. Connecting staff confidence with organisational planning helps schools move beyond isolated interventions and towards approaches that can develop and endure.

Key Points

Develop shared autism understanding across subject departments and pastoral teams, helping colleagues communicate, collaborate and consider individual adjustments throughout a varied and demanding school day.

Use flexible online learning to support workforce development, while Licensed User programmes build specialist capacity to deliver particular programmes within schools or wider organisations.

Listen to autistic pupils and their families when reviewing transitions, sensory environments and communication, ensuring decisions reflect individual experiences rather than assumptions about autism.

Draw on specialist consultancy to review policies, environments and current practice; identify priorities and connect professional learning with realistic, sustainable school improvement over time.

PARENT *partnerships*

Terri Bottriell-Wyse shares her thoughts on how school staff can go about positively engaging with the parents and carers of children with SEND

Engaging parents on standard education matters can be complex and difficult enough as it is. Add the extra barriers, considerations and sensitivities that can accompany SEND, and the task can become even harder.

As a special school headteacher, I regularly work alongside our hugely skilled pastoral lead in sharing lessons and insights from the special school sector, which we believe will help our mainstream colleagues increase engagement with parents and carers of young people with SEND.

Relationship-first

Everything we offer in our setting is based on a 'relationship-first culture', including our approach to parental engagement. Engaging parents of young people with SEND is about more than communication; it has to begin with feelings of trust and belonging.

Just like their children, many parents and carers of pupils with SEND will have experienced difficulties, challenges and struggles with education settings. Letters, meetings and reminders about upcoming school events are important, but not enough on their own. For communication to be truly effective, it must be two-way. Parents need to feel understood, valued and confident that their child matters to the school.

To enable this, schools need empathetic staff who are prepared to be invested in families, not just children – staff who are prepared to pick up the phone and talk to parents and carers during their darkest hours. If we really want parents of children with SEND to engage positively, then we must first build trust and a culture of care.

We must understand the experiences that families bring with them before we can build meaningful partnerships. Every child is an individual, and every family brings with them a unique set of circumstances and lived experiences. Staff must avoid making assumptions and judgements, opting instead to remain curious and meet families where they are.



Trauma-informed training

A trauma-informed approach can be particularly helpful here. Staff with trauma-informed training are often better equipped to consider what might sit behind a parent's behaviour or responses, rather than make snap judgements.

When a parent has spent years fighting for their child to be understood, being the professionals who finally listen and understand can create for them a sense of safety, where previously there was only fear and anxiety, making a huge difference to their future engagement across all areas of school life.

Parents need to know who they can turn to, and trust that their concerns will be heard. For those families needing the most support, a familiar, consistent point of contact will reduce the frustration of having to repeat information to multiple professionals and hearing mixed messages. Form tutors, pastoral staff, ELSAs and senior leaders can all play a role in this, but parental engagement must remain everyone's responsibility.

Communication barriers

Educators understand that communication must be accessible if we expect children to engage effectively. The same applies to parents.

All families face

practical challenges, but families of children with SEND may face additional pressures, with those experiencing the double disadvantage of SEND and Pupil Premium eligibility often particularly vulnerable. Daily life can involve so much juggling, and so many issues to overcome, that keeping up with the volume of school communications just adds to an already heavy load. Feelings of guilt, or shame at not meeting constant requests, alongside repeated requests for money, can soon become overwhelming.

Schools should therefore consider financial pressures, transport, work and caring responsibilities, as well as reasonable adjustments. Get to know your families, and work on trying to understand what's manageable and accessible for them. Which parents have disabilities or diagnoses themselves? How can we help them access the information we send home?

Just as we have a duty to meet pupils' communication needs, we must do the same for parents. Equity means responding to individual needs, rather than treating everyone identically – one size doesn't fit all.

So use a range of communication methods, including telephone calls, texts, emails, letters and social media. Offer face-to-face and remote meetings, recognising that not every family will have equal access to technology or feel comfortable using it. Provide help where it's needed. For families who can't drive or access technology, home visits may be the only option.

Remember that a lack of response doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of interest. Families often need different kinds of help, which schools must respond to without judgement or stigma.

Belonging through positivity

We'll frequently use Maslow's hierarchy of needs when considering families' specific circumstances. We use PP funding to support families with uniform, food parcels and Christmas hampers, and help parents complete forms when that presents an additional challenge.

This support must, however, be offered sensitively and discreetly. We want our families to experience early help and family support as a seamless extension of our universal offer, rather than something which makes them feel labelled or stigmatised. Our aim is for all families to receive the help they need, at any stage, regardless of labels or categories. Developing positive, understanding relationships with key staff will encourage parents to ask for support without feeling embarrassed or judged.

> **"Just as we have a duty to meet pupils' communication needs, we must do the same for parents"**

Parents are more likely to engage when they see that their children are valued, celebrated and consistently included. Schools must actively ensure that children with SEND can fully participate in Christmas shows, sports days and other opportunities for them to shine.

I've lost count of how many parents have left our school events filled with joy and pride at seeing their children participate and succeed. Sadly, I've also lost count of how many parents have told me that their child was never chosen to participate at their previous school – a concern I share, because informal, positive interactions can build such strong, celebratory relationships between staff and parents.

Going the extra mile

Supporting children effectively means recognising the needs of the wider family. It requires us to look beyond the individual and consider the wider family system. Family Group Programmes bring together parents, carers and young people in a safe, supportive environment where they can share experiences, strengthen relationships and learn from one another.

What makes this approach distinctive is our belief that meaningful change happens when families feel heard, understood and supported. Grounded in trauma-informed practice, the programme recognises that while our focus is always the child, lasting progress is most effective when home and school work together. We know that parents and carers are the experts in their child's life, with invaluable knowledge and insights that will help us understand their child's needs more fully.

Families participate in discussions, activities and shared problem-solving opportunities, enabling them to reflect on experiences, celebrate strengths and build connections. Parents often tell us that hearing from other families helps them feel less alone, more understood and more confident in supporting their independence at home.

THE PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

"Working with families is one of the most rewarding parts of my role. Over the years, I've learned that the most meaningful progress happens when we take time to listen, show compassion and build relationships based on trust and understanding. When parents feel valued and free from judgement, we can work together, learn from one another and create the best possible forms of support around the child.

Relationships before engagement must be our golden rule. Genuine engagement can't be measured simply by attendance at meetings or at school events; it grows from trust, respect and belonging. Psychological safety is a prerequisite for meaningful engagement, meaning staff must work hard to ensure parents feel safe, valued and listened to.

Parental engagement is a whole-school responsibility. As such, our culture, ethos and policies should provide consistency, with skilled key staff supplying the personal touch needed to make it work. When parents feel that their child belongs, that their voice matters and that the school is genuinely on their side, engagement becomes more than an expectation. It becomes a partnership."

– Natasha Carpenter is a special school pastoral lead



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terri Bottriell-Wyse is headteacher of a special school and mainstream satellite provision, and founder of the consultancy service Wyse Inclusion, providing remote SEND training and mentoring to school leaders with practical, non-judgemental support; follow her at @wyseinclusion (Insta) and @terribwyse (LinkedIn)



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SECONDARY LanguageLink

Less writing, more doing

If we want to improve inclusion, writes **Stephen Kilgour**, we should ask schools to show us how it's embedded, rather than simply requiring them to write about it...

Dear Secretary of State for Education...

I welcome the government's commitment to improving inclusion in mainstream education, reflected in initiatives such as the Inclusive Mainstream Fund. I also welcome the wider ambition to enable more children and young people with SEND and other support needs to thrive at their local mainstream schools.

I do, however, question whether requiring every school to publish a formal Inclusion Strategy by 31st December is the best way to achieve this.

A dated mindset

Historically, inclusion has been treated as an issue relating specifically to children with SEND or other additional support needs, rather than something that should underpin the way a school operates. There's a danger that this requirement for a 'strategy' reinforces this dated mindset.

As a former deputy head, I know it's easy for a 'strategy' to become just another document to write, publish and review, and ultimately tick off the to-do list. Yet if inclusion is genuinely embedded within a school, then it shouldn't need to sit in a separate document. It should already be evident in the things a school does every day – in its curriculum planning, teaching, behaviour, attendance, staff development and leadership decisions.

A professional-looking strategy doesn't necessarily mean that an individual child's experience has changed or improved. A school can produce a thoughtful and ambitious document, but it won't help us understand the reality of day-to-day inclusion.

Instead of adopting a strategy, we should ask what inclusion actually *feels* like at our schools. How does it feel to be a child struggling to access a lesson? How does their family feel when they ask for support? What does inclusion feel like for the teacher trying to meet a range of needs in a busy classroom? These experiences will all tell us far more about inclusion than whether a school has published a strategy.

Child, then strategy

If the DfE and Ofsted want to drive better inclusion, we need to look at what's happening in practice and start asking some key questions. What happens when a child struggles to access a lesson? How flexible is the curriculum in responding to children's needs? How are reasonable adjustments made, and how are teachers supported in adapting their practice? *These* are the things that make a real difference to a child's learning and development.

Perhaps the biggest danger is that we start with the strategy, rather than the child. Every child is different, and what enables one child to participate may not be what another needs. Genuine inclusion requires schools to understand the *individual* child – their strengths, interests and barriers – and adapt their provision accordingly. A single strategy can't capture that complexity.

We should be asking schools to know their children well enough to respond to their needs, rather than demanding that they define inclusion in a document. If the Inclusive Mainstream Fund is about building genuine capacity in mainstream schools, we should be asking what schools are now able to do differently. This is challenging work, and mainstream schools will need appropriate support to build their capacity and expertise.

There's also the risk that a standalone Inclusion Strategy becomes 'the SENCo's document' in practice. Genuine inclusion can't be delegated to one person; it needs to be owned by everyone. Headteachers, governors, teachers, support staff, pastoral teams and wider leadership all make decisions that will affect whether a school is inclusive. Inclusion needs to form part of the school's development planning, staff CPD and everyday decision-making, whether it be in the school office, the classroom or even in the actions of the premises manager.

I understand the intention behind your requirement. Schools need to become more inclusive, and we must be proactive about removing the barriers preventing children from fully participating in education. However, inclusion is demonstrated, not declared. If we want to change practice, we should ask schools to show us how they're embedding inclusion, rather than simply require them to write about it.

Yours sincerely
– Stephen...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Stephen Kilgour is an education advisor for Tapestry, the childhood education platform



teach SECONDARY AWARDS 2026

Welcome...

to the *Teach Secondary Awards* 2026!

Once again, we've invited a host of individuals and organisations to enter their products and services into our annual showcase aimed at highlighting the best resources available for schools right now.

As ever, our final shortlists have been assessed by a panel of expert judges who know what educators need from their classroom materials, online platforms, devices and professional literature. Over the page you'll find the details of those entries that made the grade by performing as promised, saving teachers time and making lessons easier to plan and deliver.

Whatever your own challenges might be, and whatever the needs of your particular setting, we hope that you find something useful, inspiring or attention-grabbing among this year's winners.

HOW IT WORKED

1. **SUBMISSION OF ENTRIES**
   Companies and organisations nominated their resources
2. **SHORTLISTING**
   We grouped the standout entries into seven categories
3. **JUDGING**
   Our panel of educators and subject specialists assessed the shortlisted entries in their category
4. **WINNERS CHOSEN**
   The judges selected their overall category winners and two highly commended entries

WHAT JUDGES ASSESSED

Our judges carefully evaluated the features and merits of each resource against the key criteria outlined below:

- **Suitability & adaptability**
- **Educational impact**
- **Originality & innovation**
- **Value for money**
- **Ease of use & accessibility**
- **Durability**
- **Environmental impact**

CATEGORIES & JUDGES

CPD
Training, books or software aimed at helping teachers grow and develop professionally



Rebecca Leek, teacher, headteacher and MAT CEO

FREE RESOURCE
Print or digital resources that are completely free to access for secondary schools



Andy Lewis, teacher of RE and deputy headteacher

EDTECH & SOFTWARE
Devices, apps and software designed to enhance learning or support school-wide systems



Kit Betts-Masters, lead practitioner for science and content creator

CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT
Resources that support curriculum subject teaching – in class or at home



Gordon Cairns, English and forest school teacher

ASSESSMENT & MONITORING
Resources for helping teachers track students' progress and deliver feedback



Anthony David, executive headteacher and author

HEALTH & WELLBEING
Materials that support RSE, safeguarding and students' mental health and wellbeing



Ann Marie Christian, safeguarding & child protection expert

SEND
Items, services and publications intended to support students with additional needs and facilitate inclusion



Terri Bottriell-Wyse, special school headteacher

HIGHLY COMMENDED

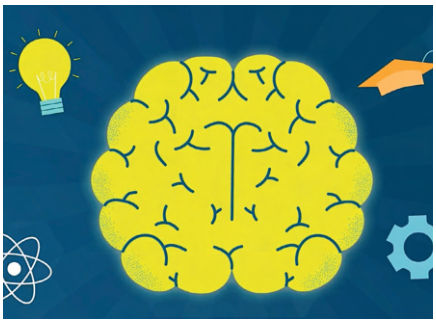


Eating Disorder Hub for Education Professionals

Beat | beateatingdisorders.org.uk

An online platform developed by the UK's leading eating disorder charity.

"This carefully curated suite of resources will help those working in schools become better equipped to support young people with illnesses that can have grave consequences."



Effective Pedagogy

Royal Society of Chemistry | rsc.org

A self-led course aimed at those teaching chemistry to students aged 11 to 18 worldwide that's suitable for all curriculums.

"Tackles pedagogy efficiently and clearly in a specialist, well-paced way. The modules and resources are extremely clear, the comment function is well-used by participants (indicating good levels of engagement) and the course as a whole is precise and innovative. A good match for ITT and those wanting to refresh their knowledge."



CATEGORY FINALISTS

ARE YOU REALLY READING?
(Are You Really Reading?)

SEND STRATEGIES FOR THE SECONDARY YEARS
(by Georgina Durrant, published by Bloomsbury)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CORE MEMBERSHIP)
(The National College)

WINNER

Supporting Holocaust Survivor Testimony in Teaching

The Holocaust Educational Trust | het.org.uk

'Supporting Holocaust Survivor Testimony in Teaching' delivers a series of free CPD sessions across England, alongside ready-to-use resources that are designed to support teachers in delivering Holocaust education with confidence, clarity, and impact. The training is built around a clear goal – to provide practical, accessible resources that translate immediately into improved classroom outcomes.

"Comprehensive, clear, thought-provoking and multi-faceted. There's attention given to the ethics of bringing the subject matter to children at certain ages, it's highly relevant to our time, and tackles a subject that's in the statutory curriculum, so will be of great help to a high number of professionals. It feels like something created by historians, for historians."


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SHAKESPEARECURRICULUM.COM

HIGHLY COMMENDED



Climate Schools Programme

Engineering UK | eukeducation.org.uk

A free, curriculum-linked initiative that helps teachers bring climate education to life for students aged 11 to 14.

"A very strong KS3 programme for individual lessons or a wider climate curriculum. The combination of science, geography, English, careers, enrichment and CPD gives it unusual degree of breadth"



The Shakespeare Curriculum

Royal Shakespeare Company
shakespearecurriculum.com

The first digital resource of its kind that distils everything the Royal Shakespeare Company knows about teaching and learning about Shakespeare into one flexible and intuitive platform.

"The most ambitious and innovative platform on the shortlist. The curriculum-building tools and thoughtful SEND pathway turn the RSC's rehearsal room practice into a distinctive classroom resource."



CATEGORY FINALISTS

JUNK KOUTURE EDUCATION HUB & CREATIVE SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMME
(Junk Kouture)

KS3 SAVE OUR SEEDS CHALLENGE, KEW ENDEAVOUR
(Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew)

SINCE 9/11 EDUCATION PROGRAMME
(SINCE 9/11)

WINNER

National Theatre Collection

Royal National Theatre | tinyurl.com/ts158-TA1

A world-class, award-winning digital resource designed to bring outstanding theatre into UK classrooms in a way that's adaptable and responsive to teacher and student needs. With more than 80 productions spanning Shakespeare, classic literature and curriculum-linked contemporary works, the Collection supports learners of all ages and abilities across KS3-5. Hosted by Drama Online, its infrastructure supports high-volume access from busy educational environments, with the content regularly updated to maintain quality and relevance.

"An exceptional free offer with immediate classroom value. The Collection's large and expanding library of professionally-filmed productions and strong learning materials give pupils access to theatre that many schools could not otherwise provide – especially outside of cities such as London."

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Finding great STEM resources shouldn't add to your workload

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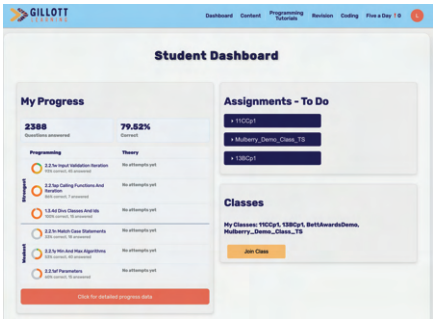
Explore curriculum-linked lessons, careers resources, real-life stories, events, activities and funding, all in one place.

Whatever you teach, help your students discover where their skills and interests could take them.



Discover EUK Education
eukeducation.org.uk

HIGHLY COMMENDED



Gillott Learning

Gillott Learning | gillottlearning.co.uk

A platform designed to teach students the programming and theory for GCSE computer science.

"I was impressed by these challenging computer science tasks. The progression towards independent coding has clear educational value for GCSE learners, and teachers can target particular topics and gaps."



classroom.cloud

NetSupport | classroom.cloud

A classroom management/teaching platform that includes online safety and technicians' tools.

"This comprehensive IT monitoring platform impressed me with its integrations to CPOMS and MyConcern safeguarding platforms. Its clear tutorials and structured teacher course provide good training to support whole school use, while its digital resource sharing facility can help reduce school printing costs."



CATEGORY FINALISTS

ARITHMAGICIANS (Arithmagicians Ltd)

LABDISC WITH GLOBILAB X (Globisens)

WINNER

Huskylens 2 AI Vision Sensor

DFRobot | dfrobot.com

An AI vision sensor that puts the power of artificial intelligence directly into the hands of teachers and students. Designed for education, HUSKYLENS 2 is exceptionally simple to use – just turn it on and start exploring over 20 built-in AI vision models, from hand and face recognition to object tracking and more. As the first AI vision sensor to feature a built-in model context protocol service, it changes how large language models perceive the physical world.

"I love a product that gets young people thinking and solving problems. HUSKYLENS 2 is an imaginative way to put AI programming into secondary computing and cross-curricular projects, with plenty of scope for pupils' own ideas. I can imagine this thing being reused and reworked for many projects – some incredibly in-depth, and some focused just on that surface layer of coding for the rapidly changing world of on-device neural processing."

Key terms support packs

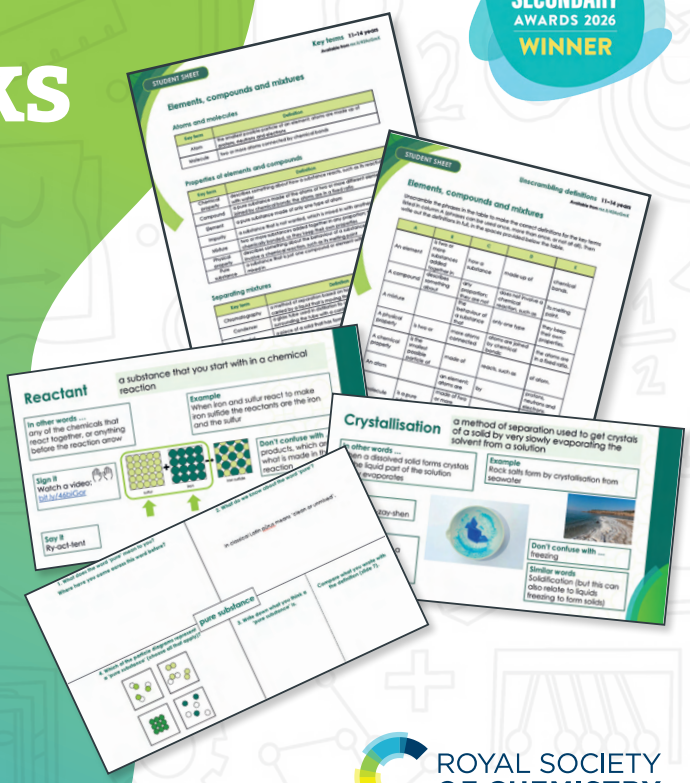
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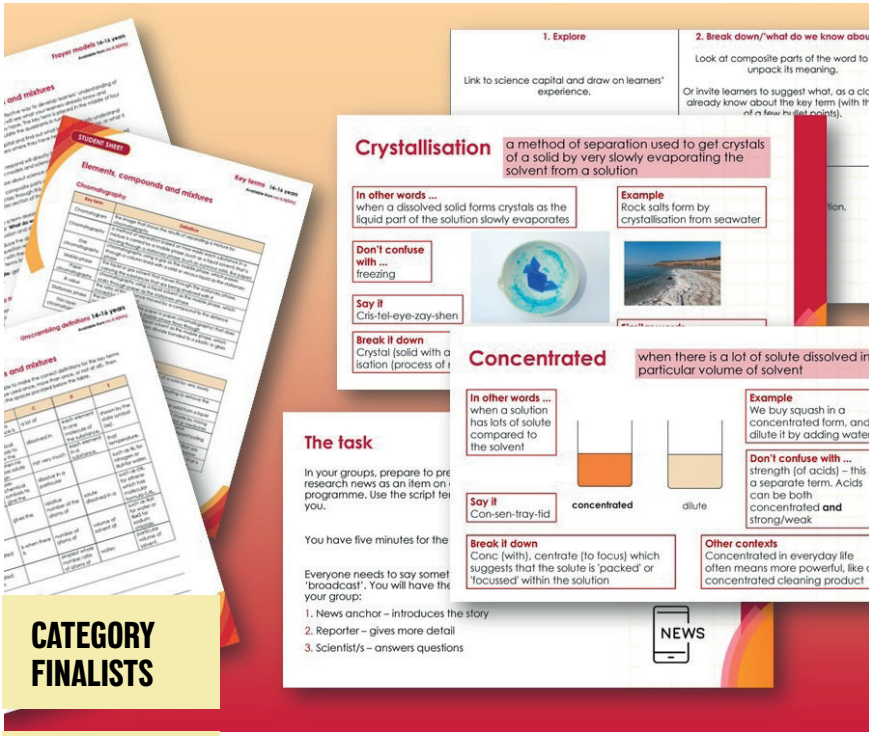


Flash Learning App

Flash Learning Limited
flashlearning.co.uk

An online revision and assessment platform designed to improve outcomes for secondary school students through accessible, exam-focused learning resources.

"Easily accessible for students on their phones, with clear, easy-to-use layouts and good overall presentation. The app identifies students' study level through questioning and sets the work appropriately."



CATEGORY FINALISTS

CRAIG 'N' DAVE KEY STAGE 3
(Craig 'n' Dave)

UNDERSTANDING MUSLIMS, UNDERSTANDING ISLAM – SECONDARY
(RE Today)

ACCESS GCSEPOD
(The Access Group)

WINNER

Key Terms Glossaries and Support

Royal Society of Chemistry | rsc.org

The Education Endowment Foundation has put together clear, evidence-based recommendations for supporting literacy in science teaching – starting with carefully selecting the vocabulary to teach, with a focus on the 'most tricky' words. The RSC has now provided teachers with a set of resources to help them do just that, with each pack including a 'Key Terms' list, an 'Accessible Glossary' and Frayer model resources – an effective scaffold to help develop learners' understanding of a new piece of vocabulary.

"The RSC has identified a specific problem – literacy in science – and created a resource to tackle said problem by improving the chemistry literacy of teachers, which I think is a brilliant, innovative idea. The resource is clear, easy to follow and pitched at just the right level."



teach SECONDARY AWARDS 2026 WINNER

Assessment and Monitoring

See EAL progress from first assessment to fluency

45% of EAL learners using FlashAcademy® progress at least one proficiency grade per year vs 18% nationally.

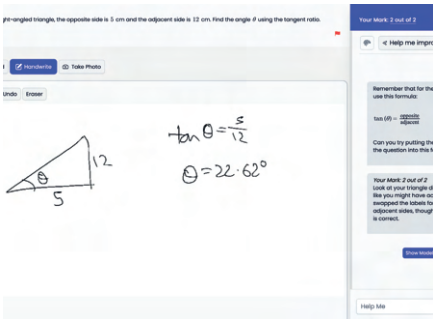
- Understand every learner's proficiency from day one with adaptive assessments.
- Save an average of 150 teacher hours per year with AI-assisted marking.
- See progress across individual, class and school level with real-time tracking.

FlashAcademy®

Scan to see EAL progress

flashacademy.com

HIGHLY COMMENDED



Learn Anything

Learn Anything Education Ltd
learnanything.com

Learn Anything is a high-impact AI educational platform built by teachers to transform the feedback loop between teachers and students.

"Offers an imaginative approach to feedback, particularly through marking handwritten work and allowing teachers to use their own questions. The potential workload savings are considerable."

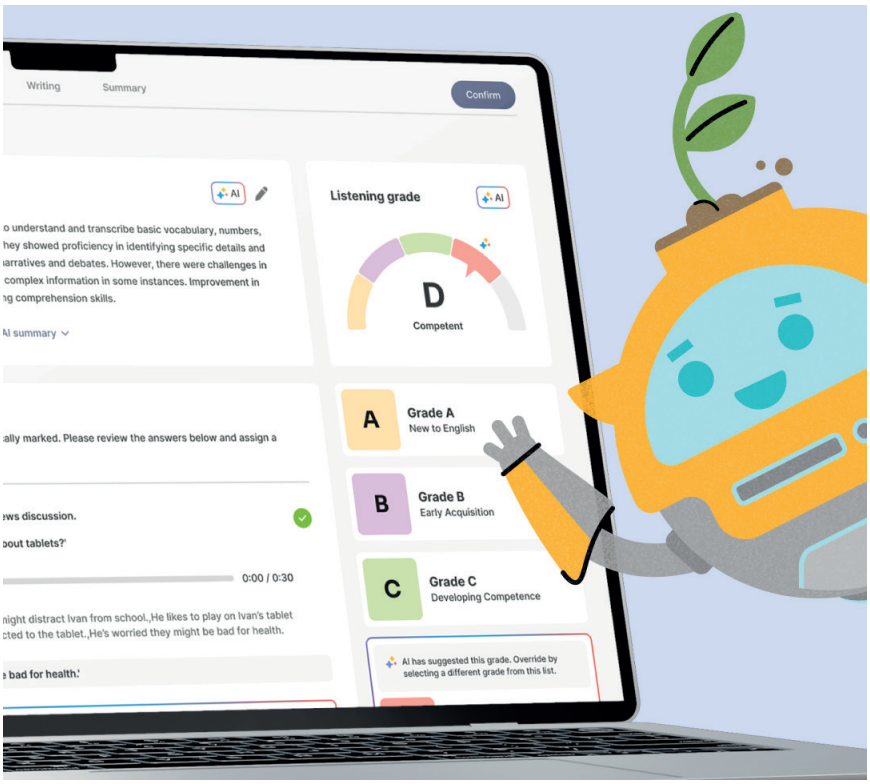


ActiveHub

Pearson
pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk

A comprehensive digital learning platform designed to empower school leaders, teachers and learners by bringing together assessment, data insights, teaching and learning resources in one intuitive space.

"I particularly value the way topic and skill information can guide targeted intervention, alongside the flexibility to build assessments around the curriculum. It's a strong option for consistent departmental and trust practice."



WINNER

FlashAcademy®

FlashAcademy® | flashacademy.com

An EAL digital assessment and language learning app that enables schools to accurately assess English language proficiency, monitor progress over time and make evidence-informed decisions about support. Combining AI-assisted digital assessment, curriculum-aligned language learning and comprehensive teacher reporting, it provides teachers and school leaders with actionable insights while significantly reducing assessment workload.

"FlashAcademy stands out because its assessment has a clear purpose – helping teachers understand pupils' English proficiency and respond with appropriate support. It connects baseline assessment, learning activities and progress monitoring, provides clear links between assessment and intervention, features an inclusive design and has the potential to reduce workloads."

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

HIGHLY COMMENDED



Pride Groups Creative Writing and Design

Just Like Us | justlikeus.org

Just Like Us, the LGBT+ young people's charity, provides resources and activities for students and teachers to use with lunchtime or after-school Pride Groups.

"A well-produced free resource that can support schools in encouraging a general ethos of kindness, support and respect."



Stress Less, Teach Better (Secondary)

Teachappy | teachappy.co.uk

Developed by Adrian Bethune, teacher, lecturer and founder of Teachappy, this course gives teachers, school leaders and support staff the knowledge and tools to understand stress, manage it skilfully and protect their long-term wellbeing.

"The teacher resources are useful and accessible, and the interactive courses engaging for staff. This is a useful preventative tool for reducing teacher burnout."



CATEGORY FINALISTS

THE MAPS PROJECT (Compass Education)

SACRED GEOMETRY AFFIRMATION MEDITATION CARDS (Magnificent Me, Magnificent You Ltd)

WELL SCHOOLS CHECK & ACCREDITATION (Youth Sport Trust)

WINNER

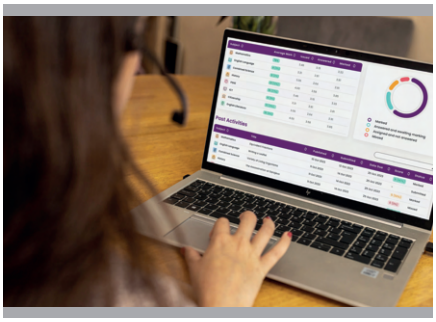
Now & Beyond

Beyond | nowandbeyond.org.uk

Now & Beyond is a youth-approved platform supporting mental health in the classroom. Thanks to collaborations with various organisations in the mental health sector, it has centralised a range of excellent resources for 4- to 18-year-olds to help alleviate teacher overwhelm and pressure.

"A fantastic free resource that's highly relevant, topical and up to date. It covers all Key Stages, with images and clips that are user-friendly, inclusive, engaging and accessible for various learners. Fully updated in line with 2026 PSHE/RSHE guidance, it's a youth-approved resource which relates to real challenges that young people need to know more about."

HIGHLY COMMENDED

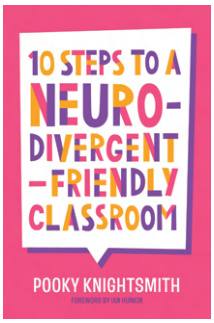


Academy21

Academy21 | academy21.co.uk

Hundreds of schools and LAs use Academy21's DfE-accredited online AP to re-engage learners with SEND and provide a safe, calm space for their students, as well excellent academic and pastoral care.

"Academy21 impressed me with its strong focus on safeguarding, quality teaching and learning, monitoring and successful reintegration."

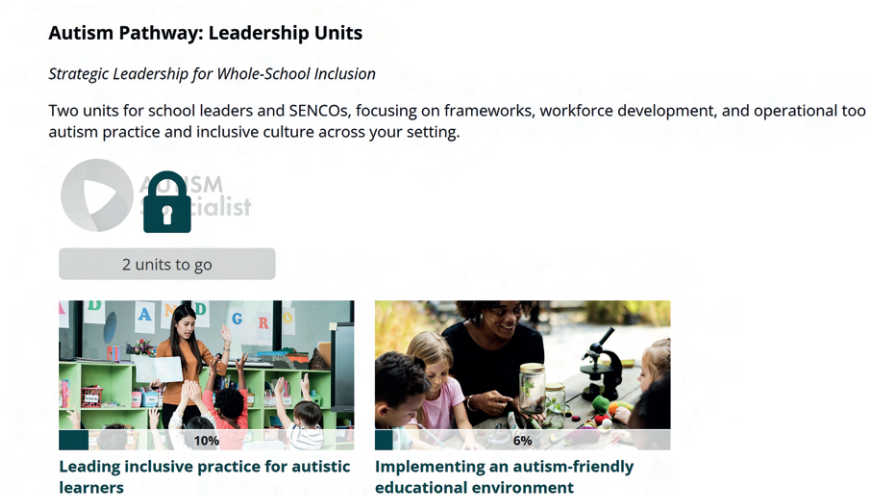


10 Steps to a Neurodivergent-Friendly Classroom

Written by Pooky Knightsmith, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers uk.jkp.com

Education expert Pooky Knightsmith distils the core principles of a neurodivergent-friendly classroom into 10 clear, actionable steps.

"I absolutely loved this practical and highly relevant book. Pooky Knightsmith has produced an excellent CPD resource, and an important reminder of what inclusive classrooms should look like."



CATEGORY FINALISTS

BLOOM
(Gaia Learning)

WINNER

Universal SEND Services Online CPD Units

Real Group | onlinecpd.wholeschoolsend.org.uk

These five autism-specific CPD units provide secondary leaders and staff with a dedicated roadmap for embedding whole-school autism excellence. Three practitioner-led modules equip subject teachers and support staff with strength-based techniques to adapt curriculum delivery, reduce processing overload and support social-emotional regulation. Two strategic leadership units meanwhile provide SENCos, inclusion managers and senior leaders with auditing tools, operational frameworks and staff development structures to embed consistent, good autism practice across all departments.

"This resource stood out for its genuine commitment to inclusion, in both content and accessibility. I was particularly impressed by the thoughtful adaptations, including colour themes, text size, audio functions and ruler options. The free, evidence-informed CPD offers exceptional value and breadth. I can see this becoming a significant part of our three-year CPD strategy, strengthening staff knowledge, confidence and SEND pedagogy."

4 REASONS TO TRY...

National Careers Week at the Science Museum

Go behind the scenes of technical careers in the museum's hands-on gallery and book a free, interactive STEM careers workshop

SCIENCE MUSEUM



1 STEM CAREERS GALLERY

In *Technicians: The David Sainsbury Gallery*, students experience what it would be like to work as a technician in a variety of STEM workplaces, from a blockbuster film set to a pharmaceutical laboratory.

2 STEM CAREERS WORKSHOP

In the Science Museum's free, 60-minute *Careers Uncovered* workshop, your students will meet technicians from top organisations and learn about careers that make a real difference through interactive, hands-on activities.

3 GAMING CAREERS

Challenge problem-solving skills, sharpen critical thinking and explore careers in the gaming sector in our gaming gallery, *Power Up*. Play through over 50 years of gaming history in this unique experience.

4 BUILD AN ITINERARY AND BOOK ONLINE

Check availability, build an itinerary and book your visit using our online booking system designed specially for groups. We'll also suggest relevant resources to download as you go.

Contact:
033 0058 0058
info@sciencemuseumgroup.ac.uk
sciencemuseum.org.uk/groups/formal-education-groups

At a glance

+ Bookings are now open for National Careers Week visits and workshops

+ Save time with our ready-to-go learning resources and gallery guides



[MATHS PROBLEM]

NEGATIVE NUMBERS

Many students get confused when subtracting a negative number, says **Colin Foster**

In this lesson, students use positive and negative boxes to make sense of subtracting a negative number

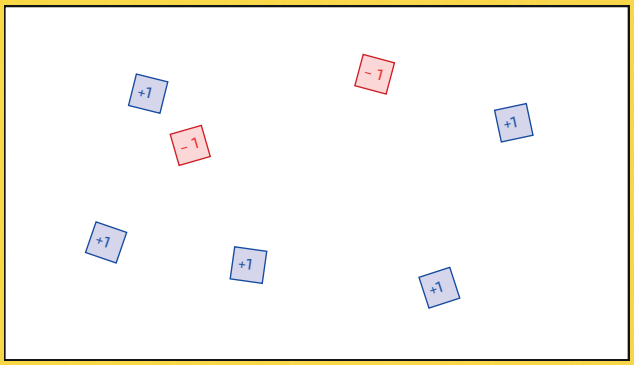
THE DIFFICULTY

Work out (+3) + (−5), (+3) − (−5), (−3) + (−5) and (−3) − (−5).

Students may struggle to answer all of these correctly, without getting muddled. The correct answers are −2, +8, −8 and +2, respectively. Students may rely on rules such as "Two minuses make a plus", but not know how to correctly apply them – perhaps thinking that (−3) + (−5) should be equal to +8, rather than −8.

THE SOLUTION

How much do I have here altogether?



Students might say 7, because there are 7 boxes. But five of the boxes are ***positive*** 1, and two of them are ***negative*** 1, so the total value is +3. The key idea is that one +1 and one −1 cancel each other out. Students might benefit from cutting out squares of paper with +1 written on some and −1 written on others. Then they can pair up a +1 and a −1 to make a 'zero pair'.

Show me another way to make the same total. And another way. And another.

Students will realise they can add or subtract as many 'zero pairs' as they like, and the total will remain +3.

Which of our four calculations are easy to do with the boxes, and which are trickier?

The additions are not too difficult. (+3) + (−5) means starting with three +1s and five −1s. This gives 3 zero pairs, with two −1s left over, so the answer is −2. (−3) + (−5) means beginning with three −1s and getting five more −1s, taking us to −8.

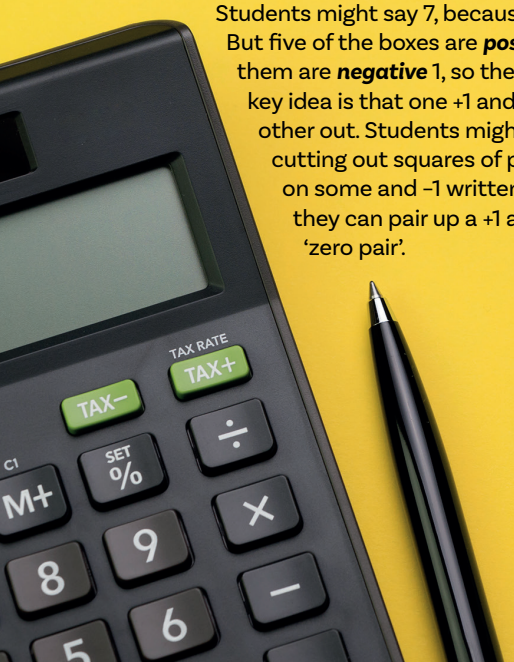
The subtractions are trickier, because in both cases we are taking away more −1s than we have. To do (+3) − (−5), starting with three +1s, we need to add (at least) five zero pairs, so we have eight +1s and five −1s. ***Now***, we can take away −5, to leave +8.

Similarly, with (−3) − (−5), starting with three −1s, we need to add (at least) two more 'zero pairs', so we have enough −1s to subtract. This means we have two +1s and five −1s. ***Now***, we can take away −5, to leave +2.

Checking for understanding

Make up four directed number additions and subtractions, like those I gave you at the start. For each one, give the correct answer, with an explanation why, and an incorrect answer someone might be likely to give, saying why they might think it.

For an animated version of this way of thinking, see https://www.twominutemath.org/gallery/addsubtractnegnumswork.html





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

ALL-SEEING EYES

Anthony David considers the school safeguarding challenges posed by the latest generation of wearable connected devices

I've spent much of my career asking children to put things away – football cards, fidget toys, ambitious collections of playground stones. Then mobile phones joined the list, but just as schools established sensible boundaries, technology found another way in. This time it's wearing a watch, perched on someone's nose or clipped discreetly to a jumper.

Smartwatches, miniature action cameras and camera-enabled glasses aren't necessarily sinister in and of themselves. Indeed, they can often be quite useful (and, I suspect, smarter than this author), but they nevertheless pose a pressing challenge for schools. How do we protect children's privacy when communication and recording devices no longer require the user to take a phone out of their pocket?

Phone bans are just the start

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 has put the DfE's mobile phone guidance on a statutory footing. That means that as of September this year, schools have been expected to follow guidance which states that pupils shouldn't have access to phones throughout the school day, except where justified. Crucially, this guidance also includes other smart technologies that feature similar communication or recording functions.

This is a welcome step, but a policy headed 'Mobile Phones' may still give families, visitors and even staff the impression that everything else is acceptable. The question is no longer simply whether a child has a phone, but rather what the device they're wearing, carrying or using can actually do.

Some smartwatches can receive messages and make calls. Certain models of 'smart glasses' are capable of capturing photographs or video without the obvious gesture of lifting a camera. Small action cameras can be attached to clothing or bags, and there are some devices that can wirelessly connect to other devices, upload material to the cloud or make recordings available beyond the school gate.

The most worrying feature isn't necessarily the quality of the footage, but the possibility that recording can occur without anyone else knowing about it.

> **"School should be a place where they can learn without wondering whether an embarrassing moment will be caught on camera"**

No opt-outs

Imagine a pupil discussing a family difficulty with a trusted adult. Then imagine another child in a nurture room who is distressed and vulnerable, or a pupil whose location and identity must be protected because of a longstanding safeguarding concern. A recording that might seem harmless to the person making it could have significant consequences for the person appearing in it.

Ordinary moments matter. Children make mistakes, become upset, fall over and say things they'd rather forget. School should be a place where they can learn without wondering whether an embarrassing moment will be caught on camera and replayed to an audience.

At the same time, there is a particular danger in treating this solely as a data protection problem. Yes, identifiable images are personal data, and schools need clear arrangements for taking, storing and sharing them, but safeguarding asks a more immediate question – *could this recording put a child at risk of harm?* The two responsibilities overlap, but they're not interchangeable. Instead, we should be thinking carefully about what we can do to maintain dignity and trust while directly confronting potential instances of bullying and coercion, as well as the possibility of sensitive information leaving the school without warning.

Target capabilities, not gadgets

My first recommendation would be a fairly simple one – *stop trying to name every possible device*. That's a competition we'll lose, because by the time the governors have approved a list, somebody will have invented a recording-enabled shoelace.

Instead, define the capabilities that matter. A school policy should cover personally owned devices that are capable of recording audio or video, taking photographs, sending or receiving messages, live-streaming or transmitting information. It should explain when such functions are prohibited, where devices must be stored, and how authorised exceptions work.

This doesn't require six new policies, or a staffroom-sized flowchart. It just calls for consistency across your behaviour policy, safeguarding and online safety procedures, acceptable use rules and guidance for parents and visitors.



5 practical steps

First, conduct a short audit. Ask staff what devices they're seeing, where they're being used and whether the present policy actually covers them. Include visits, clubs, residential trips and school events.

Second, make your expectations explicit. Pupils

are not to use personal recording or communication devices during the school day, unless the school has authorised them to do so for a specific purpose.

Third, agree on a response when someone is suspected of making an unauthorised recording. Staff should stop the activity safely, follow the school's rules on confiscation, and then report any safeguarding concerns to the DSL. They shouldn't improvise by scrolling through a child's device, or demanding access to personal accounts. Decisions around evidence and escalation will require proper authority and a written record.

Fourth, apply the rules to adults. Staff, contractors and visitors should all know whether personal smart glasses or recording wearables are permitted on site. A parent filming a performance isn't a visitor discreetly recording children in a corridor, but both scenarios demand considered boundaries rather than loose assumptions.

Finally, review your arrangements regularly. I'd rather put one manageable discussion on the annual safeguarding agenda than produce a magnificent policy that nobody ever revisits.



Remember why exceptions exist

A blanket response may be tempting, but unfortunately, safeguarding is rarely improved by forgetting the individual child.

Some pupils may use connected technology for medical monitoring purposes, such as glucose management, or as assistive technology. Others may need carefully agreed adjustments linked to a disability or certain set of circumstances. The DfE guidance recognises this, so schools must meet their legal duties.

The answer isn't to make every device permissible, nor to ban something a pupil genuinely needs. Rather, the answer involves documenting what's allowed, why, how access will be managed and how pupils' and staff's privacy will be protected. A medical exception doesn't grant permission to photograph classmates.

I'd also involve pupils in these discussions. Rather than delivering another assembly entitled 'Things You Must Never Do', we could ask what makes recording respectful, why someone might not want to appear in a video, and what to do when a friend shares something unkind. Those kinds of conversations will build a sense of judgement (which should hopefully last rather longer than the batteries in most devices).

A culture of trust

In September, the DfE confirmed in a Parliamentary answer that its existing guidance on photographs, video and CCTV could be applied to smart glasses and other wearable recording devices. The principles are technology-neutral. In other words, schools don't need to wait for a new rulebook before acting.

That's reassuring, but it leaves responsibility with those leaders who understand their communities. We need policies that are clear enough to enforce, while being sensible enough for people to support. We need staff who can recognise emerging technological risks without immediately assuming that every child wearing a smartwatch is planning some elaborate covert operation.

Most importantly, we need to explain the *why*. A school isn't simply a place where devices are controlled; it's a place where children should feel safe enough to ask questions, make mistakes, seek help and be themselves, without an unseen audience.

I'm not against new technology. I actively enjoy exploring its possibilities, even if I occasionally need a Y6 student to explain how to turn a device off – but innovation shouldn't quietly remove the privacy we work so hard to protect.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Anthony David is an executive headteacher based in North London and author of the 'AI & Me' PSHE series, aimed at giving young people the language and skills to navigate a post-AI world

Awkward ANSWERS

Elanie Ademokun looks at why the questions posed by students in RSHE lessons are getting tougher, and how best to tackle them

Ask any teacher what worries them most about teaching RSHE, and they'll probably tell you that 'answering difficult questions from students' tops the list.

Young people are bringing increasingly unpredictable questions into the classroom, often prompted by something they'll have seen on social media. While it's important to answer questions honestly, it's not always easy to pitch the answer at the right level for every student.

How, for instance, should you respond to a question like, "*I saw someone on TikTok talking about choking during sex – is that normal?*" at a time when some students in the classroom are already sexually active, while others feel barely ready yet to even hold hands?

In the wake of the government's updated RSHE guidance for English secondary schools, there's now a stronger focus on confronting challenging topics. Teachers will typically be able to access information on teaching difficult subjects, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), rape or strangulation in sex, but students' questions can still leave even the most experienced teachers feeling unprepared.

These tough questions can be a particular minefield for non-specialists covering RSHE lessons at short notice. Some of the teachers we support deal with such questions every day, however, and have developed effective strategies to help students explore sensitive topics safely and respectfully.

1 Keep calm, validate the question

Social media algorithms can very quickly lead young people to content that isn't age-appropriate for them. This means that children are being increasingly exposed to online pornography, even when they're not actively looking for it.

According to research from The Children's Commissioner, 27% of children have seen some form of pornography by the age of 11 (see tinyurl.com/ts158-P1) – content that may depict instances of extreme sexual violence, presenting children with distorted and dangerous views of what adult relationships should look like.

When confronted with a question about a sex act someone has seen in a video, it's better to take some time to think, rather than rush in too quickly with an answer. Try taking some deep breaths to regulate your nervous system, and calm the class down, if necessary.

It's important to then validate the question without showing that you're shocked – because if a student senses that they've shocked you, they might enjoy the reaction and try to get the same response out of you again. Alternatively, the student might feel shame, guilt or fear that something they've seen or done isn't appropriate.

Adopting a calm approach will also go a long way towards reassuring those students who may be concerned about the direction of the lesson content. One of your tasks, after all, is to create a safe environment in which everyone can explore difficult topics without anxiety or embarrassment.

> **"If a student senses that they've shocked you, they might enjoy the reaction and try to do it again"**

2 Follow up questions individually

At a time when students are being bombarded daily with unfiltered online content, what they need most is support from a trusted adult. As we all know, however, teachers can't be expected to instantly know the answer to every question they're asked. Indeed, students will usually respect the fact that you value their questions enough to sometimes need additional thinking time.

Rather than shutting the question down, say, "*Let me take that away and come back to you.*" Keep a regularly updated list of questions to answer later, and be sure to get back to individual students with your response.

It can be useful to give students opportunities to submit questions in writing. This way, students can ask questions discreetly, in the knowledge that their teacher will have had time to think about their answer.

To accomplish this, Charlotte Anderson, head of citizenship, RS, sociology and PSHRE at the Co-op Academy, North Manchester, uses an 'Ask-it-Basket': "*It's a little basket at the front of the room where students can pop a question on a Post-it note. I can then answer those questions, or else say that I'll come back to the next lesson with an answer for them.*"

3 Signpost to information

If students can't get answers from their teacher, they may head straight to TikTok, YouTube or Reddit, or else consult their favourite influencer and look for answers there.

Faced as they are with such a conflicting web of misinformation, students need their schools to be safe, trusted spaces in which they can access reliable information.

It's therefore a good idea to check whether your current staff training includes up-to-date lists and details of sources that can

provide good support and information for students. When students ask questions about contentious subjects – such as differing opinions on biological sex or abortion, for example – you could try deploying distancing techniques in order to depersonalise the topic, before referring students to the current legal position or medical guidelines.

There will always be those students across all ages who find the subject of sex and relationships inherently daunting, which will likely be reflected in the types of questions they ask. Some students might not even know *what* they want to ask. In these cases, teachers can emphasise that RSHE lessons might not seem relevant to them right now, but are, in fact, essential in getting them ready for their future relationships.

As Charlotte Anderson explains, "*We talk quite a lot about how, 'You don't have to be interested in sex yet – I'm just preparing you for when you are, and this is where you can go if you need to.'*"



4 Identify safeguarding concerns

Some questions, of course, might sound the alarm regarding a student's own experiences.

Obvious warning signs can include age-inappropriate questions, 'asking for a friend' queries or accounts of concerning real-life situations that students describe being part of. Bear in mind that a student's question might be a concealed cry for help.

In these instances, you can signal to a student where they might be able to access support.

If, for example, a student asks '*Why do people self-harm?*' a good response would be, '*Some people self-harm because they're struggling to cope. If you or someone you know feels this way, it's important to talk to someone you trust.*'

Students might confide in you as to whether it's a good idea to share an intimate photo, or if it's normal for their partner to want to track their location. In these cases, a one-to-one conversation will be needed to identify whether these are signs of an unhealthy or controlling relationship. Also ensure that a referral is made to your designated safeguarding lead.

Young people are seeing more extreme sexual content at far younger ages than ever before, which is being reflected in the type of questions they're now asking. Naturally, however, the last thing any teacher wants is to stop students asking questions.

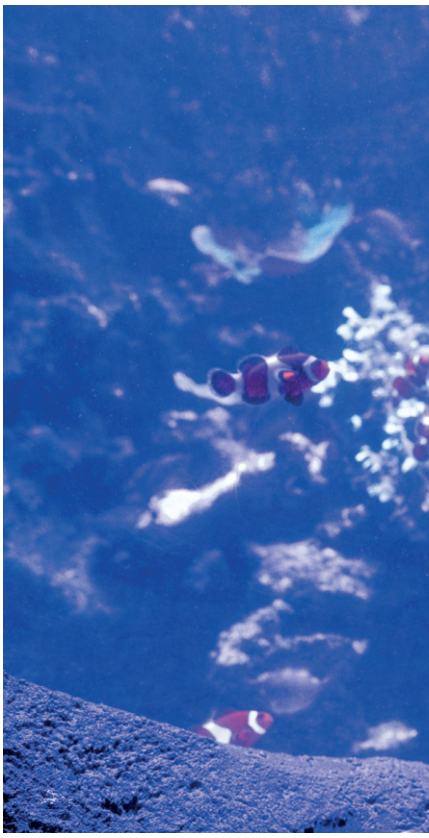
By offering a calm and measured response, avoiding judgement and providing individualised support, teachers can prepare in advance for the toughest questions, and hopefully guide young people towards healthy relationships both now and in the future.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Elanie Ademokun is a former secondary school teacher, now programmes director at Jigsaw Education Group (jigsaweducationgroup.com); the organisation's recently produced report, 'How To Tackle Tough Questions from Secondary School Students in Sex and Relationships Education' is available to download via **tinyurl.com/ts158-RSHE1**

Relationships on the reef...

Use coral ecosystems to explore interdependence and reveal the real impact of environmental change



Walk into any coral reef aquarium display and the first thing you notice is movement. A clownfish darts between sea anemones. Tiny damselfish weave between coral branches while rays of light flicker across the water. It feels alive because it *is* alive – not just with individual species, but with relationships.

Relationships are one of the most powerful concepts we teach in geography and environmental education. Students often arrive in our classrooms seeing ecosystems as collections of plants and animals rather than complex systems of interdependence; coral reefs provide a perfect way to challenge that misconception.

Reefs are visually spectacular, instantly engaging and full of recognisable species. Yet beneath this lies a fragile balance that can easily be disrupted. Remove one species, alter one environmental condition or introduce one human pressure, and the consequences ripple throughout the system.



For teachers, then, coral reefs can offer far more than a lesson about oceans. They are a gateway into systems thinking, climate change, biodiversity, sustainability and human responsibility.

A model ecosystem

One of the most effective ways to introduce ecosystems is to move beyond diagrams in textbooks and instead explore a living example. A coral reef habitat, whether in a classroom video clip, virtual tour or a visit to a SEA LIFE centre, becomes an accessible model ecosystem. Students can immediately identify the biotic components: fish, coral, algae, crustaceans and microorganisms. They can then begin to consider the abiotic conditions that allow life to exist there: water temperatures, sunlight, salinity and oxygen levels.

What makes coral reefs such rich teaching material is the sheer density of interactions taking place. Coral survives because of a symbiotic relationship with tiny algae called zooxanthellae, which live inside coral tissue. The algae photosynthesise and provide nutrients to the coral, while the coral offers protection and access to sunlight.

This relationship becomes a brilliant case study in interdependence. If water temperatures rise too high, the algae are expelled, causing coral bleaching. Without the algae, coral struggles to survive. A change in one abiotic factor therefore triggers biological consequences throughout the ecosystem.

The illusion of stability

The variety of species found within reefs creates opportunities to explore food webs in a highly visual and engaging way. Herbivorous fish graze on algae, preventing it from overwhelming coral. Predatory fish regulate populations lower down the food chain. Sea turtles feed on seagrass beds. Each species performs a role.

This is where teachers can begin asking the most important question: what happens if one species disappears? Students are often surprised by how quickly the balance can shift. Remove herbivorous fish through overfishing and algae growth increases dramatically; this leads to a competition for light and space and in turn reef biodiversity declines.

This systems-based thinking is incredibly valuable across the curriculum. Students move from linear cause-and-effect explanations towards understanding feedback loops, connections and unintended consequences. These are important as they progress through to their GCSE and A Level studies.

Human impacts

Once students understand how interconnected reefs are, the impact of human activity becomes much easier to comprehend. Plastic pollution is often the most visible starting point, as students can immediately see how discarded fishing nets and microplastics threaten marine life.

Overfishing provides another important lens. Many students already understand fishing as an economic activity, but fewer appreciate how removing particular species destabilises entire ecosystems. Coral reefs are especially vulnerable, because many species occupy specialised ecological roles.

Climate change, however, is perhaps the defining issue. Rising ocean temperatures are causing increasingly frequent coral bleaching events across the world. Ocean acidification weakens coral skeletons and reduces reef growth; more intense storms physically damage reef structures. Exploring this allows students to see climate change not as a single issue, but as a multiplier of environmental pressures.

Coral reef decline does not only affect marine organisms; it affects people, who rely on reefs for food, tourism income and coastal protection. Reefs act as natural barriers, reducing wave energy and helping to protect coastlines from erosion and storm surges.



When reefs decline, whole coastal communities become more vulnerable.

Conservation and education

SEA LIFE and other conservation organisations increasingly play important roles in marine education and conservation. SEA LIFE contributes through rescue and rehabilitation programmes, including supporting cold-stunned sea turtles stranded around the UK; restoring species and habitats to help re-establish healthy ecosystems; and protecting animals and ecosystems through research, education, stewardship, policy, and campaigns. Through close-up animal experiences and learning opportunities, SEA LIFE helps inspire empathy and encourages positive action for marine conservation. When students start to see ecosystems as fragile and dynamic rather than permanent and self-sustaining, sustainability becomes more than a buzzword. This is why coral reef education matters beyond geography and science lessons. It develops environmental literacy.

Why it matters

Students are growing up in a world shaped by environmental uncertainty. Yet many still encounter ecosystems as static diagrams to memorise for exams. The challenge for teachers is to move beyond content coverage and help students develop ecological understanding.

Coral reefs are particularly useful because they combine awe with vulnerability. Students are drawn in by the colour and biodiversity, but quickly begin asking deeper questions about fragility and responsibility.

There is also something powerful about teaching systems through real-world examples that students can physically experience. Visiting an aquarium, such as SEA LIFE, transforms learning from abstract to tangible, enabling students to appreciate the scale and complexity of reef ecosystems in a way textbooks cannot fully replicate.

Importantly, these experiences can also foster emotional engagement, curiosity and concern. Environmental education sometimes risks overwhelming students with negative narratives. Coral reefs can become another example of destruction and decline. However, alongside the challenges, there are also important stories of conservation, restoration and scientific innovation. That balance matters. Students need honesty about environmental crises, but they also need to see examples of action and possibility.

BRINGING ECOSYSTEMS TO LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM

Five practical strategies for teachers

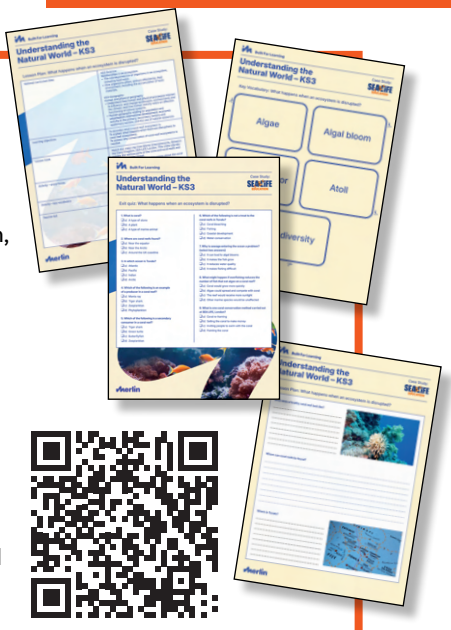
- **Start with a mystery question**
  What would happen if one species disappeared? Encourage prediction before explanation.
- **Use visual complexity**
  Short video clips or live aquarium footage help students see reefs as dynamic systems.
- **Link local and global scales**
  Connect coral reef decline to wider themes such as climate change, and coastal flooding.
- **Use systems thinking**
  Focus on interactions, feedback loops and interdependence.
- **Balance concern with hope**
  Alongside environmental threats, include examples of conservation, restoration and scientific innovation to maintain student agency and optimism.

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Built for Learning is a growing library of classroom-ready multimedia resources from Teachwire, currently using Merlin Entertainments attractions – including SEA LIFE, Alton Towers, Chessington World of Adventures, Warwick Castle and the London Eye – as real-world curriculum case studies for KS2 and KS3.

Every resource combines classroom-ready activities with specially filmed video from the featured attraction, helping teachers give pupils a shared real-world context for curriculum learning – and access to the people who put that learning into practice.

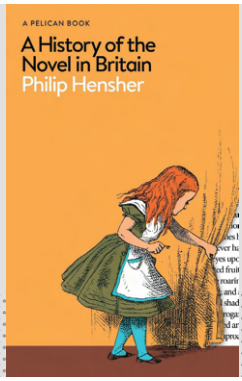
To download the free KS3 SEA LIFE lesson, including exclusive footage from SEA LIFE's Coral Kingdom, just scan the QR code, which will also give you access to the full Built for Learning library!





Off the Shelves

Brilliant titles for you and your students to explore



A History of the Novel in Britain

(Philip Hensher, Pelican, £25)

Reading this detailed chronicle, it's quite a shock to be confronted with the obvious fact that the things we take for granted in a novel – multiple viewpoints, unreliable narrators, even people as individual characters – were once new. Indeed, the very form of the novel itself was once looked down upon because it wasn't 'classical literature'. As the form's techniques evolved, so too did the scope of its subject matter, eventually giving rise to historical fiction and hitherto unseen depictions of working class life. As well as learning about the history of the novel itself, we also find out how changes in copyright law affected the literary landscape. At a time when reading for pleasure is in steep decline among the wider population, hopefully this book can play a part in reversing the trend.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman
bit.ly/Eclecticism

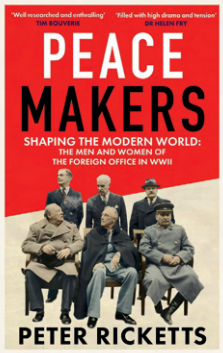


Nine Days in May: The General Strike of 1926

(Jonathan Schneer, OUP, £25)

The General Strike of 1926 arose from the grievances of coal miners, which led to the TUC calling out thousands of other workers in support. It was an abject failure, however, and this book explains why. The TUC didn't want to so much defeat the government as replace it altogether in a general election – thus perhaps proving Wellington's observation that the only thing worse than losing a battle is winning it. Moreover, the then Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, had spent considerable time planning for the possibility of widespread strikes. *Nine Days in May* is a highly detailed account of all this, and an object lesson in realpolitik that clearly highlights the disparities between the miners and the pit owners. My only criticism would be that it's arguably too detailed, making it sometimes difficult to appreciate the bigger picture. Nevertheless, it's a marvellous resource for economics and politics students.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman



Peace Makers: Shaping the Modern World

(Peter Ricketts, Aurum, £22)

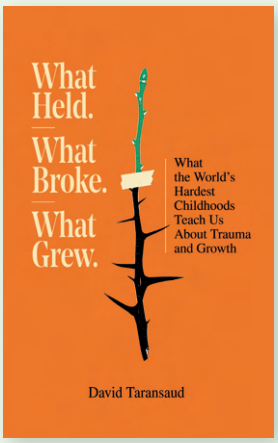
Reading most books about WWII, you could be forgiven for thinking that everything achieved in that conflict was down to the actions of people in the top positions of authority, such as Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt – but as Ricketts makes clear in *Peace Makers*, nothing could have been accomplished without the skills, contacts and personal qualities of numerous diplomats and other officials. This is a highly detailed, yet compelling account of the minutiae and realpolitik that were key to the Allies' success. One potentially catastrophic rift between Churchill and Stalin, for instance, was only averted thanks to Churchill's assistant sharing with Stalin a similarly bawdy sense of humour. We also learn that while it was Roosevelt and Churchill who wanted to establish a framework for international relations after peace had been achieved, it was a British and American diplomat who actually came up with the wording of the UN's founding charter. An excellent glimpse behind the curtain.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman

ON THE RADAR

What Held. What Broke. What Grew.

(David Taransaud, Windswept Tree, £5.99 – also available as a free PDF download from davidtaransaud.com)

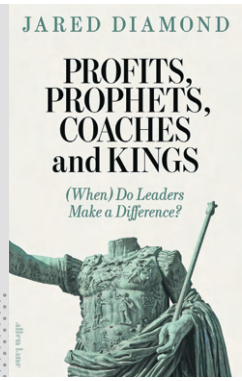


Among the numerous challenges confronting school staff, one of the toughest is to provide help and support for students who have experienced trauma, while at the same time doing what you can to ensure they're able to fulfil their academic potential alongside their peers.

It's an area that Taransaud knows well, being a UKCP-registered psychotherapeutic counsellor, consultant, and someone who's previously worked with child soldiers in Uganda and destitute children on the streets of Pakistan. At 73 pages, *What Held...* is a slim volume, but one built around a compelling core query – what is it that enables some survivors of near unimaginable childhood horrors to make it out the other side as changed, yet strong, hopeful and even ambitious individuals, secure in their sense of self? And can we harness that knowledge in the service of supporting children in our education settings?

For Taransaud, the answer lies in a combination of fostering post-traumatic growth (the replacing of an individual's old emotional apparatus with a new one informed by the clarity of traumatic experience) and providing access to psychoeducation – the practice of equipping children with a deeper understanding of themselves, their impulses and behaviours.

He then takes readers through a series of arguments and points of advice that are elegantly expressed, easy to follow, and which may well give SLTs and pastoral teams some serious food for thought.



Profits, Prophets, Coaches and Kings

(Jared Diamond, Allen Lane, £25)

This book's subtitle echoes a question often asked of leadership – *'Do leaders make a difference?'* A better question, argues Diamond is, ***"When** do leaders make a difference?"* In other words, what they do or don't do really depends on not just the attributes of the person in question, but also factors such as general timing, availability of resources and the qualities of other contenders for the role (if any). Diamond then proceeds to set out the 'natural experiments' approach as a counter to the more traditional 'biographical' approach. Where the latter examines only the person themselves, the former accounts for various external factors – not least, whether anyone else at the time could have taken the reins instead. While not a primer on good leadership *per se*, this is a very interesting, thoughtful and readable book, and potentially a source of some useful case studies.

Reviewed by Terry Freedman



Creative Careers

(Lucia Vinti, Tate Publishing, £18.99)

At a time when access to arts careers is a hotly-debated topic, this book feels timely. *Creative Careers* is a vibrantly-presented overview of various job roles and career paths requiring the application of creative skills to one degree or another. Each job role gets its own lavishly presented page or spread, many accompanied by informative interviews with someone employed in said role about their working day and how they came to do what they do. The range of featured jobs is impressive in its breadth, ranging from the obligatory – 'painter', 'musician' – to the less immediately obvious, including 'theatre producer', 'video editor' and 'tattoo artist'. Those wanting a thorough breakdown of what a film director or prop maker does, with detailed guidance on how to qualify for such jobs won't find that here – but for those wide-eyed Y7/8 students with artistic leanings and curious minds, it's a very good match indeed.

Meet the author



LUCIA VINTI

What was your motivation for writing the book?

When I was younger, I always enjoyed daydreaming about the different jobs I could do when I grew up. I was especially interested in fashion, and loved activity books where you could design your own clothes. My idea started as an expanded version of this – an activity book exploring not just fashion, but also other types of design like architecture, graphic design and furniture design.

Once I started, I realised it would actually be more useful to create a more in-depth resource that let people know about *loads* of different jobs; ones you might fantasise about having, or never even heard of. As a freelance illustrator, I work with people from many different industries, and am lucky enough to have wonderful creative friends with unusual creative careers. The more people I met, the more I realised there are so many roles out there for different types of creatives, and so many incredible people with interesting jobs that I wanted to highlight.

What did the process of putting the words and visuals together involve?

It's quite a back and forth process when you're doing both the writing and illustrating. When I'm writing, I'm immediately imagining how it will look on the page – but equally, I sometimes can't start writing until I have a visual in mind. I started with very quick sketches of what each page would look like, with many ideas coming from workspaces and equipment associated with each job. Once I'd written the book, I then created the artwork. I wanted to include a mix of busier and more pared back pages with some great colour schemes, but didn't want it to feel too childish.

How did you secure the interviewees – were there any individuals you were keen to include from the outset?

Some people I interviewed were friends, and others were people I admire who I got in touch with. One of my favourite interviews was with Issy Irwin, who's a prop maker for the Globe Theatre. We met in person and she took me behind the scenes to see the theatre's prop and costume department – that was amazing! Another highlight was getting to talk to Torisheju Dumi, who's dressed celebrities like Zendaya and Kendall Jenner.

What conversations would you like to see the book prompt in classrooms?

I'd love for the book to help people expand their ideas of what doing a 'creative job' looks like. Following a creative career doesn't have to mean becoming a fine artist or fashion designer, and it doesn't have to be the 'risky' option. As the world of work continues to change, doing something you're passionate about – even something niche, skilful and hands-on – might actually be more sensible than some more traditional jobs...

Lucia Vinti is a London-based illustrator, artist and writer

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Tooth gone – what now?

If a student's tooth gets knocked out, be aware that what happens in the next five minutes really matters, counsels **Dr Yousuf Ibrahim**...

A collision during PE. A fall on the stairs. A pupil appearing before you with blood around their mouth and a tooth in their hand. You call for the first aider and ask a colleague to contact home, but there's something else you should be dealing with immediately – the tooth.

As a dentist, I want teachers to know that a permanent tooth knocked completely out of its socket can sometimes be put back. Its condition on arrival affects the treatment available, meaning that the actions taken at school can make a difference long before the pupil reaches a dental surgery.



Start with the pupil

First, reassure the pupil, summon your school's first aider and follow your emergency procedures. Serious injuries, including breathing difficulties or suspected significant head injury, take priority. Never attempt to replace a tooth in an unconscious or uncooperative pupil.

Ask a colleague to contact parents and obtain urgent dental advice while someone stays with the child. Explain exactly what has happened. '*A permanent tooth has been knocked out*' will communicate the situation more clearly than '*They've hurt their mouth.*'

Handle the tooth with care

NHS public guidance advises against trying to put a knocked-out permanent tooth back, and instead recommends seeing a dentist as soon as possible.

Pick the tooth up by the crown – the part used for biting and chewing – and keep your fingers away from the root. If the tooth is dirty, gently rinse it using milk, saline or the pupil's saliva. Don't scrub it.

If the pupil is conscious and cooperative, you can try returning the tooth to its original socket if you're able to do so safely. Never force it into position. If it slips back easily, a clean cloth held between the teeth with gentle biting pressure can help keep it there.

When replacement isn't possible, use a container of milk or the pupil's saliva to prevent drying and send the container to the dentist with the pupil. Placing the tooth in tissue, a pocket or an empty bag will dry it out.

Keep any broken pieces

A fracture calls for a different response. Recover any pieces you can find safely and place them in milk or the pupil's saliva. A dentist may be able to bond a fragment back onto the damaged tooth.

Arrange dental assessment, and seek urgent advice if a tooth has moved out of position or if the pupil can't bite normally. A small chip and a tooth completely out of its socket demand entirely different courses of action.

Explain the urgency at handover

Write down the time of the injury, the action taken and how the tooth was stored, and pass this information on to the parent or adult accompanying the pupil. These details will help the dentist assess the injury.

Ensure the pupil's family understand that a knocked-out permanent tooth requires immediate attention. In England, NHS 111 can advise when there's no dentist available or an emergency appointment can't be secured. In the meantime, protect the tooth and seek dental advice while collection is arranged.

Know where to turn

Before your next duty, fixture or trip, check the following:

- Who will provide first aid cover when the usual colleague is absent?
- Where can you find clear instructions regarding dental injuries?
- Will you be able to quickly obtain gloves, a clean container and supplies of milk?
- Who can make the necessary phone calls while another adult supports the pupil?

Ask your first-aid lead about anything unfamiliar. Staff should know where to find help during after-school activities and away fixtures, as well as during lessons.

A teenager who loses a permanent front tooth may face years of appointments and decisions around its replacement. Prompt care will produce a better chance of retaining it. Though the eventual outcome will be uncertain, it's worth checking that you'll know what to do with a knocked-out tooth before one is handed to you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Yousuf Ibrahim is a practising dentist with interests in restorative dentistry and endodontics, and is the founder of ToothRevive (toothrevive.com) – a supplier of dental-trauma kits containing instructions and basic materials to aid initial responses to dental injuries

What's New?

Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education



1 Free Drama Teacher Webinar

Teaching Key Stage 3 Drama? Join Bloomsbury Publishing's free teacher webinar on Wednesday 25th November at 4pm.

Deborah Gibbs, experienced drama teacher and author of the newly published Key Stage 3 Drama Toolkit, will share practical lesson ideas and actionable strategies to build student confidence, embed core theatrical skills and establish clear progression across years 7, 8 and 9. Get your free ticket via **tinyurl.com/ts158-WN1**.

2 Neuroinclusive secondary schools



National Autistic Society: Learn supports secondary schools and MATs to develop confident, knowledgeable workforces and embed inclusive practice across their organisations. Combining the National Autistic Society's specialist expertise with evidence-informed approaches and lived experience, we provide professional development designed to support meaningful, lasting improvement.

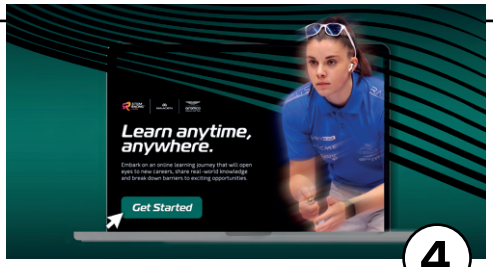
Our offer includes specialist training, flexible online learning, Licensed User programmes and consultancy, helping schools strengthen staff understanding, develop internal expertise and improve organisational practice. From individual teachers, to whole-school leadership teams, we work with education professionals to create environments where autistic and neurodivergent learners are better understood and supported. Discover more at **naslearn.org.uk**.

3 Real-world geography

At the Royal Geographical Society, we create curriculum-linked careers resources to help students discover how the geography taught in their classrooms is used in the real world. Our careers resources cover a range of topics – from ecosystems and landscapes, to place-making and GIS. We've also partnered with the Built Environment Schools Trust to create a 'Careers that build sustainable cities' series, which showcases the wide range of roles for geographers in the regeneration of urban spaces.

Our careers resources are designed to be rich in real-world examples, drawing on the day-to-day jobs of professional geographers and their favourite projects. Focused on the application of geographical subject knowledge and skills, they're adaptable and aim to support self-regulated learning. Our library of careers resources can be explored at **tinyurl.com/ts158-WN2.** Choose Geography co-ordinator, Alice Matthews (pictured), can be contacted at **A.Matthews@rgs.org**.





4 On your marks...

STEM Racing, the global STEM competition, has launched STEM Racing Learn – a pioneering, free digital learning platform developed in partnership with Aston Martin Aramco Formula One™ Team and Maaden. Bringing together expertise from motorsport, mining and education, the platform combines industry insights with interactive quizzes, step-by-step tutorials and engaging activities. In a first-of-its-kind partnership, the platform aims to make high-quality STEM education more accessible, helping to overcome geographical and resource barriers.

By connecting classroom learning with real-world industry experience, STEM Racing Learn is set to empower thousands of young people worldwide to develop STEM skills and discover exciting future careers. Find out more at **stemracing.com/learn**.



5 Space for every learner

Every student experiences the school day in their own way. For those with specific individual needs, the right resources and environments can make a real difference in supporting calm, focus and communication. Regularly reviewing what you have and seeing what's new helps you make small adjustments to help students feel as confident, comfortable and included as possible. Whether it's more spaces for self-regulation, additional sensory engagement or more inclusive routines, every adjustment is a move towards more accessible learning for every pupil. Explore a range of resources available to support your pupils' journey at **ypo.co.uk/send**.

The forgotten MIDDLE CHILD

Amid the flurry of activity surrounding your Y11s at this time of year, spare a thought for your comparatively overlooked and under-supervised Y10s...

From time to time, you meet a child who's self-sufficient, calm and unassuming. They're not the eldest among their siblings, whose milestones become family events, nor the youngest, whose every achievement is heralded by rapturous applause. They're *the middle child* – the one everyone assumes is coping.

They're old enough to not need constant reassurance, but young enough that their big moments can wait. They become remarkably self-sufficient, if only because they don't have much of a choice. Their birthdays are remembered, though maybe with not quite the same air of anticipation. Their stories are interrupted by louder voices, their successes often quieter.

Quietly plugging away

Y10 can often feel like that middle child, particularly during November – the month that nobody warns you about. See, September gets all the attention, with its new routines, seating plans and learning of names before the first data deadline. October half-term is held up as the first finish line, while December has the Christmas break to pull everyone through.

November, however, is when schools quietly become *exclusively about Y11*. Staff briefings start to revolve around mock timetables. Corridors fill with intervention posters. Sixth-form applications acquire a sudden urgency. Meanwhile, Y10 sits in the classroom next door, quietly plugging away as a sense of



panicked chaos grips the rest of the school. They're the 'GCSE students' nobody's referring to when discussing exams.

You see it in those little moments. A Y10 student asks if they should start revising and someone else jokes that GCSEs 'don't really start until Y11'. Homework starts to slip from '*I'll do it tonight*' to '*I'll catch up next week.*' Nobody panics, of course, because there's no crisis brewing here. After all, they've got plenty of time – *except they haven't*.

Every year, in those moments when the world is revolving around Y11, someone will remark that "*This is the time of year when Y10 start to slacken...*" and I'll often find myself responding with, "*Well, yeah – wouldn't you?*"

Because nobody's looking at them. Instead, everyone's focused with laser-like precision on Y11 – '*How will they cope?*' '*What interventions need putting in place?*' All the while, your Y10s are letting their own standards slip without anybody really noticing.

The accountability timetable

November of Y10 is where GCSE habits start to harden. The student who never quite finishes a paragraph won't become magically organised the following April. The student who convinces themselves that missing one homework assignment won't matter soon finds that they've missed 10 without their teacher batting an eyelid. It's rarely dramatic, and that's precisely the problem.

Schools don't neglect Y10 out of indifference; we do so because accountability runs according to a timetable. Y11 outcomes matter *now*. Mock analysis can't wait. Parents need information. Leaders need predictions. Teachers are pulled towards those pupils closest to the cliff edge.

The unintended, yet natural consequence is that Y10 receive a subtle, but unmistakable message – "*It's not your turn yet.*"

Celebrating strong work

Ask experienced teachers when they wish they could have intervened earlier, and they'll likely identify autumn of Y10, since that's when students' confidence, routines and expectations are strong, yet still malleable enough to change.

The irony is that Y10 often responds brilliantly when we treat their experiences as significant. A properly-timed retrieval quiz can become a confidence booster, rather than a judgement. A conversation about revision methods will now start to feel like guidance and less like crisis management.

Celebrating strong work in November tells students that GCSE success isn't built in the final hundred days, but in ordinary Tuesday lessons, when nobody's counting down to the exams.

Perhaps the answer isn't a new initiative – schools have enough of those. It may be as simple as remembering to look inside the classroom next door.

Every November we tell Y11 they're running out of time, when we should perhaps be reminding Y10 that their time has already begun. Because by the time we notice they've become the forgotten middle child, they'll only be months away from becoming another Y11 student that we're desperately trying to rescue.



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**

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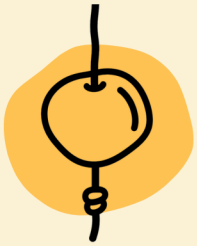
No losers on sports day

How honest should we be with children about what it really takes to succeed?



Don't talk about sex in the classroom

Why can talking about bodies and relationships feel so awkward?



No playing conkers

When we're responsible for other people's children, how much risk should we accept?

Q&A

"Students return with evidence of the skills they've developed"

Duncan Kemp, Divisional Director at JCA, explains how the company's Skills Builder programme helps schools recognise and evidence the skills students develop through a residential experience

30 SECOND BRIEFING

The Skills Builder programme uses a recognised framework to help students develop, recognise and evidence essential skills throughout their residential. Students assess their progress, reflect on their experiences and record their development in a Skills Builder Passport, helping schools recognise and evidence personal development and enrichment outcomes.

What is JCA's Skills Builder programme?

Most teachers don't need convincing that residentials help young people develop skills. We see students working with people they wouldn't normally work with – solving problems, showing resilience and growing in confidence throughout their stay. The challenge is often how that development is recognised and evidenced afterwards.

The Skills Builder programme uses a recognised framework to help students develop, recognise and evidence essential skills throughout their residential. Students assess their progress, reflect on their experiences and record their development in a Skills Builder Passport.

By aligning our residentials to the Skills Builder Universal Framework, students and staff have a common language for discussing skills development and reflecting on their progress throughout the visit.

How does it work in practice?

Each activity is linked to three specific skill steps, giving students and instructors a clear focus for the session. Instructors focus on those skill steps throughout the activity, ask students about them and review them with the group, helping students recognise where they have demonstrated those skills.

Alongside the activity-specific skill steps, four additional skills run throughout the whole residential: active listening, practising resilience, involving others and being diplomatic.

Students complete a self-assessment at the start and end of the residential, and record examples in their Skills Builder Passport throughout the week. This process helps students reflect on their experiences, recognise the skills they have used and build a record of their development.

Is the learning limited to only the activity sessions?

No. Some of the best opportunities for developing essential skills come from residential life itself, not just the activities. Sharing accommodation, taking responsibility, working with different people, dealing with setbacks and contributing to group decisions can all provide opportunities for personal development.

That's why some skill steps run throughout the whole residential, rather than being linked to individual activities. Students also create a Group Charter at the start of their stay, which helps establish how they'll work together and support each other throughout the week.

How can this help with enrichment?

Schools are increasingly being asked to demonstrate the impact of enrichment and personal development, not simply provide opportunities for it. The Skills Builder framework provides a structured way of recognising and recording student development. Students reflect on their progress against agreed skill steps, record examples in their Passport and complete the same assessment before they leave.

The result is a record of reflections, self-assessments and examples of skill development that can support wider discussions around enrichment, character education and personal development.

How do schools get started?

Skills Builder can be incorporated into any JCA secondary residential, free of charge. This starts with a conversation about the group and what the school wants students to gain from the experience. We then agree the skill focus and build it into the residential programme.

The activities and residential experience remain the same. What Skills Builder adds is a framework that helps students understand the skills they're developing and provides a way of recognising and recording that progress.



JCA

Contact:
01273 647 200 | jca-adventure.co.uk



ABOUT DUNCAN: Duncan Kemp, JCA's Divisional Director, leads operations across JCA's residentials, including the new Skills Builder programme

What's the difference?

+ **One instructor, all week** – The same instructor names the skill, watches for it and reviews it with the group, from the baseline assessment right through to the end assessment.
+ **Learning between activities** – Four skill steps run throughout the entirety of the stay, with some of the most significant development happening between activities.
+ **No added expense** – JCA's Skills Builder programme is built into every secondary residential stay, at no extra cost.

Beyond the gates

Expand your students' learning horizons with some advice and suggestions for your next school trip...



EXPERT VIEW

First Aid Planning

All schools should have a checklist of requirements that need to be completed before visits are authorised, which will include needing to have a trained first aider attending. This should form part of your risk assessment planning, but will ultimately provide some peace of mind to school leaders, the EVC and you, as the trip leader, that someone who's completed the 'First Aid at Work Course' will be present and able to deal with the immediate impact of any medical matters.

Trip leads must also ensure that the trip will be furnished with a fully-stocked first aid kit. Yes, the coach company will have its own for the vehicle, and the driver may even be first aid-trained themselves, but you should be aiming to run the safest possible trip. Having your own trained member of staff enables you to take control of the situation. It's helpful to check what first aid provision will be in place at the venue or destination, but never rely on whatever equipment or training others might have.

When journeying overseas, having your own first aider – ideally two – on the staff team is a must. It will ensure that first aid can be provided to anyone in your group without having to wait on airport staff, airline crew or hotel/hostel staff, and also means that the first aid duties can be shared – especially if decisions need to be made on whether to seek medical advice or contact the nearest hospital.



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

CURRICULUM LINKS



History

Gunpowder Mills is a unique heritage site located in Waltham Abbey, Essex, with a school programme offering curriculum-linked educational visits and workshops for EYFS to KS4.
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Science/Geography

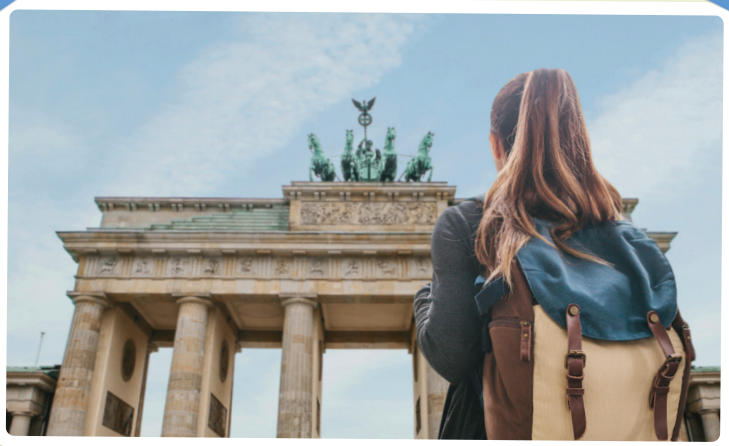
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✔ **OUR PLANET, OUR FUTURE** (Ongoing) A new careers/sustainability-themed workshop for schools at the Natural History Museum | **tinyurl.com/ts158-BTG2**

✔ **DIG** (Ongoing) Archaeology workshops for KS3/4 organised by York Archaeology Learning | **tinyurl.com/ts158-BTG3**

RESOURCE CENTRE



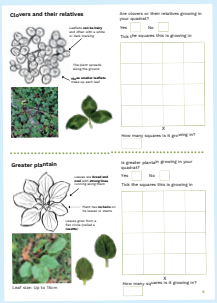
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The V&A Museum and Young V&A offer an extensive range of resources for teachers and students, including lesson plans, presentations, visual aids and activities that relate to art, craft and design. **tinyurl.com/ts158-BTG4**



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The National Education Nature Park programme offers a variety of KS1-5 resources via its website to support nature-based learning, including guidance for educators, lesson plans, assemblies and tools to help students record their observations. **tinyurl.com/ts158-BTG6**

Forging a better path

Meena Wood contemplates what it will take for schools to offer a viable and inclusive 'technical pathways' curriculum for learners aged 14 and up...

The 14-16 school curriculum hasn't served the needs of all children. For too long, vocational education has remained the preserve of FE – especially for that third of 16-year-olds who haven't achieved their GCSEs, or those who have been excluded.

Instead of offering vocational, technical and creative pathways that inspire *all* children, schools still force a binary 'pass or fail' condition on students at 16. As a headteacher, I remember speaking to children who were so certain that they'd fail their maths and English exams that they were fully prepared to simply accept whatever trade a relative could find for them.

Restore the equity

On the other hand, a Y9 student wanting to study robotic engineering will need to be conversant with physics, computer science, electronics and D&T. If, however, the school's timetabling prioritises EBacc languages and humanities, will they be able to fulfil their ambitions? Even with the government's incoming vocational GCSEs in place, industry experience via internships or personal robotics projects will still perform a key role in the student getting to develop the hands-on technical and employability skills they require.

In other words, we're disadvantaging all children equally by imposing on them a single pathway leading only to the 'gold standard' of university. Those wanting to pursue a skilled vocational or creative profession from the age of 14 won't be able to until at least 2029. In the meantime, students with such ambitions but considered 'too bright' for non-academic options will be propelled towards university. How does that help develop the real potential of all students?

A new 14-16 pathways curriculum could restore the equity and parity we're missing, while simultaneously fulfilling the Prime Minister's vision of 'a hard hat [being] as acceptable as a graduation cap'. A pathways-style curriculum, with properly funded apprenticeships, pre-vocational options and work placements, could offer students real choice.

> **"We're disadvantaging all children by imposing a single pathway leading only to the 'gold standard' of university"**

But would this be realistically possible in a school setting that lacks any formal college or employer partnerships? Will schools be able to recruit and train enough staff with the skills needed to deliver the first V Levels in education, finance and digital, alongside the new T Levels in sports, fitness and care services from 2028 onwards?

Postcode lottery

Around 90% of mainstream English schools offered at least one Technical Award in the 2024-25 academic year, with 45% of students opting to take up said offers. That's a large mainstream qualification route sitting on inconsistent foundations with poor uptake. The vocational GCSEs are meant to correct this, since they'll be nationally set and regulated by Ofqual, just as it currently does for academic GCSEs, but not for another three years. Confusion thus emerges, as the timelines for *re-organisation* and *implementation* of the qualifications are different.

A 2026 school leaver, a 2027 college applicant and a 2029 GCSE cohort will all be affected by the changes, but none will experience the same qualifications within the same year. At the same time, the government-led National Mission on Work Experience is encouraging employers to create work placements, which could well lead to a postcode lottery, rather than the intended mandatory entitlement.

Demonstrating competence

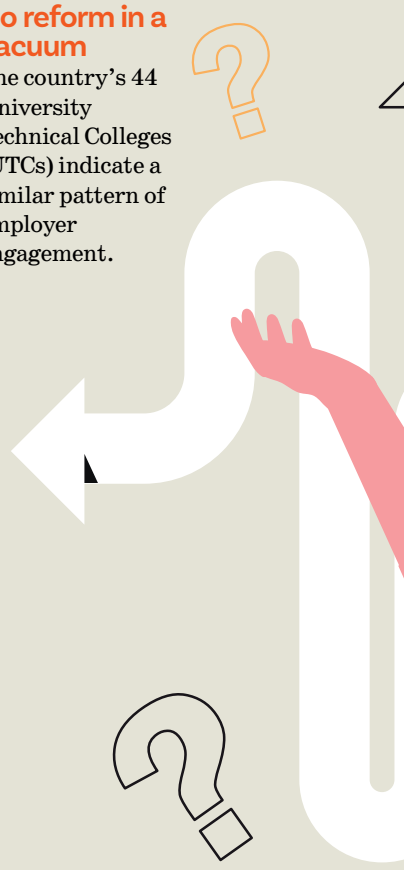
We can learn from past experience. Between 2005 and 2011, 14-19 diplomas attempted to bring about parity in a similar way. As an Ofsted HMI at the time, I saw first-hand how the diplomas could engage and enthuse children in subjects that genuinely inspired them – motor mechanics, hairdressing, plumbing, catering, electronics – and provide opportunities to apply their learning in work-related contexts. The 14-year-olds following hairdressing, for instance, finally understood the ways in which learning chemistry and maths could help inform their mixing of hair colour!

Their success, though, depended on the availability of well-qualified and experienced teachers, plus ready access to high-quality resources and well-equipped venues. The linchpin of these efforts was effective, hands-on local employer partnerships, with 'employer champions' driving assignments while collaborative partnerships produced comprehensive manuals and protocols, all built around local needs.

Learners responded with enthusiasm and high attendance, especially when they could demonstrate their competence using industry-standard resources. Where there was a lack of employer involvement or off-site visits, however, the subsequent over-reliance on theory held many back.

No reform in a vacuum

The country's 44 University Technical Colleges (UTCs) indicate a similar pattern of employer engagement.



Their curricula – co-developed by university and industry partners – provide work experience opportunities, guide teachers' professional development and support students into apprenticeships and tertiary education.

In my role as a Local Authority advisor, I've seen maths, English and science taught using practical, interdisciplinary approaches, in ways that have led students to securing technical qualifications in fields such as manufacturing and engineering. Yes, the quality of leadership will inevitably shape outcomes, but this kind of delivery model could potentially have a huge influence on the design of new 14-16 vocational school pathways.

Realising this potential, though, will mean directing structured funding to local consortia likely made up of schools, colleges and employers working together on curricula shaped around their local community's needs (see 'Courses we can learn from' for two current examples).

No reform happens in a vacuum, however – we must be mindful of the social and economic contexts involved. Over half of the graduates in Cumbria and Lincolnshire work in jobs that don't require a degree. England has the highest level of overqualification among OECD countries, currently standing at around 37% (see tinyurl.com/ts158-PW3).

Ambition and delivery

Further compounding the issue is the growing youth employment crisis highlighted by the 'Milburn Review' published earlier this year (see tinyurl.com/ts158-PW4), which could see as many as one in six young people not in education, employment or training by 2031.

Meeting these challenges will require both bold ambition and successful delivery. The Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) has been shown to work well, thanks in no small part to that city's diverse employment landscape, local capacity, genuine engagement on the part of employers and appropriate funding.

That model could be replicated in other major cities, but as new strategic Mayoral authorities are granted devolved powers for post-16 funding, there needs to be greater awareness that some areas – particularly non-Mayoral authorities such as Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset – may initially receive less funding.

No glass ceilings

Besides geography, the other barrier to overcome is that of labelling some children as 'disadvantaged,' 'SEN' or 'EAL', in effect placing a glass ceiling on what they can achieve while pushing them into inappropriate pathways. Schools must be able to make meaningful comparisons that properly account for factors such as the Income Deprivation Affecting Children index, Free School Meal eligibility, gender, urban/rural locations, attendance and persistent absence.

The 'Crossing Paths' report produced by The Sutton Trust (see tinyurl.com/ts158-PW5) is clear on the importance of these factors in determining outcomes. Without that granular detail, we risk relying on generalised narratives that lack the precision needed to drive improvement and accountability as measured by the inspectorate.

Meanwhile, those who cynically oppose the introduction of vocational GCSEs amid concerns of 'dumbing down' the curriculum must understand that vocational courses also demand their own form of academic rigour, from the need to grasp elements of algebra to technical literacy.

The Education Minister, Lucy Powell, has rightly expressed support for an "*Education matching high ambition, and not a one-size-fits-all straitjacket.*" As she and her colleagues work to streamline our existing pre- and post-16 qualifications, she mustn't lose sight of the need to resource a curriculum infrastructure that lives up to that ambition and avoid repeating the failures of the past.



COURSES WE CAN LEARN FROM

- The Fylde Coast Academy Trust's 'Compass Curriculum' (see tinyurl.com/ts158-PW1) is a universal KS4 offer provided to all Y9 pupils as part of their options selection. It replaces one traditional GCSE with a 2-year college course, thus delivering technical and vocational pathways to students aged 14 and up which combine college, school and work placements.
- Three Spires Trust's 'Engineering, Design & Manufacturing Gateway' (see tinyurl.com/ts158-PW2) is focused on providing all young people with guidance on vocational qualifications and appropriate careers progression. The Trust is currently seeking to develop further collaborative partnerships with colleges and employers.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Meena Wood is a former school headteacher, college principal, HMI, and author of *Secondary Curriculum Transformed – Enabling All to Achieve* (Routledge, £24.99)



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FOCUS ON: MFL

The benefits of immersing students in the language they're studying, why MFL teachers should feel positive in a seemingly bleak time for the subject – and how to manage a GCSE class with a very wide spread of attainment...

What does engaging and sustainable MFL teaching look like in practice?

THE AGENDA:

64 TOTAL IMMERSION

Placing students abroad, or creating an environment where English is barely spoken at all, can help students become more confident in their use of a foreign language – so long as you prepare appropriately, writes Dalia Abourgess...

67 BACK FROM THE BRINK?

Paul Smith reflects on the challenges that MFL teachers are currently confronted by, and why there's still some cause for optimism...

68 FROM 9 TO 1

Esmeralda Salgado considers the strategies and aptitudes needed to teach mixed-ability MFL classes at GCSE level



TOTAL IMMERSION

Placing students abroad, or creating an environment where English is barely spoken at all can help students become more confident in their use of a foreign language – so long as you prepare appropriately, writes **Dalia Abourgess**...

A student can conjugate French verbs perfectly on paper, but freezes when a waiter asks what they'd like to drink. That gap between knowing a language and using it is where immersion can make a difference.

Whether students are navigating a French café, or taking part in a classroom role-play, having something to communicate will give their learning a purpose beyond the next test, but putting students on the spot doesn't automatically build confidence. The teacher's judgement matters – when to let them work through uncertainty, when to offer a prompt and when to step in.

Advantages of immersion

One of the main benefits of language immersion is that it encourages students to use the target language for real purposes. In traditional lessons, students may be solving grammar problems or practising vocabulary, but without necessarily knowing how to apply what they've learned to real-life situations.

Immersion encourages them to use what they've learned. A learner of French visiting France, for example, may well find themselves having to order food, ask for directions or make an introduction. These simple exchanges can help students bridge the gap between what they learn in the classroom and actual communication. They also help students improve their listening skills through being exposed to different accents, expressions and speeds of speech.

Moreover, immersion builds self-confidence. Students will slowly discover that good communication doesn't actually require a large vocabulary or perfect grammar. Sometimes, all it takes is the ability to keep a conversation going – maybe through making appropriate gestures, dropping in a familiar expression or by requesting further clarification.

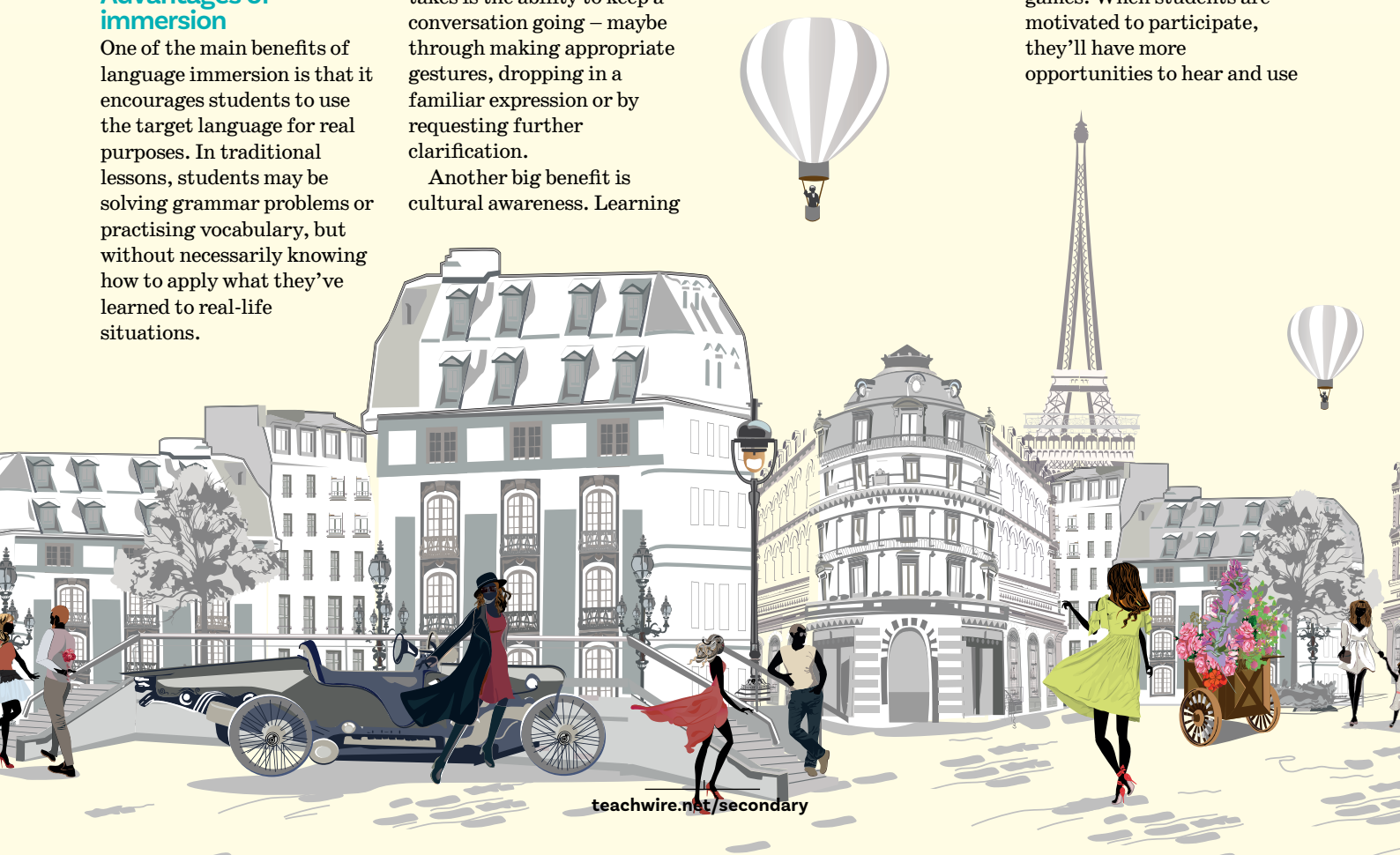
Another big benefit is cultural awareness. Learning a different language also entails learning about how people interact, communicate and express civility within different cultural contexts. Immersive experiences can help students expand their horizons and learn much more about the communities whose language they are studying.

Immersion at home

That said, you don't need to travel abroad in order to immerse yourself. Exchange programs and international travel are great, but teachers can also provide meaningful language experiences through regular classroom instruction. As a French teacher, I like activities that encourage speaking, participation and active use of the language. Instead of rote learning and parroting, learners can practise French for a reason through games, role-playing activities and structured conversations.

For example, a class role-play might see one student assume the role of a patron at a French café while another is cast as the waiter. Both students can practise giving greetings, the process of ordering food, how to ask questions and how to respond politely. A shopping activity can additionally give students practice at communicating costs, numbers and common phrases in a practical context.

In this sense, repetition can be made much more interesting than language games. When students are motivated to participate, they'll have more opportunities to hear and use



the language. Pair work and group activities can also provide less confident students with opportunities to practise speaking in front of the class.

Music and language acquisition

Songs can also help with language immersion, particularly among younger students. As a French teacher, I've found that using songs makes learning the language more enjoyable and memorable. Children learn new words more easily when exposed to music, rhythm, and repetition.

Students can be further encouraged to use the language without feeling pressure to be flawless by taking part in group singing. Repeated exposure in such scenarios will soon help familiar expressions become part of children's everyday language, even if they don't understand every word at first. In time, they might eventually be able to identify sentence structures, pronunciation patterns and meanings.

Singing in groups provides students with a shared activity in which they can practise their pronunciation and listen to one another – something that's especially helpful for learners who lack confidence – while additionally creating a favourable emotional bond with the language, which can enhance the pleasure to be had from learning it.

The use of songs shouldn't be seen as a substitute for traditional vocabulary and meaning instruction, but teachers can generate enthusiasm among students by, for example, explaining key words in the context of song lyrics. Music can thus be a practical tool for developing confidence, memory and communication skills.

"One of an educator's most important responsibilities is deciding when to let students solve a problem on their own and when to offer assistance"

These approaches introduce important immersion concepts, such as active engagement, meaningful communication and frequent exposure to the target language, even if they don't fully replicate living overseas.

Dangers and difficulties

Despite its advantages, however, immersion can be too much for some students. Being in a foreign language setting can cause anxiety, particularly for beginners or students who lack confidence when speaking in front of others.

Students may worry about making mistakes, being misunderstood or appearing less capable than their peers. If they feel under pressure to speak without adequate preparation they may withdraw, rather than engage in activities.

Furthermore, it's possible that more confident students will lead conversations, while more reserved students remain on the sidelines. Students with additional learning needs, language processing problems or communication challenges may require more time, and/or the option of taking part in activities specifically designed to meet their needs before being able to participate effectively.

Practical safeguarding matters – supervision, awareness of allergies, medical needs, unfamiliar surroundings, the possibility of students becoming separated from the group – should always be given careful consideration by teachers when travelling abroad. Cultural differences and the possibility of misunderstandings mean that inadequate preparation could present even more difficulties than usual.

The objective should never be to put students through as much hardship as possible. Effective immersion ensures that students feel safe, included and supported, while still providing a suitable level of difficulty.

Travelling abroad requires a particular threshold for intervention in terms of safety. Teachers should act quickly if a student is lost, appears to be in danger, or is unable to understand an important safety instruction. Promoting independence must never take precedence over safeguarding.

When to step in

One of an educator's most important responsibilities is deciding when to let students solve a problem on their own, and when to offer assistance. Making mistakes is a common part of learning a language, of course. Correcting every grammatical error immediately can impede communication and deter students from speaking. It's usually far more advantageous to allow conversations to continue and address any recurring errors after the meaning has become clear.

But then there can be times when it's best to not remain silent. If a student consistently misinterprets a lesson, shows signs of distress or is unable to participate, despite making a visible effort, then the teacher should intervene and offer the required support. This could involve matching the student with a helpful classmate, repeating a question more slowly, volunteering a helpful phrase or providing a visual cue of some kind. A teacher might, for example, say, "*Je voudrais...*" and let the student complete the sentence on their own, if they don't know how to order food in French.

The aim should be to facilitate communication without taking over. Students should feel that support is available, while still having opportunities to solve problems and become independent.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dalia Abourgess holds a master's degree in French language and literature, with 17 years of experience in Lebanon and the UK across primary, secondary and university levels; she specialises in French and Arabic language teaching and can be found on LinkedIn via **tinyurl.com/ts158-TI1**

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Back from the brink?

Paul Smith reflects on the challenges that MFL teachers are currently confronted by, and why there's still some cause for optimism...

As language teachers, it can often feel as though we're constantly riding the waves of change – whether through specification revisions requiring substantial resource redevelopment, the fallout from Brexit and changing pupil attitudes towards language learning, or shifting national patterns in GCSE uptake.

French entries are declining, while German continues to struggle with comparatively low numbers, against a backdrop of growing popularity for Spanish and, increasingly, Chinese. Indeed, in 2025 Spanish overtook French as the most popular GCSE language. In England, French GCSE entries then fell by 6,960 candidates in 2026 – a decline of approximately 5.5% – while Spanish entries rose marginally by 660.

A bleak future

Recent developments seem to suggest an even bleaker future for the study of certain modern foreign languages. Take the draft Northern Ireland Curriculum Framework for 2028, for example. Its proposed statutory Modern Languages framework focuses on KS3 pupils, while a separate framework for 'language and cultural awareness' at KS2 is merely optional. Unfortunately, these proposals don't guarantee a compulsory modern language entitlement throughout primary education, or beyond KS3.

Closer to home, the University of Nottingham has suspended admissions to language degrees for new students. If the suspension becomes permanent, it's on course to become the first Russell Group university without an MFL degree course.

Elsewhere, UCAS acceptances onto undergraduate courses classified as 'Language and Area Studies' fell from 19,930 in 2019 to 15,115 in 2025 – a decline of almost a quarter. To compound matters, the recruitment of languages teachers is falling well short of government targets. Only 43% of the recruitment target for MFL trainee teachers was met in the 2024/25 academic year.

Finding out the hard way

I used to be one of *those* teachers who would read such headlines and think '*That'll never affect me*' until I found out the hard way. Having taught French and German at KS3-5 for almost two decades at one particular school, in a successful MFL department, I was recently made redundant following a decision to cut French and German from the school's three-strand offering while maintaining the provision of Spanish. The reasons given? 'Financial pressures' and 'low student uptake at KS4 and KS5' compared to other subjects.

We had reported strong results year-on-year. We employed experienced practitioners, taught in colourful learning environments and oversaw an inclusive, yet challenging and engaging curriculum that had been honed and perfected over a number of years. Our department organised popular and successful overseas educational visits to Berlin and Paris. All accomplished against the backdrop of our curriculum time being squeezed from five lessons over two weeks to four, and endless, yet ultimately fruitless meetings with senior leadership demanding evidence that our French and German provision was sustainable.

There remains, however, a small glimmer of hope, both for me and in a broader context. On a personal note, I'm very fortunate to have found new employment in a setting that supports language learning, and in which French is the predominant language trust-wide. Also, at the time of writing, whispers about the UK rejoining the EU are growing increasingly louder, with PM Andy Burnham recently stating that Brexit caused "*More harm than good*", and that he is open to "*all options*", potentially leaving the door very much open to a new referendum on the matter.

Welcome news

A further cause for cheer can be seen with YouGov's September 2026 tracker, which found that 59% of respondents supported rejoining the EU, compared with 32% opposed. Then there's the welcome news that the UK will rejoin Erasmus+ as of 2027, thus reopening important study, training and work exchange opportunities across Europe that are expected to benefit over 100,000 people in just that first year.

Will these moves come to fruition before it's too late? The pessimist in me believes that it's the decisions of a small minority in positions of power (government leaders, the DfE, headteachers) that will determine the future path of language study in the UK.

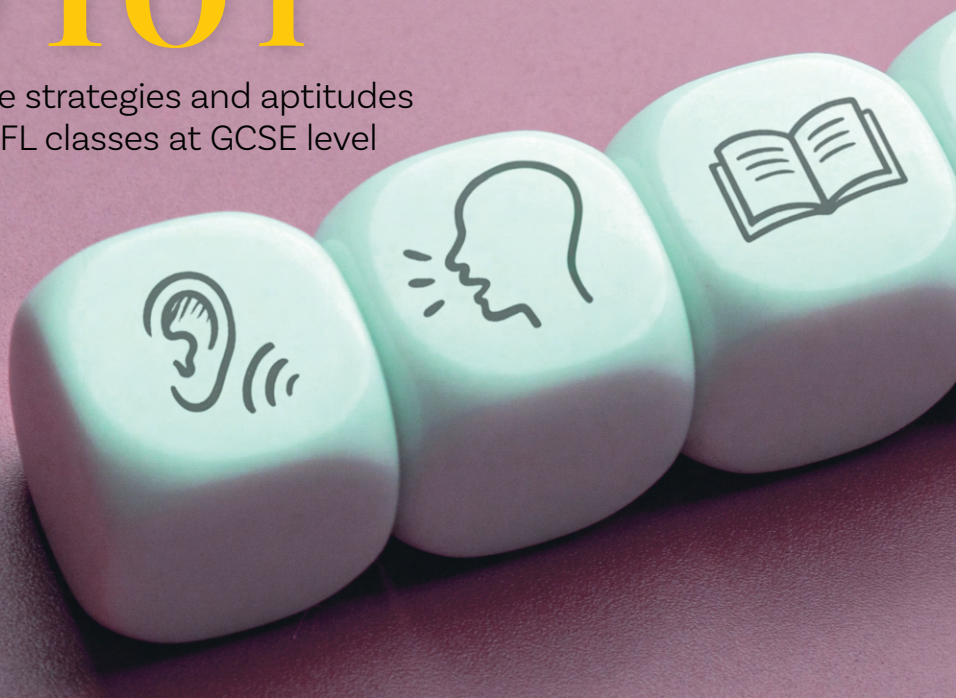
That said, however, it's also down to us, language educators, to continue fighting for a broad language offering in UK schools; to challenge parochialism; to champion our subjects at every opportunity, and to continue opening those doors for this generation of students.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Paul Smith is head of languages at Bedlington Academy, with over 20 years' experience teaching French and German across KS3–5, and can be found on LinkedIn via **tinyurl.com/ts158-DL1**

FROM 9 TO 1

Esmeralda Salgado considers the strategies and aptitudes needed to teach mixed-ability MFL classes at GCSE level



I was generally very pleased with our GCSE results this year, as they exceeded our mock exam predictions by around 10%.

62.8% achieving 4+ in Spanish and 60% in French might seem poor to some, but I see those results as hugely positive, considering how many of our students were eligible for Pupil Premium or had SEN. We had only 18 students take the Higher Tier in Spanish, and eight in French. For some of our students, a grade 3 GCSE in languages was a big achievement, and something to be genuinely proud of.

A 400% increase

All of our GCSE classes are mixed-ability. This means that within the same class, our results can range from grade 9 down to grade 1. When I first started teaching at Princes Risborough School, our big target was to improve the GCSE uptake in MFL. We fulfilled that target three years ago, after seeing an increase in numbers at Y10 of around 400%.

This increase, however, meant that languages quickly became an 'inclusive' subject – one chosen by many students who previously wouldn't have picked a language as one of their GCSE choices. We were suddenly teaching many students who were eligible for PP, who had SEND, and others who found languages challenging, but who understood the importance of learning them and wanted to give the course a go.

As a result, we found ourselves with many different attainment levels in the same classroom, and having to accept that the days of our GCSE results amounting to nearly 100% earning grade 4+ – as was the case when we had just 15 students doing French and Spanish – were now over. That was a price I was more than happy to pay.

So how should MFL teachers go about managing a GCSE classroom containing such a mix of abilities? Via *adaptive teaching*, and by *having high expectations for all*.

We decided that we would pitch for the Higher Tier, by covering the grammar and vocabulary it demanded, while also providing plenty of scaffolding and shortcuts – what we call **nuggets** – to help students achieve their best personal grades, thus avoiding the need to create different worksheet tasks for different attainers.

We then adopted these seven strategies to create a syllabus suitable for all…

1. 'Sentence Builder' booklets

We produce Sentence Builder booklets containing predetermined vocabulary that cover all topics and themes at GCSE, and which detail what we call the '5 Magic Powers' – those elements which, if correctly demonstrated in the writing and speaking exam, will all but guarantee a good grade:

- Using '3-time phrases'
- Giving opinions
- Giving reasons
- Talking about someone else (or in its simplest form, using reported speech – '*My friend says…*')
- Using High Impact expressions

Our Sentence Builder booklets work to create opportunities for retrieval practice, thus helping students transfer vocabulary and structures to their long-term memories.

> *"We were suddenly teaching students who found languages challenging, but wanted to give the course a go"*

2. A lexicogrammar approach

We teach our curriculum with the aid of our Sentence Builder booklets using a lexicogrammar approach rooted in Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction.

This means that we model the language (as it appears in the Sentence Builder booklet) via lots of repetition in the shape of various listening/reading tasks, through games, and with the use of mini whiteboards, which allows us to adapt the teaching and learning experience according to students' live responses, and scaffold activities to cater for their different abilities.

When modelling the language during listening/reading tasks, we'll produce output worthy of an 8/9 grade, while allowing lower



attaining students to use their Sentence Builder booklets as support. At a given point decided by the teacher, scheme of work or curriculum, however, all students will be expected to work from memory.

After modelling, following Rosenshine, we'll carry out structured production of language – mainly translation of sentences, scaffolding them from least to most challenging using the 5 Magic Powers.

The idea is that this will lead to fluent practice once students start producing language from memory following the 'rule of 3' – producing language that consists of at least three sentences – and using the aforementioned '5 Magic Powers' as support tools.

We regularly use mini games and activities to give purpose to the language learning experience and increase students' motivation. In its simplest form, this might involve students tallying their correct answers via their MWBs, which will in turn convert to Achievement Points used by our whole school reward system.

3. Use of 'nuggets'

'Nuggets' is how we describe the infinitive structures that let students use different tenses, without having to be over-reliant on grammatical verb endings (at least initially). This is important, since many students can lose motivation due to the cognitive overload of conjugating verb endings.

This doesn't mean we don't teach grammatical verb tenses – we very much do, and for every student – but only later, once they're confident with the vocabulary and structures they've learned in a topic and feel that they're making progress.

The 'nuggets' are supported tools leading to fluency, examples of which include:

- Suelo +infinitive
- Empecé a + infinitive
- Decidí/decidimos + infinitive
- Solía + infinitive
- Me gustaría + infinitive
- Me gustaba + infinitive
- Voy a + infinitive

4. Teaching to master the oral/writing exams

Initially, our key aim will be to teach students to master the oral/writing exams and equip them with the skills needed to do so. We won't overload students with official vocabulary lists, because the Sentence Builder booklet covers most of the vocabulary to start with.

Instead, our priority is to recycle and reuse this vocabulary in different contexts and different topics, while working on helping students automatise their vocabulary retrieval via careful scaffolding.

5. Having high expectations for all

We will pitch for the Higher Tier at all times, covering the necessary grammar and verb endings for different tenses accordingly, but always while applying our golden rule – *scaffold the process*.

We aim to be conscious of students' needs across all lessons, and will therefore be checking for understanding constantly, only moving on to the next scaffold level once they're ready.

As previously noted, MWBs are great for this. What happens with those high attaining students who fly through the process? With the aid of MWBs we can tell at a glance who is finding the tasks easy and stretch them appropriately. We may ask them to extend a sentence; conjugate a verb; use a different tense; demonstrate a specific Magic Power; or even remove all assistance and task them with working entirely from memory. In other words, we let them skip the scaffold and use the lift…

6. Independent reading/listening exam sessions

Every two weeks, students will spend a lesson carrying out listening and reading tasks taken from past papers – Exampro in our case, since we follow AQA.

These exam questions will be scaffolded from the Foundation to Higher Tier, and include transcripts and mark schemes so that students can work at their own pace while using headphones, looking at transcripts and marking their work, while making note of any new vocabulary in their own Quizlet courses.

This is essential, because higher attainers will be exposed to new vocabulary from the official vocab list in context, which they'll then use in their own productive tasks alongside the vocabulary they've previously learned from the Sentence Builder booklet with our guidance.

Lower attainers, on the other hand, will be able to develop reading/listening skills and become familiar with the official vocab list, so that they can at least start to recognise certain words in future tasks – even if they might not always be able to retain and retrieve those words themselves.

7. Targeted oral practice

We aim to finish the entire syllabus by March, which gives us four to five weeks of oral and written practice before the speaking exams take place.

During this period we'll simply concentrate on oral tasks that range from role-play activities, to reading aloud and surprise questions. Once again, we'll make use of MWBs so that we can check for understanding instantly and encourage some students to use their 'lifts', while also supporting others by providing model answers in English that they can then translate into Spanish/French and elaborate upon.

TEACHWIRE DOWNLOAD

A copy of Princes Risborough School's Sentence Builder booklet for all GCSE topics

tinyurl.com/ts158-MFL1

Further classroom resources created by Esmeralda and her colleagues based on the strategies discussed here

tinyurl.com/ts158-MFL2



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Esmeralda Salgado is an Advanced Skills Teacher and Lead Practitioner for Insignis Trust, and Head of MFL and School Digital Lead at Princes Risborough School; this article is based on a post originally published on her blog, MFL Craft (**mflcraft.blogspot.com**)

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The landscapes OF CONFLICT

Zoë Thornhill explains how the topic of warfare can produce powerful learning experiences in geography lessons

What happens to a place when the fighting stops? While warfare is often associated with history lessons, its consequences extend far beyond battles, political decisions and changing borders.

From altered landscapes and affected farmland, to destroyed cities and displaced communities, conflict fundamentally transforms the environments in which people live.

For geography teachers, these changes provide opportunities to explore human–environment interactions, migration, urban development and sustainability. Yet teaching warfare requires sensitivity, particularly when its consequences remain ongoing for millions of people.

The challenge is to make the geographical learning engaging, without trivialising the experiences of those affected. Through geographical enquiry, mapping, problem-solving and collaborative decision-making, students can investigate not simply where conflicts occur, but how they reshape places and communities, thus encouraging curiosity, critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Landscape detectives

Warfare can leave lasting changes on the physical landscape, from preserved trenches and shell craters to damaged vegetation and disturbed soils. The former battlefields of the Western Front, such as those at Beaumont-Hamel in northern France, offer a particularly remarkable example of how warfare can permanently alter the physical landscape, with evidence of conflict still visible more than a century later. Such features raise important geographical questions about changing land use, environmental recovery and the lasting legacy of conflict.

Rather than beginning with an explanation, though, why not introduce your students to a mystery landscape? Present them with an aerial photograph of a former battlefield, without revealing its location, and challenge them to become geographical detectives. What unusual features can they identify? How might these landforms have developed?

Working in pairs, students can annotate the image, propose explanations and compare their findings with historical maps before the location is finally revealed. The enquiry can then move beyond observation – has the landscape truly recovered, or do environmental consequences remain hidden beneath the surface?

> **"The challenge is to make the geographical learning engaging, without trivialising the experiences of those affected"**

This approach develops image interpretation, geographical reasoning and an understanding of environmental change over time, while encouraging students to recognise that the impacts of warfare can endure long after the fighting stops.

Disruptions to urban life

A city is more than a collection of buildings; it's a network of interconnected systems that include transport routes and electricity supplies to schools, hospitals and residential neighbourhoods. When warfare damages civilian infrastructure, the consequences can extend far beyond the immediate area. A destroyed bridge, for example, may prevent residents from accessing essential services, while damage to electricity networks can disrupt water supplies and healthcare.

To explore these connections, introduce students to The City Challenge – a collaborative geographical enquiry that places them in the role of urban recovery planners. Begin with a fictional city map showing residential areas, transport links and essential services. Have the students investigate how the city functions, before providing them with a second map showing damage to its infrastructure. Now comes the challenge – with a limited reconstruction budget, which services should be restored first?

Working in small groups, students must prioritise repairs, justify their decisions and consider the wider consequences. Should they restore electricity before reopening schools? How might repairing a bridge improve



access to healthcare? Introducing new information throughout the activity will encourage the students to reassess their proposals as geographical circumstances change.

One unexpected complication could be that the city's main water treatment facility depends on a damaged electricity substation. Groups that may have initially prioritised restoring water supplies must now reconsider their early decisions. This helps students see how urban infrastructure can't always be repaired in isolation, and that geographical planning involves understanding the connections between services.

For teachers wishing to develop this activity further, The City Challenge could form the basis of a five-lesson scheme of work, progressing from urban mapping and infrastructure damage, to population displacement, reconstruction and a final evidence-based recovery proposal. Rather than simply identifying damaged buildings, students will develop an understanding of urban interdependence, geographical decision-making and the complexities of rebuilding communities.

Mapping displacement

Warfare doesn't just transform landscapes and infrastructure; it also changes where people live. Conflict can force communities to flee their homes, dramatically reshaping population distributions at a local, national or even international scale.

When teaching displacement, it can be tempting to use familiar activities – asking students to imagine themselves as refugees, writing diary entries, deciding what to pack if forced to escape conflict. Although intended to encourage empathy, these approaches risk oversimplifying deeply complex experiences – particularly for students who may have actually experienced displacement themselves. But why stop at just *imagining* such experiences when geography gives us the tools to *investigate* them?

With that in mind, challenge your students to become geographical cartographers. Using age-appropriate displacement data from the UN Refugee Agency, have the students construct proportional flow maps, using different arrow widths to represent population movements. They can investigate geographical patterns, distinguish between refugees and internally displaced people, and explore how borders, accessibility and resources influence migration.

You can then extend the enquiry by asking whether displaced populations always travel far from home, or how changes in population distribution can affect housing, education and healthcare in the receiving communities.

Rather than relying on simulated experiences, this approach develops cartographic skills, geographical reasoning and a more informed understanding of forced migration, while still encouraging students to recognise the human experiences behind the statistics.

When the fighting stops

The geographical consequences of warfare rarely disappear once the fighting ends. Farmland may remain unsafe because of unexploded ordnance. Infrastructure can take years to restore. Displaced communities may face considerable barriers to returning home. Recovery is therefore not simply about rebuilding what was destroyed, but understanding how places, environments and populations have changed.

To bring these ideas together, challenge students with a final geographical question: *Can a place ever truly return to what it was before?* Using evidence gathered from previous enquiries, students could investigate the long-term recovery of a former conflict zone, comparing historical and contemporary maps, satellite imagery and land use patterns. Has its agricultural land returned to production? Have its transport links been restored? Are there areas where the physical landscape still reveals evidence of conflict years after the fact?

Students could present their findings via annotated maps or short geographical reports, evaluating whether environmental recovery, infrastructure reconstruction and repopulation happen at the same pace.

This can provide opportunities to develop evaluative skills, while also recognising that such recovery is rarely straightforward – and that the rebuilding of physical infrastructure won't always restore communities to where they were originally.

Teaching the geographical impacts of warfare requires sensitivity, but this shouldn't mean avoiding the subject altogether. For some students, conflict and displacement may be more than distant events discussed in a classroom. Carefully selected resources, age-appropriate evidence and opportunities for thoughtful discussion will therefore be essential to have on hand.

Places changed

Even so, engaging teaching doesn't require that students simulate traumatic experiences. Through geographical investigation, problem-solving and evidence-based decision-making, students can explore complex issues while developing the skills to rigorously question, interpret and understand the world around them.

Ultimately, warfare isn't simply something that happens 'in a place'; it's a development that fundamentally *changes* that place. Geography lets students investigate what those changes can involve, and identify the lasting connections between landscapes, communities and the people who inhabit them.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Zoë Thornhill is an associate tutor in Higher Education and former secondary geography teacher currently undertaking a Master's in Education, with research interests in ECT experiences and misogyny in education; find her on LinkedIn via **tinyurl.com/ts158-GW1**



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IN THIS ISSUE

+ How one school went about getting its students to read for pleasure
+ Why it's helpful to show an interest in students' skills and knowledge beyond the classroom
+ What is a 'home'? How two artistic responses to that question can inspire your art class...
+ The school aiming to provide its students with an 'irresistible curriculum'
+ Could AI lighten the administrative load of your feedback tasks?
+ Take charge of your classroom in 5 steps

CONTRIBUTORS

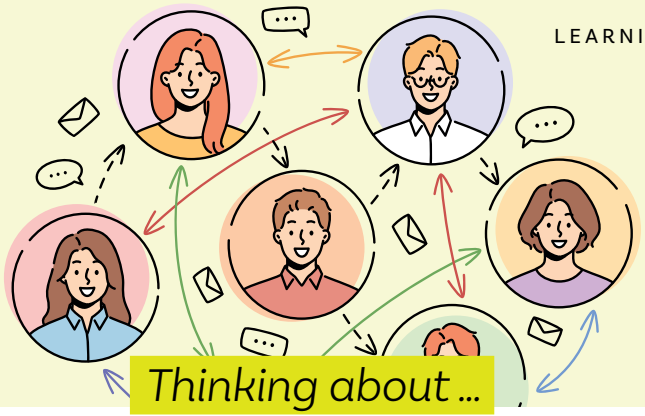
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PE teacher and school achievement leader



Thinking about ...

GROUP CHATS

Here's a question for you – how many group chats are you part of? I'd imagine I'm an outlier in being part of my family chat group and no others – though I'm technically still part of the Barcelona trip staff group chat from July of this year, which was certainly useful for co-ordinating room checks and monitoring the hotel at night. Not that I really contributed all that much...

I first learned about the popularity of group chats as a rugby coach 10 years ago, when I joined a new team and was instantly enrolled into the team's group chat. The players loved chatting at all times of day and night, and would frequently post various funny memes and jokes.

They would also post some obscene rubbish with supporting imagery, so I pretty quickly learned how to change the iOS WhatsApp settings and prevent shared images from being automatically downloaded to my phone and uploaded to my own Cloud-hosted photo albums...

For my work colleagues though – as well as my teacher wife and teacher son – group chats have become a ubiquitous part of the modern workplace. If asked why they're needed, I'll be told of the constant need to share reminders, new ideas, meeting arrangements, details of plans, last-minute adjustments to said plans and more besides.

However, we've also seen the rise of another development within modern teaching – namely the opinions, announcements and utterances of MATs' HR departments, in part because of the direct impact that ill-judged group chat actions and contributions can have. As we've seen for some time now, when people are given the means to electronically share their thoughts and opinions with the wider world, common sense and good judgment often seem to go out the window.

Having told friends that I was writing this article, I've heard multiple stories about group chats going horribly wrong and ending in acrimony, censure and sometimes even dismissal. I've listened to tales of people being deliberately excluded from conversations; critical information being withheld; inappropriate or abusive comments concerning colleagues, parents and students; the emergence of problematic cliques; leadership decisions made on the fly; and the ever-present spectre of 'banter' – my least favourite word in school.

Even now, you'll find colleagues sharing confidential school data, creating 'pile-ons' or saying things that would put them at risk of gross misconduct, in the mistaken belief that they're somehow protected by the chat being 'private'. Yet how often has the wrong person been added to a group, only for them to discover offensive or inappropriate comments written about them? How many screenshots have we seen escape the confines of group chats and cause distress among wider school or trust communities?

I also wonder how often staff – who will have signed a school or trust code of conduct – fail to realise that the content of their group chat contributions can quickly create very real professional problems that end up requiring the services of outside organisations.

If you haven't already, I would urge any active workplace group chat users to get in touch with your relevant professional association, and seek advice on what's deemed to be reasonable and acceptable conduct. You'll often find that there are some very clear guidelines out there for staff to follow – a few of which I suspect might come as an unpleasant surprise...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Daniel Harvey is a science teacher and lead on behaviour, pastoral and school culture at an inner-city academy

FOCUS ON...
FUTURE FEMALE LEADERS



When I asked our wonderful curriculum leader of English for a review of a project she'd recently led, she came back to me with some pupil voice. One child had said, *"It taught me to believe in myself."* Another commented, *"It taught me to never give up on what I want in the future,"* while a third remarked, *"It taught me to be kind to people."*

In a nutshell, the project in question was built around spending curriculum time reading carefully selected, high-quality texts aloud to pupils and then discussing what they'd read, as part of a broader whole-school drive on prioritising reading.

ELIMINATING THE GAPS

There's some hard data around our whole school reading strategy that I'm really proud of. Chronological reading age gaps are being eliminated, thanks to a team of dedicated colleagues delivering impactful interventions to those who need them most. As a result, our current Y11s are on track to deliver what I believe will be certainly amongst the country's most improved outcomes next summer in their GCSE exams and BTEC courses.

We shouldn't lose sight of such measures. We're funded by public money, and if our activity doesn't improve outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, then we need to have a re-think. Our approach at Mercia Northridge is certainly improving outcomes for all pupils.

Reading for pleasure has been a central strand of the strategy. Rates of book borrowing from our fantastically stocked and brilliantly staffed school library have skyrocketed. So how have we brought about this change in attitudes towards volitional reading?

A PROCESS OF REMODELLING

Firstly, we remodelled our library. The stock was reviewed, the displays reconsidered and the space made ultimately more inviting and more accessible. Crucially, alongside some committed colleagues we involved the pupils themselves in the remodelling process. A section of the library was given over to trans-language and dual-language texts, to ensure that reading for pleasure was an inclusive offer.

The process involved in borrowing and returning books was also streamlined to make it as easy as possible. The data on borrowing was then collected and subsequently analysed so that we could organise more targeted interventions among those individuals and groups for whom rates of reading for pleasure remained low.

We then revised the shape of our days. Each day at Mercia Northridge now begins with 30 minutes of guided reading using books selected to act as gateway texts for our library stock. We've additionally created a 30-minute daily enrichment slot, during which pupils are free to visit the lending library. Staff who know the students well are available to support them in their book selections and discuss their reading with them.

IMPROVED LIFE CHANCES

We've sought to create new times and spaces for social reading. Working with pupil volunteers, a sample of texts deemed as being both inclusive and of high interest were selected for ready availability in the school canteen, to allow for reading groups during social times. Staff members have modelled reading during those times in these spaces, while also providing short summaries to help guide text choices and discussion prompts aimed at encouraging reading as a social activity.

I'm really proud of what we've been doing at Mercia Northridge, and the improved life chances we've been able to deliver for the young people we serve. To return to the pupil voice I opened with, it's also been delivering self-belief, perseverance, ambition and kindness.



GARY HAMMONDS IS A DEPUTY HEADTEACHER AT MERCIA NORTHRIDGE SCHOOL IN PARSON CROSS, SHEFFIELD

DO THIS
SHOW AN INTEREST

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

Your students aren't just learners in your lessons – they're also individuals with lives outside the classroom and school, and it's good to sometimes show an interest in those lives.

You don't need to be nosey or ask lots of questions. All you have to do is simply clock snippets of information that come to the surface over time, and then use that information when the opportunity arises. If you know that a student's football team did well at the weekend, for instance, mention the result. If you saw a student in the school play, say something positive about their performance. If you know a student's cat has gone missing, ask if it's been found.

You can also show an interest by drawing on your students' hobbies, skills and knowledge, as most students appreciate getting to be an expert in the classroom (even those who say they don't). Likewise, if a student made an interesting and pertinent observation during the last lesson, refer to it in this one.

These are small things, but they communicate something powerful. They tell the student that they're significant and worthy of your interest. Simply put, we like people who take an interest in us – so take an interest.

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)

35%

of teachers say they now work fewer hours after using AI; 55 report working the same hours, while 4 say they now work more

Source: YouGov survey of 1,033 UK teachers commissioned by Bett

A new national study led by the Anna Freud children's mental health charity has found that one in four Y8 students in England have a probable mental health condition.

The ongoing 'Growing Up in the 2020s' study was commissioned by the DfE, and is being run in partnership with University College London's Centre for Longitudinal Studies and market research firm Ipsos, with the aim of tracking the wellbeing and academic outcomes of around 8,000 state secondary students over five years.

Drawing on data reported by young people and their parents and carers, the researchers concluded that the prevalence of probable mental health issues among 12- to 13-year-olds stands at around 25%. Girls seemed to be affected more than boys (28% compared to 23% respectively), along with students eligible for free school meals (FSM), 36% of whom were affected, compared to 20% of their non-eligible peers.

Other areas of the study seemed to suggest a more positive picture, however, with most young people reporting good relationships with family and friends, generally high levels of life satisfaction, healthy amounts of sleep and even positive experiences of their school.

The study also seems to suggest that a majority of young people see themselves as being resilient, with 71% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the suggestion that they will keep trying when encountering a difficult task.

Young people with SEND provision and FSM students were less likely to report strong feelings of school belonging, participated in fewer enrichment activities and experienced higher levels of bullying.

THE ART FILES... VISIONS OF HOME



Hannah Day explores the connections and contrasts between two artworks sharing similar themes – one older and one contemporary...

Vermeer, 'The Little Street' (1657-58)
Rachel Whiteread, 'House' (1993)

Home life is a rich source of inspiration for students and artists alike. Family situations can be hugely varied, yet common themes are often present.

With Vermeer's 'The Little Street', it's initially the building that feels like the key element, but as you explore the work further, the focus is actually on the people. His use of whitewash frames the daily action, with the darkness of one doorway making for a striking contrast with the surrounding activity.

Another work that engaged with the meanings and complexities of domestic life was Rachel Whiteread's 'House' – an enormous sculpture created by filling the shell of a condemned Victorian-era London dwelling with a mix of plaster and concrete, thus rendering the traces of everyday domestic life in inverted relief.

While the two pieces are dramatically different in style, both explore(d) how lives were lived, and how we ultimately create the places that we call home.

A project based around covering painted canvases and cast objects would be excitingly diverse – even more so if photography were used to help create the project's visual sources. The suburban exterior and interior photography of John R J Taylor, and autobiographical depictions of poverty-stricken households by the artist and film-maker Richard Billingham are great places to start.

Alternatively, you can look to the lithographs of Jim Dine that celebrate the tools found in his family's hardware shop, which could inspire the creation of intriguing prints, rubbings and embossed works – a range of processes that would be helpful when putting together a GCSE art submission.

Studies of interiors, the everyday tasks that make a home, the sentimental items we can't bear to be without – all can serve as starting points for works based on students' domestic lives.





HANNAH DAY IS A TEACHER OF ART, MEDIA AND FILM STUDIES

92%

of teachers believe that a better balance between technology use and traditional teaching techniques could improve student outcomes

Source: 'Educate to Empower' report produced by Epson

Need to know

The House of Lords' Numeracy for Life Committee has put forward a series of recommendations for improving individuals' numeracy skills from early years education to retirement age. Having spoken to a range of witnesses – ranging from teachers and academics, to financial experts and government officials – its findings have been published in a report titled 'Making it Count: Numeracy for Life' (see tinyurl.com/ts158-LL2).

The proposals likely to be of most interest to TS readers include issuing parents and carers of school-age children with guidance on numeracy skills comparable to the literacy and reading advice some settings offer, and funding more EY practitioners to undertake early-years maths leadership courses, including the Maths Champions programme.

The Committee also expressed support for a comprehensive diagnostic maths assessment to be taken at Y8 – echoing an idea previously mooted by the Curriculum and Assessment Review headed up by Professor Becky Francis – and for looking into different ways of embedding numeracy across the broader curriculum.

Finally, the Committee recommends investing in the recruitment of specialist maths teachers, providing staff with training in how to identify and support students with dyscalculia, and evaluating the current use of AI-enabled maths tutoring tools.

WHY SCHOOLS NEED... AN IRRESISTIBLE CURRICULUM



Debates around pupil disengagement tend to focus on attendance, behaviour and wellbeing. Yet children spend most of their school day in lessons, and a pupil who finds those lessons dull is liable to disengage almost as much as the student who chooses not to attend.

If we want young people in school, then we need to start by asking what it is that makes them want to learn.

THE 'KASE' APPROACH

There are some who will argue that schools must choose between academic rigour or engagement, and claim that lessons which engage pupils in unconventional ways must surely lack depth of knowledge. Such views rest on outdated ideas of what a curriculum is for, and are based on low expectations of the children currently studying at our schools.

Because in truth, the pressures placed on pupils' attention are greater now than ever before. If they're to feel that their classes are worthwhile, pupils will need agency, variety and grounded reasons to care about what they're learning.

At Central Region Schools Trust, our curriculum is built around Knowledge, Attributes, Skills and Experiences (KASE). The Knowledge aspect is what drives our subject planning, but we also crucially aim to design lessons that manifest an appetite and thirst for learning. In practice, this means creating areas of study which build on what pupils already care about and engage with the modern world, beyond the restrictive methods of learning designed for previous generations.

Demonstrating the relevance of the subjects being taught is also vital. Our schools' curriculums, beyond what's required by the National Curriculum, are designed with reference to local context, so that children can be inspired by content relevant to their community. In geography lessons, for instance, data and information concerning the local area can be used to support understanding of geographical concepts whilst also helping pupils better understand their place in the region, nationally and in the wider world. Pupils who see their own community in lessons are more likely to feel the school belongs to them.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Belonging is often treated as a pastoral matter, but this feeling is shaped just as much in the classroom, and can play a crucial role in making children feel that their work is contributing towards something external to themselves.

We also build on what pupils already care about. An interest in football, gaming or music can open doors into other subjects through relevant subject knowledge. Whilst we naturally want pupils to succeed academically, we should also be aiming to develop longstanding character attributes in pupils, helping them to develop confidence, resilience and learn about themselves, as well as the world around them.

Experiences beyond the classroom matter just as much, because they provide stimulus for, and models of how knowledge is gained. Our trust strategy commits us to ensuring that pupils can access engaging experiences within and beyond the classroom which enable opportunity, inclusivity, diversity and agency. This approach often works best when combined with context-relevant engagement – from local theatre and gallery visits, to community projects and careers encounters.

Curriculum deserves a central place in the conversation about engagement. Curious pupils take part, pupils who take part make progress, and progress builds confidence. Confident pupils are more likely to attend, aim higher and stay in education. When designed well, a curriculum can be one of the strongest levers a school has for fostering confidence, aspiration and long-term success.



GUY SHEARS IS CEO OF THE CENTRAL REGION SCHOOLS TRUST



On the radar *AI expectations*

Teachers have always known that the final answer doesn't tell the whole story of a student's learning. However, now that almost a quarter of 13- to 18-year-olds use AI to complete their homework (see tinyurl.com/ts158-LL1), it's possible that a polished essay will actually tell you very little about a student's comprehension and learning.

Rather than treat AI as a problem to be policed, though, schools ought to see it as an opportunity to rethink how student learning is designed and assessed. The focus can instead shift to the process – the questions students ask, how their thinking develops and where they might be struggling.

Teachers have always been more interested in whether students can explain how they arrived at a particular conclusion, and in seeing the learning as it's actually happening. AI simply makes that visibility all the more imperative, because it can take the place of the process altogether.

Teachers need to see how students think, which can be enabled with the right kind of flexible technology. By breaking up the learning process with digital tools, feedback can be provided at various points, by both teachers and peers. Teachers can spot misconceptions earlier, extend learning where students are ready to go further, and adapt their teaching to different levels of understanding as they emerge.

AI can have a useful role in learning, but only when it supports, rather than shortcuts the learning objective. If AI now makes it easy for students to find the correct answers, schools can start placing greater emphasis on understanding how students have arrived at those answers.

Zareen Poonen Levien is principal educator at Padlet; for more information, visit padlet.com

TRENDING

Our pick of the recent resources and launches teachers might find useful...

FUTURE FACING

Samsung has launched Solve for Tomorrow – a competition that tasks 11- to 18-year-old students with developing tech ideas that can improve sport, protect the planet or help people stay safe online. Prizes include Samsung tech items for students and their school and CPD for teachers; the deadline for submissions is 18th January 2027.

solvefortomorrowuk.com

ART TALK

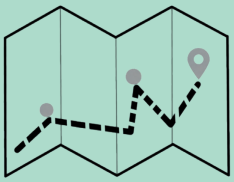
Looking for another podcast to add to your feed? 'Stories of Art' is presented by art critic/journalist Alastair Sooke and art historian James Fox, with each 45- to 60-minute episode delving deep into the personal stories of individual artists and the cultural context of specific art movements.

YouTube / Apple Podcasts / Spotify

5 WAYS TO...

TAKE CHARGE OF THE ROOM

ZEPH BENNETT OFFERS SOME TIPS ON HOW TO ASSERT YOUR AUTHORITY IN THE CLASSROOM



1

PLAN A ROUTE MAP

Get to know the best places from which to stand and observe; provide diagnostic feedback where necessary



2

LIVE MARKING

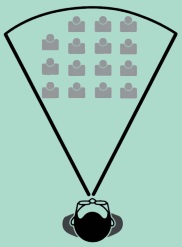
Moving around while students are working, checking for understanding and spotting misconceptions, will further help you maintain control



3

USE A PRESENTATION CLICKER

This will let you move around the room whilst still being able to control the content and pace of the lesson.



4

SCAN THE SPACE

Key to running a classroom is the ability to have your eyes sweep all areas of the room, scanning for off-task activity or students requiring help.



5

STAND UP

Standing whilst issuing instruction will help you to observe the students more clearly, anticipate problems and move to deal with them promptly

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

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DRAMA

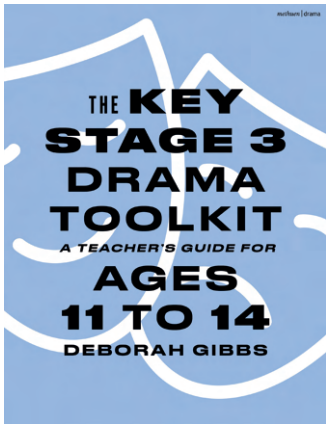
methuen | drama

The Key Stage 3 Drama Toolkit

An impressively structured resource containing many practical exercises well-suited to a full KS3 drama programme

AT A GLANCE

- **A KS3 programme aimed at building students' key drama skills**
- **Elements can be adapted according to teachers' specific skills and interests**
- **Increased challenge with each passing year**
- **Includes a significant range of activities and exercises**
- **Authored by Deborah Gibbs, a seasoned teacher with 35 years' experience working across state, private and international schools**



REVIEWED BY: HANNAH DAY

Methuen's *The Key Stage 3 Drama Toolkit* starts with some helpful suggestions on general lesson management, with areas such as dividing students into groups, developing performance skills and sharing strategies all duly covered. These daily points of classroom management should be particularly useful for ECTs.

The book is then divided into three parts, one for each year group, which are in turn split into four sections – 'Voice', 'Movement', 'Stage Space', and 'Applying Skills'. These each contain a variety of talking games and warm-ups, followed by improvisation suggestions, an original script, a published script and finally some written exercises.

This level of detail is one of the toolkit's key strengths. Once familiarised with how it's structured, teachers should find the toolkit clearly laid out, easy to use and a highly useful reference when putting together their own KS3 drama programme, covering all the skills students will need. Alternatively, it could also serve as a source of inspiring practice for those looking to reinvigorate their existing programme with some fresh ideas.

Take the book's 'Voice' sections, for instance. The very first activity proposes using the taking of the register as a starter activity to boost focus and concentration, with students encouraged to respond to their names in different volumes and tones of voice.

This is characteristic of the book's sections, which prompt the students to connect to a key skill, and where games such as 'Pick an Emotion' (whereby dialogue examples are randomly combined with different emotions to get students experimenting with their voices and body language) help set the stage for the material to follow. A further warm-up exercise, 'Let Me Tell You...' sees students placed in pairs and told to gradually move further apart while still trying to maintain a conversation.

As you'd expect, the Y9 'Voice' activities are more involved and challenging, with a different variant of the earlier 'Register' activity now requiring students to vary the length of the pause between the teacher calling out their name and their response. This exercise – aimed at helping students discern the differences between a beat, short pause, pause, long pause and silence – calls for focus and concentration, turning what was a fun and lively engagement activity for Y7s into a powerful exercise that expects students to be much more considered when speaking *and* when listening.

And all those examples are from just one section. Pore through the others and you'll come away with countless other lesson ideas and jumping-off points.

What I like about this approach is how each year builds naturally on the learning of the year prior. Instead of changing things up completely from one year to the next, students get to revisit familiar terrain with thoughtfully increased challenge, giving them a chance to become comfortable with the subject's requirements while steadily growing in confidence.

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VERDICT

- ✓ Presents a clear guide through the complexities of KS3 drama topics
- ✓ The content is superbly organised
- ✓ Its presentation is visually compelling
- ✓ Fully supportive of teachers' needs
- ✓ Serves as an excellent foundation for GCSE study

PICK UP IF...

... you're looking for a well-structured, appealingly presented toolkit that covers all key KS3 drama skills.

RRP £19.99; for more information, visit www.bloomsbury.com/key-stage-3-drama-toolkit-9781350567696

GEOGRAPHY

Discover Geography Collins

Collins

teach SECONDARY AWARDS 2026 HIGHLY COMMENDED

A well-organised, dynamic collection of books offering a complete programme for KS3 geography study

AT A GLANCE

- **Comprehensive guides for students and teachers**
- **Clearly laid out in years, chapters and sessions**
- **Easy to follow**
- **Visually engaging**
- **Clear lesson rationales and explanations for teachers**



REVIEWED BY: HANNAH DAY

Entries for GCSE geography have been steadily increasing for over 10 years. Much of that growth can be traced back to a rising interest in social geography – the exploration of people, places and natural phenomena, which offers some fascinating opportunities for enquiry.

Collins Discover Geography is a well-organised and easy-to-follow collection covering KS3, with dedicated Student Books, Workbooks and Teacher's Guides for each year group. The Student Books are well laid out, enabling straightforward navigation across topics and concepts with a good sense of flow across the chapters.

Take Student Book 7, for example. Its six chapters effectively each act as half-term programmes, which are then further divided into sub-sections. These sub-sections feature a mix of explanations and illustrations that mesh together in a way that supports deep understanding.

The Workbooks indeed work as advertised, enabling students to work through the information contained within Student Books and express their answers via a layout similar to what they're likely to encounter in their final test papers, thus incorporating some invisible exam prep.

What I like most, however, are the Teacher's Guides. If an educator is to teach well, then they're going to need an appropriately embedded understanding of what it is they're actually teaching, in terms of both content and accuracy.

The chapters in the Teacher's Guides all open with a 'Chapter Intent' area that highlights key areas for teachers to attend to, and potential activities and approaches available to them and their class. This way, teachers get an easy-to-digest, time-saving summary of the skills that the material will be calling on, expected prior knowledge, intended learning outcomes, possible curriculum links, common misconceptions, fieldwork opportunities and local geography opportunities.

I was especially pleased to see the 'misconceptions' section, which should allow teachers to clearly and explicitly lay out the facts that students will need to grasp before commencing their study of the topic in question.

In chapter 3 of the Teacher's Guide, for instance, we're presented with a set of common misconceptions that relate to human migration – an important addition, considering the tenor of the media coverage and public discourse we're currently seeing around that particular issue.

The Teacher's Guides also include scaffolded activity explanations, but that's not to say that there's an overwhelming amount for teachers to get through. The information is concise and clearly laid out, so that it can be read and easily reviewed when time is limited. For those new to teaching, or who may have found themselves teaching geography while primarily specialising in history or RE, this kind of guidance could be priceless.

Teachers need to feel sufficiently supported, and students need the confidence to know that what they're encountering in the classroom will adequately prepare them for the GCSE geography pathway, should they choose to follow it. These resources offer precisely that.

teach SECONDARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Acts as a clear guide through a variety of complex topics
- ✓ Well-organised content
- ✓ Visually compelling presentation
- ✓ Fully supportive of teachers' needs
- ✓ Serves as an excellent foundation for GCSE study

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RRP £12.99 - £100.00; for more information, visit collins.co.uk/DiscoverGeography



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

Can we fix it...?

...yes we can, says **John Lawson**, so long as we recognise that 'it' – students' willingness to learn, in this instance – requires experience, a considered approach, and a determination to never give up...

I rarely watch TV, though there are some programmes that I seldom miss – among them, *The Repair Shop*. That's because I'm a sap for sad stories, but more than that, I'm captivated by the stellar skills of the mavens in the barn.

Steve, Dom, Kirsten, Susie, Will and The Bear Ladies have all worked diligently for many years, and earned the right to be respected as experts able to cleverly conquer complex challenges. Every A-grade teacher I know shares a similar passion for education. They might not have an instant solution for every problem, but they're talented, energetic, resourceful and forensic enough to find one eventually. They're the 'never-give-uppers' who know that serious problems need to be thoughtfully tackled.

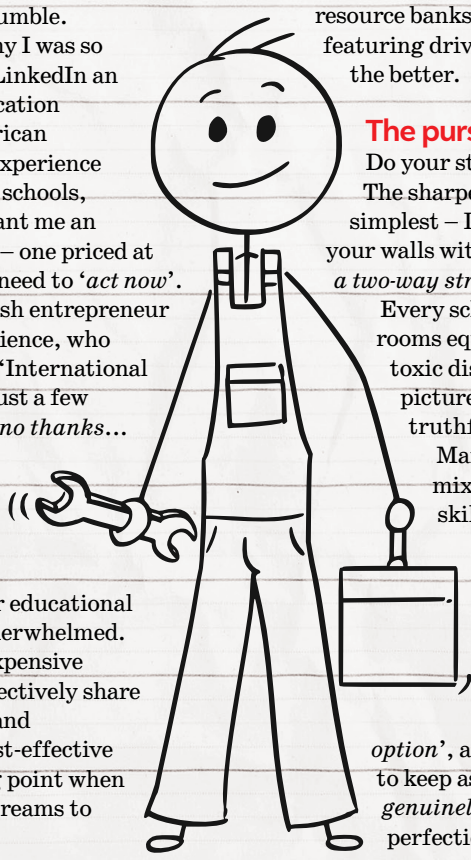
Callow experts

When I'm in need of insightful counsel, I'll consult erudite educators with many years of blood, sweat and tears behind them; visionary principals, like Sam Strickland, Principal Lamb on Facebook and Education Matters CEO, Paul Hazzard, all of whom are astute, honest and humble.

This will hopefully help explain why I was so disconcerted to recently receive via LinkedIn an invitation to become a 'certified education consultant' from a 30-year-old American trainer. Speaking as a teacher with experience of having taught at two private high schools, I'm not sure what qualifies her to grant me an 'Education Consultancy Certificate' – one priced at '*only $3,000*', mind you, though I'd need to '*act now*'.

I've also heard from a young English entrepreneur possessing even less classroom experience, who offered to train and certify me as an 'International academic coach' within the span of just a few months – a snip at just £2,000. Um, *no thanks*...

What expertise are these callow 'experts' selling? They, and others like them, will slickly market themselves via glitzy websites and seemingly impressive social media presences, but when it comes to their educational acuity, I'm always left distinctly underwhelmed. Teachers don't need re-training or expensive certificates to coach teenagers or effectively share their expertise. I regularly do both, and principals listen because I deliver cost-effective results. So here, then, is my starting point when senior leaders bring their damaged dreams to my 'School Repair Shop'....



Pastoral and educational

Is the needle on your tolerance threshold meter (TTM) swinging wildly? It's a common problem, so ensure that everyone understands how swearing at teachers, destruction of school property, persistent disruption of lessons or threats against peers and staff are non-negotiable no-nos.

When a school's TTM is incorrectly calibrated, destructive behaviour will soon become self-replicating – so stop categorising abuse as 'naughtiness'. Once your team consistently addresses the most challenging students and families – because you should always involve parents – you'll soon be able to discern significant improvements. Many so-called 'problem children' are merely following unchecked ringleaders. When we fail to tackle abusive behaviour, we're ultimately damaging students' futures.

Everything we do as teachers should be pastoral and educational. Do your teachers favour restorative discipline over retributive punishment? Because children in detention ought to be exposed to examples of positive behaviour. Build resource banks of engaging articles and TikTok videos featuring driven teenagers fearlessly changing our world for the better.

The pursuit of perfection

Do your students know how to envision future success? The sharpest strategy I ever devised was also the simplest – I just taught teenagers *how* to study. Deck your walls with motivational aphorisms, such as '*Respect is a two-way street*'.

Every school needs inclusion spaces and interview rooms equipped with cameras. Parents should see how toxic disruptive behaviour really is. Videos and pictures can often speak more powerfully and truthfully than reams of words.

Many successful schools now recognise that mixed-ability teaching requires extraordinary skills that many teachers lack. Setting can work wonders in boosting achievement, but there remains considerable uncertainty as to why the mixed-ability approach seems to work well in some schools (especially those in Scandinavia) and less so in others.

Finally, the Repair Shop experts all readily embrace NASA's motto of '*Failure is not an option*', and the same ought to apply to schools. We need to keep asking ourselves one simple question – *are we genuinely improving learning*? We'll never achieve perfection, but we must never cease pursuing it.

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