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teach SECONDARY

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BEHAVIOUR



PAUL DIX

"Strict is good – being nasty with it is not"

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lesson observations

How teacher
flaws can
become
strengths

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FROM THE EDITOR

“Welcome...



At last, finally, there it was. During the Autumn Budget speech, the announcement from Rachel Reeves of *more money*. Core schools budget up by £2.3 billion. £300 million more for further education. A £1 billion uplift in funding for SEND provision (though it would later emerge that this would be coming out of that same £2.3 billion). And perhaps most emblematic of all, £6.7 billion of capital investment

into the DfE, plus an additional £2.1 billion earmarked for school maintenance improvements.

Memories of the Building Schools for the Future investment programme during the Blair/Brown years are evidently still fresh in the minds of today's Labour Ministers. Whether they'll manage to leave a similar legacy remains to be seen – but at the very least, they can now point to a sharp contrast between their policy ambitions and the response last year of Rishi Sunak's administration when the appalling optics of the RAAC crisis in school buildings generated widespread public condemnation.

The next big indication of how far the DfE has travelled will be the recommendations of Professor Becky Francis' wide-ranging curriculum and assessment review, due in 2025. It's still far too early to say whether they'll pave the way for a dramatic overhaul of current arrangements comparable to Michael Gove's education reforms – but would the wider profession actually welcome that if they do?

Given what appears to be an increasingly fragmented party political landscape, not to mention the Tories' lurch in electoral fortunes between 2019 and 2024, it's not unthinkable that the pendulum could swing back the other way come 2029 – or even sooner, as the case may be.

Lest we forget, one of the core foundations of Finland's widely admired education system is how the country's Ministry of Education and Culture has benefited from a decades-long consensus between parties on how it should be run and what its priorities ought to be. The result? Long-term stability, consistency, and the conditions needed for new ideas and proposals to be carefully implemented, analysed and evidenced over time.

Mind you, writing these words in the immediate aftermath of Donald Trump's decisive victory in the US general election, we might soon get to see what happens when an advanced democracy decides to do away with federal oversight of education altogether. It's certainly shaping up to be an interesting latter half of the decade, right enough...

Enjoy the issue,

Callum Fauser
callum.fauser@theteachco.com

On board this issue:



Nikki Cunningham-Smith is an assistant headteacher



Gordon Cairns is an English and forest school teacher



Alice Guile is a secondary school art teacher



Paul Dix is a children's behaviour expert



Rebecca Leek is a primary and secondary teacher, SENCo, headteacher and MAT CEO



Colin Foster is a Reader in Mathematics Education at Loughborough University

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NP Schools

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There will always be some parts of our practice and personalities that are weaker than others, reasons Colin Foster – but what if we could turn them to our advantage?

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No student should have to put up with endlessly explaining their needs and requirements to teachers in lesson after lesson, reasons Rebecca Leek – but with a pupil passport, they won't have to...

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The 5-step guide to being a great teacher mentor; the trick to embedding classroom rules; and why, with the right mindset in place, students' outcomes can extend far beyond what you could ever imagine

**teach
SECONDARY**

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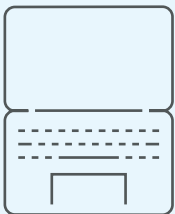
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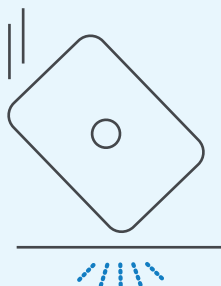


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The newsletter

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

The UNINFORMED teacher's guide to...



LUNCHLY

Well, it would seem YouTube's most indefatigable content/brand creators are at it again. Not content with turning supermarket fizzy pop aisles into scenes from *Assault on Precinct 13* last year with the launch of their Prime – sorry, PRIME – energy drink, KSI and Logan Paul now have designs upon da yooof's midday meals. With YouTube's reputed king of video content himself, MrBeast, along for the ride.

Lunchly is 'Your new favourite midday mashup', apparently. More specifically, it's a boxed 'savory + confectionary + drink' lunch package, available in three variants that sound like threats – Turkey Stack 'Ems, "The Pizza" (quote marks theirs) and Fiesta Nachos – each containing a bottle of PRIME (obvs). If that sounds very similar to the Dairy Lea Lunch-Ables kits available at your local Asda, you'd be right. Lunchly kits are pitched as being a healthier alternative, and while they do contain real, as opposed to processed cheese, nutrition experts have questioned those claims, highlighting the kits' overall sodium and calorie counts.

Complicating matters further are YouTube response videos showing freshly opened kits containing mouldy cheese slices, as well as the troubling allegations of murky goings-on within MrBeast's extensive media operation. If you're still keen to give Lunchly a try, it's yet to see an official launch in the UK, but you can snag a box for between £6 and £7 from a specialist importer of American food products. Bon appetit!

DO SAY
"Lunchtime fuel, bro"

DON'T SAY

"Wagon Wheel, anyone?"



BEAT THE BUDGET



What's on offer?

A lesson plan, assembly presentation, letter for parents, posters and flyers supporting the Don't Be Fooled campaign, aimed at raising awareness of the risks involved in becoming a money mule.



sums of money into their bank account which they then transfer to a different account, while keeping some of the funds for themselves. These Money Mules Awareness resources aim to highlight how young people are increasingly being targeted for recruitment by criminal gangs, and what the consequences of being a money mule can be.

What are we talking about?

Money Mules Awareness: Don't Be Fooled

Who is it for?

Y5-6 and Y7-9 learners, with separate resources available for both age groups

How might teachers use the resources?

Money mules are recruited to help launder the financial proceeds of crimes, by receiving

Where is it available?

tiny.cc/ts138-NL1

Think of a number...

25%

of secondary school pupils in 2023 had tried vaping at least once

13%

of secondary school pupils in 2023 had taken illegal drugs at least once (compared to 18% in 2021)

Source: NHS England Digital

8%

of 15-year-olds in OECD countries stated in 2022 that they had gone without food for at least one day a week over the previous month, owing to their household's income

Source: OECD 'How's Life? 2024' report

347

cybersecurity incidents were reported within the education and childcare sector in 2023 – a 55% increase compared to 2022

Source: Information Commissioner's Office

ONE FOR THE WALL

"Learning does not consist only of knowing what we must or we can do, but also of knowing what we could do and perhaps should not do"

Umberto Eco

WHAT THEY SAID

"Our state schools need teachers more than private schools need embossed stationery"

X post by Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson dated 05/10/24, in reference to the government's decision to impose VAT on private school fees



Balancing the books

Reductions in pupil numbers, plus a recent change in government to one less committed to the drive towards academisation, have resulted in MATs facing a very different political and financial landscape over the coming years. Thanks to a new report produced by IMP Software, drawing on budget forecasts from over 260 MATs for the 2024/25 and 2026/27 financial years, we can now get a sense of the numbers involved.

The headline stat is that 37% of MATs are projected to be holding revenue reserves of less than 5% within the next three years – less than enough to indicate financial vulnerability in the eyes of The Education and Skills Funding Agency. MATs in the survey primarily made up of primaries expect to see a decline in pupil numbers of almost 2% by 2026/27 – which, combined with a forecasted 17% rise in staffing costs over the next three years, has resulted in primary MATs predicting a near 5% cutback in teacher numbers and 6% reduction in TAs.

The outlook is slightly less bleak for majority secondary MATs, which are currently forecasting a 1% reduction in teacher numbers and a near 2% contraction in TA numbers.

According to Leora Cruddas CBE, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, which supported the report's publication, "We know the funding landscape is challenging and balancing the books is a never-ending task, but this report equips us for the first time with a trust-specific view of the sector, the scale of the challenge, and how together we can tackle it head on."

SAVE THE DATE

SPEECHES AND CORRESPONDENCE

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



THE SPEECH:

Chancellor delivers Autumn Budget speech

WHO? Rachel Reeves, Chancellor of the Exchequer

WHERE? House of Commons

WHEN? 30th October 2024

"I am today tripling investment in breakfast clubs to fund them in thousands of schools. I am increasing the core schools budget by £2.3bn next year, to support our pledge to hire thousands more teachers into key subjects, so that our young people can develop the skills that they need for the future.

This government is committed to reforming special educational needs provision, to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable children and ensure the system is financially sustainable. To support that work, I am today providing a £1bn uplift in funding – a 6% real terms increase from this year.

Schools' roofs are crumbling, and millions of children are facing the very same backdrop as I did. I will be the Chancellor that changes that. So today, I am providing £6.7bn of capital investment to the Department for Education next year – a 19% real-terms increase on this year. That includes £1.4bn to rebuild over 500 schools in the greatest need, including St Helen's Primary School in Hartlepool, Mercia Academy in Derby and so many more across our country.

And we will provide a further £2.1bn to improve school maintenance, £300m more than this year, ensuring that all our children can learn somewhere safe – including dealing with RAAC-affected schools in the constituencies of my Honourable Friends, the members for Watford [Matt Turmaine], Stourbridge [Cat Eccles], Hyndburn [Sarah Smith] and beyond.

Alongside investment in new teachers and funding for thousands of new breakfast clubs, this government is giving our children and young people the opportunities that they deserve."

THE RESPONSE:

NASUWT welcomes education funding announcements

NASUWT
The Teachers' Union

FROM? Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary of the NASUWT

REGARDING? The government's Autumn 2024 Budget Announcement

WHEN? 30th October 2024

"We welcome the government's commitments to education and public services set out in the Budget today, which marks a step change in approach by the new government. The Chancellor has had to make some tough choices in the context of the acute pressure on public finances, but it is clear that the government has chosen to invest in our children's future and our education system as a priority."

20 NOVEMBER 2024 Schools & Academies Show | 21 NOVEMBER 2024 5th Annual Dyslexia Conference Show | 22-24 JANUARY 2025 Bett

20 NOVEMBER 2024

Schools & Academies Show
NEC Birmingham
schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk

Back for another stint at the NEC is this fixture of the education events calendar, offering lots in the way of knowledge-sharing, advice sessions and inspiring keynotes. This year's event will be sharing exhibition space on the day with both the EdTech Summit and the Independent Schools Conference, making for more networking opportunities than ever before.

21 NOVEMBER 2024

5th Annual Dyslexia Conference
Holiday Inn Liverpool – City Centre
positivedyslexia.co.uk/events

Individuals with dyslexia, parents and education professionals will find plenty of insights, advice and ideas at this in-person event. Organised by the dyslexia awareness organisation Positive Dyslexia, the day will see a series of expert speakers address matters relating to dyslexia definitions, spelling strategies and the impact of targeted interventions carried out by specialists versus non-specialists.

22-24 JANUARY 2025

Bett
London ExCeL
uk.bettshow.com

January will once again see this long-running stalwart of the education show circuit set up shop in ExCeL London for three days of keynotes, workshops, meetings and encounters with cutting-edge edtech around the event's extensive exhibition space. With this year marking Bett's 40th anniversary, visitors can expect an even more positive and celebratory air than usual.

bett

● A Hyve Event

ExCeL London
22 - 24 January 2025



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Take part in peer-led discussions to inspire change and spark new ideas at Bett 2025. Launched in 2024, we hosted over 130 roundtables between 1,000 educators from 739 institutions across 78 countries.

bett | C^onnect

● A Hyve Event

Want to discover the right solutions for your learners in a fraction of the time? Using data and technology we make critical connections between education decision makers and solution providers, taking the 'work' out of networking.

bett |



● A Hyve Event

Due to popular demand, Tech User Labs is back and bigger than ever! With free sessions at Bett 2025, you'll learn how to get the most out of your current tech and explore emerging innovations within education - there's no CPD opportunity quite like it!

**Tickets for Bett UK
2025 are now LIVE!**
FREE for educators!



All content sessions
at Bett UK are CPD
accredited

Get Into Film



Q&A - FIONA EVANS

Fiona joined Into Film – the leading charity for film in education and the community – as Chief Executive in April 2024, having previously worked for charities including the National Literacy Trust, and in education for 20 years before that

Beyond the access to feature films and supporting resources, what else does Into Film do that educators may be less familiar with?

We want to ensure that young people can see a space for themselves in the screen industries, wherever they are in the UK and whatever their background. Our educator careers hub helps teachers and careers leaders demystify careers in screen industries, and uncover the vast range of roles – not just creative – that cut across subjects, interests and skillsets. We have an array of lessons, assemblies, video clips, podcasts and other resources teachers can use to connect screen careers with various curriculum subjects.

Can you tell us more about Into Film's 'Every Child A Filmmaker' programme?

The programme gives young people (especially those from underserved communities) the chance to tell their story through film. Participants work with industry professionals to develop core skills in filmmaking and storytelling, increasing their creativity and confidence in their own voice. Through hands-on practical experience, participants develop their interpersonal skills and broader career awareness.

The annual Into Film festival takes place this month – how can schools join in with what's going on?

The Into Film Festival takes place between 8th and 29th November across the UK, and will encompass 2000 free screenings and 60 other events. One of my highlights so far has been the beautiful animated film, *Kensuke's Kingdom*, based on Michael Morpurgo's beloved children's novel.

For more information, visit intofilm.org



Retweets

Who's been saying what on X this month?

Tom Starkey @tstarkey1212

Was I the only English teacher who didn't really care if kids loved reading as long as they could, y'know, read?

Teacher's Manual @UnofficialOA

I am secondary, have been for nearly 20yrs. Lack of respect (by the public, by politicians, by some pupils) is always a concern but it's not the reason why people leave teaching. I'll take an insult over a high workload any day of the week!

Follow us via @teachsecondary – and let us know what you're thinking

TEACHER TALES

True stories from the education chalkface

I'll get my coat...

While patrolling the school's 'out of bounds' area, as I did at most morning break times, I encountered a young female and asked her why she was there, and why she was wearing a plain black jumper, rather than one emblazoned with the school logo. Her reply? "Oh, I'm sorry – I didn't think that those rules applied to supply teachers..."

Holding and folding

Before a football PE lesson, I asked for all personal valuables to be handed in for safekeeping.

One 14-year-old boy, however, was extremely reluctant to hand his over. (I knew

that once a month this pupil would head to a local market after school, but not that he would always be carrying a large amount of cash on him). Despite repeated requests he steadfastly refused, saying he had a 'safe place' for them.

During the ensuing game, this 'safe place' was revealed to be his partially laced and bulging boot, after it flew off and caused loose £10 and £20 notes to flutter around the pitch. Which promptly compelled the rest of the players to pick up the pace a bit...

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

A FEW MINUTES OF DESIGN

Look at the information on the card below. How could it be understood at a glance?

Using pictures, symbols, shapes, lines and/or colours, as well as words or numbers – or instead of them – make the information clear and quick to understand.

#32 FINISHING WELL

A Few Minutes of Design PICTURE THIS

The average teenager has been said to spend **5 hours 23 minutes** a day using a digital device, engaged in these activities:

Watching online videos: 35 mins.	Browsing websites: 36 mins.
Watching TV: 22 mins.	Using social media: 71 mins.
Reading: 5 mins.	Video-chatting: 13 mins.
Listening to music: 64 mins.	Writing: 4 mins.
Playing games: 44 mins.	Other: 23 mins.

[MATHS PROBLEM]

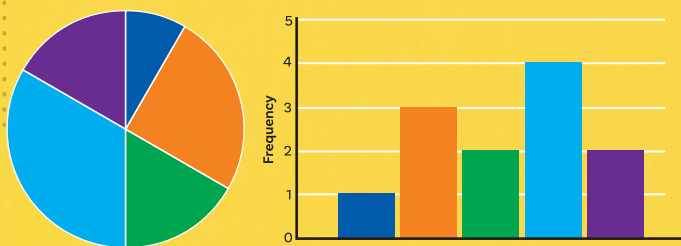
BAR CHARTS VERSUS PIE CHARTS

Students often struggle to compare the benefits offered by different types of statistical charts, says **Colin Foster**

In this lesson, students explore the advantages and disadvantages of bar charts and pie charts.

THE DIFFICULTY

Five different colours are available for painting a youth centre. Each child in the youth centre chooses their preferred colour. These two charts both show the same data about their choices.



Which chart do you prefer? Why?

This question is just to get students thinking about their personal preferences and what they might depend on.

THE SOLUTION

Try using the two charts to answer these questions.

Which chart do you find easier to use for each question? Why?

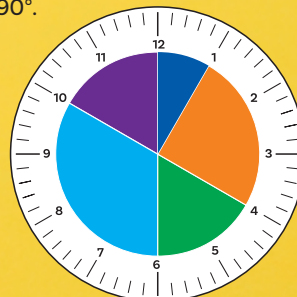
1. Which was the most popular colour?
2. How many children altogether were in the youth centre?
3. Which colour was **three times** as popular as another colour?
4. Which colour did **a quarter** of the children choose?
5. Did **more than half** of the children choose **some kind** of blue?
6. How many **more** children chose orange than dark blue?

Here are answers and some comments.

	Answer	Comments
1	Light blue	Easy to see from either chart, but maybe easier from the bar chart.
2	12	Need the bar chart.
3	Orange	Easier to be sure from the bar chart.
4	Orange	Easier to see (rather than calculate) the fraction from the 90° sector in the pie chart.
5	No	Easier to see in the pie chart.
6	2	Need the bar chart.

If you want to see the exact frequencies, or differences in frequencies, then the scale on the bar chart is necessary. Most people find the areas of rectangles (on a bar chart) easier to compare visually than the areas of sectors of a circle (on a pie chart).

If you want to see proportions, then the pie chart may be easier, especially if the total frequency (as here) is a multiple of 12. Imagining a clockface around the pie chart can often make it easier to draw conclusions without needing to use an angle measurer. The corner of a piece of paper can be useful for comparing with 90°.



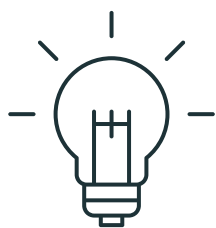
Checking for understanding

Make up some data like these and represent them in both a bar chart and a pie chart. Invent 3 questions that are easier to answer using the bar chart, and 3 questions that are easier to answer using the pie chart. See if your partner agrees.



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

THE NEXT BIG THING



Conservation education

Unpack this important topic with Chester Zoo's Conservation Education and Engagement Team

[THE DISCUSSION]

SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL

Palm oil is one of the most widely used vegetable oils today, found in 50% of products on supermarket shelves. Lessons on sustainable palm oil help students become more informed consumers, while the debate around its production fosters critical thinking, allowing pupils to explore complex issues. Here are some suggestions for discussing sustainable palm oil with students.



ENGLISH – WRITTEN ADVOCACY

Challenge students to champion sustainable palm oil, and to take an active interest in its supply chain. Students can carry out their own research and write persuasive letters to interested parties or stakeholders highlighting the benefits of sustainable palm oil. Take land efficiency, for example – palm oil supplies 35% of the world's vegetable oil, from just 10% of the global land dedicated to oil crops.

HISTORY – PALM OIL'S PAST

Students can look back at history, through the advent and impacts of global trade and increasing living standards, to understand the growth in demand for palm oil, and thus the importance of sustainable palm oil.

SCIENCE – ECOSYSTEMS AND BIODIVERSITY

Using Google Maps, students can track urban encroachment across rainforests around the world. This can tie into their studies of human geography, through exploring the social reasons for population expansion within certain areas.

GEOGRAPHY – MAPPING THE IMPACT OF PALM OIL

Students can learn about the geographical distribution of palm oil production, and its social and economic impacts on local communities.

DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY – BUILDING AND DESIGNING FOR CHANGE

Challenge students with projects promoting sustainable practices! They could create brochures, or models

showcasing the benefits of RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil)-certified palm oil, which reduces deforestation and protects biodiversity.

PE – EXPLORING ECOSYSTEMS

Combine physical activity with environmental education by organising a local nature walk alongside older residents or elderly relatives, noting changes in land use, bird populations and technology over time. Consider how adverse impacts could be addressed. For example, research by Chester Zoo shows sustainable palm oil plantations can coexist with rich biodiversity, if managed correctly.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Students can use digital tools to create animated videos or social media content explaining the journey of sustainable palm oil, from farm to product – or else help to communicate some of the themes they're exploring through their other studies.

Contact:
chesterzoo.org/schools

Ferrero, a leader in sustainable palm oil, is proud to support Chester Zoo's education programme. The company was ranked second in the 2024 WWF Palm Oil Buyers Scorecard (tinyurl.com/tp-BuyersCard).

DISCOVER MORE

Dive deeper with Chester Zoo's resources (chesterzoo.org/schools), where you'll find complete lesson plans (for Years 3–6 and KS3) on sustainable palm oil and inspiration for long-term school planning. You can also download the PalmOil Scan App (tinyurl.com/tp-POApp) developed by Chester Zoo and partners, to better understand which products use sustainable palm oil. Let's embark on this journey of discovery together, making a difference one lesson – and one choice – at a time.

Unintended CONSEQUENCES

Matilda Gosling looks at whether universal mental health interventions in schools may be inadvertently contributing to the very problem they're trying to solve...

A fifth of children between the ages of 8 and 16 have a probable mental disorder, according to data from NHS England (see [tiny.cc/ts138-TP1](https://tinyurl.com/ts138-TP1)) – a proportion that's grown from a sixth since 2017.

Some popular theories that attempt to explain this deterioration include social media use, climate change anxiety, COVID-19 and our expanding definitions of poor mental health, which seem to increasingly capture normal human worry and sadness within them.

These statistics have put concerned adults and institutions on high alert. Mental health fluency is increasing among teenagers, who are taking in the messaging that's being filtered to them through social media, and from teachers and health professionals.

But is this awareness of mental health conditions, and the resulting propensity to think about them at length, actually part of the problem? There's a risk here of making teenagers feel vulnerable, which could in turn erode their ability to cope with the problems everyday life throws at them.

Too much stress?

An NHS-endorsed resource for teachers – billed as a 'stress quiz' aimed at 14- to 18-year-olds (see [tiny.cc/ts138-TP2](https://tinyurl.com/ts138-TP2)) – asks those completing it, 'Is there too much stress in your life?' Students are asked about the extent to which various

statements apply to them, some of which concern quite trivial matters – whether they find it hard to calm down after something has upset them, for example, or how impatient they get when waiting at traffic lights.

Most of the questions posed are arguably core parts of the human experience, especially during high-stakes exam periods. Those attaining high scores in the quiz are subsequently referred on to sources of external support, thus likely compounding these

actually got *worse*, compared to those in the control arm of the study (see tinyurl.com/ts138-TP4).

A separate mindfulness-based intervention was meanwhile found to prompt higher levels of depression and depressed feelings in early adolescents who took part, compared with those who did not.

Professor Willem Kuyken was the lead researcher on a different trial examining school-based mindfulness (see tinyurl.com/ts138-TP5), which ultimately

unforeseen, adverse consequences are far more likely.

For many, it seems counter-intuitive that universal mental health programmes could be linked to worsened student mental health outcomes. This makes it challenging to filter findings down to schools. Those unfamiliar with the research are distracted by easy messages around wanting to make students more aware of their mental health, facilitate early interventions and reduce stigma.

Beyond fostering feelings of vulnerability, why else might we be seeing these sometimes negative effects? Doctors Lucy Foulkes and Jack Andrews, both from the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Oxford, have advanced a theory they've termed the 'prevalence inflation hypothesis' (see tinyurl.com/ts138-TP6). According to them, mental health awareness-raising efforts may be linked to teenagers recognising and over-interpreting symptoms, which can then lead to higher incidence of mental health problems.

A hypothetical example teenager – let's call her Emma – might see, in class, a checklist of anxiety symptoms. She recognises some items from the list. Yes, she *does* sometimes feel irritable, restless and tired, and finds it hard to concentrate at times.

These feelings are normal, but Emma doesn't know

“Students learn better when they have good mental health, but teachers are not trained psychotherapists”

students' belief that there's something wrong with them.

There's increasing evidence too that universal mental health interventions in schools – those targeted at all students, not just those previously diagnosed with poor mental health – may sometimes create more problems than they solve.

Some of these intervention have indeed shown positive outcomes (see tinyurl.com/ts138-TP3), albeit more often those delivered by mental health professionals, rather than teachers. Others, however, have not. A trial of dialectical behaviour therapy (a form of talking therapy) previously found that the mental health of students involved in the intervention

showed no significant positive or negative results, saying of the findings, “*Enthusiasm was ahead of the evidence.*” His belief is that the complexities of mental health research mean that we need to involve multidisciplinary teams, with different skills sets, if we're to solve what is a difficult set of problems.

Adverse consequences

It's not a stretch to argue that schools running their own mental health programmes, or implementing off-the-peg programmes developed by external providers, are going to miss that important element of multidisciplinary expertise – without which,

this. She instead worries that she might have anxiety, and resolves to keep an eye out for other listed symptoms. This makes her ruminate over her mental health, which in turn leads to her feeling down. It also stops her spending so much time on those things that are actually good for her wellbeing – connecting with friends, sleeping well, playing sport – as she’s increasingly looking inwards, not outwards. Her mental health starts to get worse. Emma now has diagnosable levels of anxiety.

Mixed evidence

The government has committed to placing a mental health professional in every secondary school. “*Early access to care, support and ongoing treatment is incredibly important,*” said the then Shadow Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson, ahead of the summer’s General Election. “*That’s why Labour would make sure mental health support is [offered] directly within our schools.*”

For some teenagers – those already struggling with anxiety or depression, and who require professional support to alleviate their symptoms – this may be a helpful move.

But there are two important questions that need answering. Do all schools have enough pupils with serious mental health issues to require in-school provision? And, more importantly, does placing even more attention on mental health in schools risk making those teenagers *who are currently fine* focus

their attention inwards and start to over-interpret their ‘symptoms’?

Some possible routes through the mental health quagmire include co-designing interventions with students and targeting them appropriately. There’s some evidence to show that interventions are less likely to cause harm when they’re targeted at older adolescents and adults. We could also ensure that mental health programmes are delivered by trained professionals, and not teachers.

Perhaps, though, we need to ask a more fundamental question. Should busy, resource-strapped schools be trying to run mental health interventions, for which evidence is – at best – mixed? Or should they focus on teaching?

Rolling the dice

Leadership teams face a dilemma. Students learn better when they have good mental health, but teachers are not trained psychotherapists – and as we’ve seen, some programmes may even cause

more harm than good. We don’t yet have enough information to know in advance which those are, and the human mind is exceptionally complex.

This means that any school running a universal mental health intervention will effectively be rolling the dice with its students’ wellbeing.

Instead, schools may be better off focusing on what they do well, much of which we know can play an important role in propping up students’ wellbeing. Students have better outcomes when they feel connected to their schools; when they experience a positive classroom climate (through high quality interactions with teachers, for example, routines and consistently applied rules), and when their schools are able to minimise physical aggression and bullying (see tinyurl.com/ts138-TP7).

Focusing on those areas would also free up counselling and support services for those with serious pre-existing mental health problems. Diluting access to such services for *all* students risks limiting their availability to those who really need them.

School leaders should familiarise themselves with the evidence. And so should the Education Secretary.

IN BRIEF

► WHAT’S THE ISSUE?

Genuine concern over widely publicised declines in youth mental health have prompted schools to offer their own in-house or externally sourced mental health checks and interventions.

► WHAT’S BEING SAID?

The government has publicly committed to placing mental health professionals in every school, yet a number of studies seem to suggest that the kind of interventions provided within schools can be ineffective, or even counter-productive.

► WHAT’S REALLY HAPPENING?

School-based mental health provision has been effective in some cases, but a general lack of multi-disciplinary expertise, combined with social media messaging, can lead to instances of self-misdiagnosis among students.

► THE TAKEAWAY

Schools are already engaged in work that can significantly contribute in positive ways to students’ levels of health and wellbeing (through building camaraderie and establishing boundaries, for example), with existing resources perhaps likely to do more good if directed towards those ends.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matilda Gosling is a social researcher and author; her book, *Teenagers: The Evidence Base* is available for pre-order (£16.99, Swift Press, published January 2025)



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Key Points

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1 FLEXIBILITY One key challenge for schools running internal AP is embedding the tailored support their students need within their existing schedules. Academy21 offers a unique environment where students benefit from a comprehensive and rigorous curriculum and access to tailored support, all online. Additionally, Academy21 provision is adaptable to existing timetables. Students can access the support they need – be it one-to-one mentoring, wellbeing workshops or additional lessons – without disrupting their day-to-day lives. Because our live, adaptive lessons are fully online, all students need is a laptop and internet access. The set up for schools is seamless, and requires no upfront commitment.

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3 TARGETED INTERVENTIONS Many of the students schools place in internal AP will have complex needs that can't be addressed through traditional classroom teaching. As the leading online alternative provision,



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Key Points

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For more details of how Academy21 can support your internal AP strategy, request a free consultation or visit our website



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

Pay a visit to your local supermarket and you may come across a few items with a French name. Starting with dairy, 'fromage frais' literally means 'fresh cheese', while 'crème fraîche' features the feminine form of the same adjective. 'Crème de la crème', which is used to describe an elite group, is based on the same word. Ironically, in haute cuisine circles, Michelin-starred chefs may substitute the term 'custard' for the more chic appellation 'an Anglaise' – which is short for 'crème anglaise', the French for custard. When French words are adopted in English they can take on a more specific meaning. In French, 'gâteau' and 'bonbon' are both generic terms.



TEACHING TIP: WORD VARIATIONS

According to the American writer, George Saunders, writing requires "Thousands of tiny adjustments, hundreds of drafts." The process of redrafting does indeed make demands of both syntactic flexibility and lexical wealth.



There's one particular activity that's beneficial for both. Ask pupils to draw a four-column table with the following headings: 'noun', 'verb', 'adjective' and 'adverb'. The goal then is to fill each column with one or more entries starting with a particular word. For instance, starting with the noun 'construction', students can enter 'construct', 'constructive', 'constructively' and so on.

There will be many possible variations for them to choose from, which could entail synonyms, antonyms and alternative affixes (deconstruct / reconstruct). Depending on the choice of word, manoeuvring across columns may require a change of lexical root. The noun 'hand', for instance, may trigger the adjective 'handy' but also 'manual'. The same goes for 'back' (N), from which comes 'dorsal' (Adj), 'beautiful' (Adj) / 'embellish' (V), 'easy' (Adj) / 'facilitate' (V), etc. This can be a great way of exploring word depth, morphology, semantic fields and grammar.



LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

What is grammar? Perhaps we should ask, what is it not?

Many see grammar as an arcane discipline, the preserve of privately educated people well-versed in the classics. If you're not among that group, however, I have good news – you're already an expert in English grammar. In fact, virtually every native speaker will be. People assume grammar rules concern recondite terminologies, but they conflate *prescriptive grammar* and *descriptive grammar*. 'Descriptive' is the term used by linguists when observing how people use language, and in this sense, as Steven Pinker puts it, "*The lunatics are running the asylum!*" There are some set rules, though. James Forsyth has observed that adjectives before nouns follow a strict sequence: opinion, size, age, shape, colour, origin, material, purpose.

There are some famous infractions of this rule – 'big, bad wolf' – but these usually adhere to other rules (of a phonological nature, in that particular case). Grammar rules go beyond standard English. 'Gonna', for example, may be short for 'going to', but no fluent English speaker would ever say 'He's gonna the cinema'. Linguists of the Chomskian school argue we're genetically programmed to internalise grammatical structures, acquiring most grammar orally and naturally, long before formal schooling.

SAME ROOT, DIFFERENT WORDS



A **theologian** studies religion(s); a **theocracy** is a form of government where a deity is the supreme ruler



An **atheist** does not believe in any god



The **Pantheon** was a building dedicated to 'all the gods' in the **polytheistic** Roman era

The limits OF LOOKING

Are observations an effective tool for teacher development?
That can depend who's doing the observing and why, say

Professor Geoff Baker and Craig Lomas...

Observation has played a contested, but central role in teaching and learning for many years, with commentators alternately highlighting its promise as a tool for professional development, and the dangers it poses as a scheme for ranking and assessing practitioners.

Recent years have seen some shifts in the use of classroom observation, influenced by wider organisational and political factors within education. Whilst the use of classroom observation is starting to evolve into what many would consider a more developmental use of the process, there are still inconsistencies.

A crucial decision that must be made by school leaders before committing to specific methods is establishing the purpose of classroom observation. Are they to be isolated events for the purpose of policing and measuring performance, based on defined criteria? Or should classroom observation form part of a larger process aimed at facilitating professional dialogue and development?

Some recent work – most notably that by Professor Matt O'Leary – has argued that lesson observations can't be both. Here, we want to look at the use and misuse of classroom observation, by offering five evidence-based recommendations for ensuring observations can be

effective in promoting teacher development.

1. Divorce observations from assessment

Perhaps the most contested aspect of classroom observation surrounds graded lesson observations. Some argue that there's value in providing graded judgements for isolated lessons, but the evidence and arguments against carry significantly more weight.

Hierarchical ranking systems hold no real value, except to those wanting a measure of teacher performance. However, this

inherently negative, the competition this brings about can produce a 'survival of the fittest' mentality that increasingly isolates teachers – something that's hardly conducive to a learning organisation.

judgement to an action, which can then affect the dialogue that follows. It's important to ensure that training is conducted on how to collect evidence during an observation in a non-judgemental manner. It might take time to unlearn years of habitual behaviour, but it's an important step in ensuring the process is meaningful.

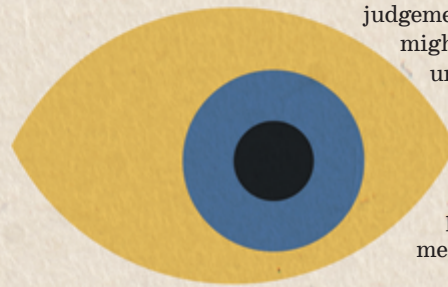
“Observations with judgements attached tend to stifle creativity and risk-taking”

approach is flawed for numerous reasons, which can be seen in Ofsted's decision to move away from grading individual lessons during inspections. Judgements are a subjective measure, and as such, their reliability and validity can be questioned. Even with a specific framework with which to attribute these judgements, the consistency of use and application of these frameworks is, again, subjective.

Graded observations can also impact upon a school's culture, by generating competition. Whilst not

Furthermore, observations with judgements attached tend to stifle creativity and risk-taking in the classroom, thus limiting the evolution of teacher practice. For these reasons, grading observations can act as a barrier to effective professional development.

Removing judgements from classroom observations isn't simply a case of removing graded lessons, but involves removing judgements throughout the entire process. It's all too easy for observers to attribute a (misplaced)



2. Avoid the 'snapshot approach'

A 'snapshot approach' sees an isolated lesson as reflective of a colleague's entire practice. Some school settings still use one or two isolated lessons to inform performance management and make judgements about individuals as teachers. The issues with such an approach are that the single lessons are used as averages, which means they conceal the highs and lows experienced throughout the academic year, and lack any contextual consideration.

A standalone lesson in the context of a unit of work simply can't be judged without observing other lessons in that unit of work, or triangulating those findings with other evidence, such as pupil voice and scrutiny of book work.

Whether the lesson is at the start or end of the unit will determine the level of knowledge students have and can display, as well as the choice of tasks and activities utilised by teachers.

What's observed might be wholly appropriate for the lesson in context, but deemed insufficient according to an isolated lesson approach, where a 'tick box' framework of

expected outcomes will likely inform the judgement. Context is crucial when observing, but this approach limits the observer's capacity to factor that in.

Isolated observations also make it very difficult to show measurable progress of students and teachers, thus often resulting in the 'rehearsed lesson' – a set play lesson that's out of sync, so that the teacher can showcase their skillset, often at the expense of learners.

3. Recognise the the power dynamic

Another issue with formal classroom observations is the observer-teacher relationship. Observers are frequently senior or middle leaders, and thus seen as 'somebody in authority' assumed fit to make judgements. The reality is that many of these leaders don't teach, or teach comparatively rarely, thus calling their credibility as classroom practitioners into question.

It's a power dynamic that can create mistrust. The process feels less collaborative, more as though it is being done *to* the teacher. A final point to note is that we'll often observe what we want or expect to see. Alas, confirmation bias can be widely prevalent within classroom observations. The interpretive lens of the observer may already have preconceived ideas of what they expect to see, and their evidence collection will

simply support this – cherry-picking those aspects of the lesson that confirm their initial views.

Observers must be mindful of avoiding personal preference and seek to understand the teacher's approach. A pre-observation meeting may offer opportunities to explore this.

4. Lesson observations shouldn't be used in isolation

The frequency of observation should be context-specific, and viewed as part of an ongoing process aimed at removing stress and building a greater evidence base with which to inform next steps and develop practice.

Some schools have adopted 'open door' policies, which entail regular learning walks. This is a far less formal way of observing, and provides a regular overview of classroom practice, but can often see a lack of follow-up and engagement in dialogue. Approaches that utilise a Lesson Study framework, or an instructional rounds philosophy, will see small groups working collaboratively with a specific focus, thus providing a more holistic view of teaching.

5. Observation should involve partnership

Observation should be mutually beneficial for both teacher and observer. The peer observation model can be an effective way of achieving this – a more collaborative approach that mitigates some of the relational pitfalls discussed above – but not necessarily the only one.

What's key is establishing common ways of working and trust between all colleagues. Leaders should articulate clearly and transparently the nature of the process, while working to ensure that all teachers feel that they have a voice. Observers should have no preconceived ideas of what the lesson will look like, or how the resulting dialogue will be shaped. It should be a flexible, organic process.

Recent research has indicated that an appreciative enquiry model can be especially beneficial for successful observation and professional development. Highlighting areas of strength, and how these areas can be utilised to develop other areas of practice, is empowering for teachers. It builds confidence, and focuses on the behaviours and strategies we adopt when we're at our best.

Ultimately, lesson observations can be an integral part of teacher development. The goal is to ensure that they are utilised in a productive manner, to enhance practice and to promote professional dialogue.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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

WHY I LOVE...

Katharine Beckett, associate director of English at the Outwood Grange Academies Trust, discusses the impact of Renaissance's reading practice and assessment solutions

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TALKING ABOUT: RENAISSANCE ACCELERATED READER

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Academically, our schools consistently exceed the national average in the reading sections of their GCSE English papers – but the benefit of using AR extends much further than test scores. Our students have developed greater confidence in articulating their feelings. They've become more empathetic and understanding of differences. We're teaching our children to question what they read and make informed decisions, rather than believing everything they see on social media or in the news.

We still face challenges – particularly with encouraging reading at home, as some students claim that they find this difficult – but we're continuously looking for solutions to support these students. We're looking to provide more quiet spaces for reading within our schools, and also working to make reading a whole-school priority, with leadership teams actively engaging students in conversations about books.

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We've become used to hearing about the rising levels of demand, inconsistent provision and growing resentment when it comes to SEND support in schools – but the voices of those campaigning for dramatic changes are getting louder...

Natasha Devon



As of January 2023, 17% of pupils in England identified as having SEND. That's around 1 in 6. As I type these words, 400,000 children are seeking support from medical services for a suspected developmental condition.

It feels as though a revolution is happening in the world of SEND, right now. In response to the news that over 20,000 children in England are currently waiting for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessment, the British Psychological Society has launched a campaign calling for every school to have a named educational psychologist based in their local authority (tiny.cc/ts138-ND1).

At the same time, the Children's Commissioner, Rachel De Souza, has published a report (see tiny.cc/ts138-ND2) in which she demands 'urgent action' and "*Better support in mainstream schools, improved awareness and training for frontline professionals in education, health care.*"

Culture of blame

And then last month, a group of charities and experts wrote an open letter to the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson (see bit.ly/ts138-ND3), highlighting the 'culture of blame' that has emerged in relation to children with SEND. The letter describes how parents, teachers, LA workers and even young people themselves are being shamed for the very existence of SEND itself, with no real action being taken to alleviate the challenges any of them face.

The letter calls for a number of changes, and concludes by pointing out that, "*This must include a repositioning of 'SEND' within the wider education system, so that it is no longer viewed as a 'bolt-on' or afterthought as it is now. Rather, those children and young people who need something additional and/or different*

to access education must be considered as central to all educational policy."

Such an approach would, the letter's authors argue, reverse much of the damage inadvertently caused by the introduction of Michael Gove's sweeping education reforms in 2014, which, whilst striving for increased expectations and attainment, in reality proved to be, "*Narrow, prescriptive,*" and disadvantageous to huge swathes of the children that the government was purporting to help.

Towards a whole school approach

None of this will be news to those working in SEND, of course. All three of the interventions mentioned above stress the crucial necessity of a whole school approach – and yet, I've seen for myself the look of terror on many a member of staff's face when the prospect of a 'whole school approach' is mentioned.

I entirely understand why that might be their response. As a mental health campaigner, I'll often look at the latest statistics, consider the enormity of the issue and then find myself completely

overwhelmed, unsure where to start.

When this happens, I'll call to mind one of the best pieces of advice I ever heard: '*Think globally, act locally.*' It's a phrase frequently used in activist circles, alongside the 'patchwork quilt' analogy, which says that we each have our own sphere of influence – our own 'patch'. These patches might not look like much on their own, but when sewn together, they can cover a lot.

The smallest successes

With that in mind, I asked three SEND experts their advice on what school staff can do to improve matters right now. As far as Ellie Costello, director of the charity Square Pegs, is concerned, "*Don't wait for the cavalry – the SEND revolution is unlikely to be a silver bullet. Meet the child where they're at, use professional curiosity to explore what might be going on, and build psychological safety, trust and belonging.*"

Ginny Bootman, a SENCo and headteacher with over 30 years' experience in education, meanwhile suggests that. "*The little things do make the biggest difference. Changing the seating to suit the needs of the individual child; providing visual timetables and ensuring equipment is easily to hand, for example.*"

An anonymous LA worker with responsibility for SEND further told me that, "*When we interviewed older children and young adults who had found learning difficult about what had helped them at school, they didn't talk about interventions and groups. They spoke about teachers who gave them the benefit of the doubt that they were trying – who acknowledged that not having remembered instructions didn't mean they weren't listening. Teachers who could see when students were working hard, and noticed even the smallest successes.*"



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

Q&A

“Low on cost, big on outdoor learning”

Maria McQuillan discusses the exciting programmes Conway Centres, Anglesey is offering this year...



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Winners of the ‘Best Residential Experience’ at the latest School Travel Awards, Conway Centres, Anglesey are experts in providing secondary schools with outdoor learning residentials. Located on the Menai Strait and close to all of North Wales’ hotspots – adventure is never far away.

What’s new at Conway Centres this year?

With school budgets, family purse strings and teaching staff resource tighter than ever, we want to ensure that as many schools and young people as possible can experience a residential. We have now launched our brand new programmes, which make booking a residential easier than ever. The three new programmes are perfect for secondary schools, and are all low on cost and big on outdoor learning.

Tell us more about the new programmes...

We have three new programmes for secondary schools: *Conway Outdoors*, *Conway Connect* and *Conway Ultimate*. *Conway Outdoors* is designed for schools wanting a low-cost residential with all the benefits of outdoor learning. *Conway Connect* focuses on boosting teamwork, forging friendships, improving communication with peers and supporting each other. *Conway Ultimate*, meanwhile, is perfect if you are looking for something for thrill-seekers! This jam-packed adventure programme provides access to our widest and most exciting activities, and includes an off-site day.

What can schools expect from a residential at Conway Centres?

Our new programmes have all been carefully crafted to make the most of your residential experience. Whether it’s bringing your Y7s out to build new friendships and *connect*, ready for their secondary school experience;



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encouraging your Y8s to get outdoors; or helping your Y9s experience the *ultimate* adventure, outdoor learning is at the heart of everything we do. Plus, we still have our popular exam support courses and revision adventures, which have a proven track record of raising attainment and boosting students’ grades at GCSE and A Level!

Great! When should we visit?

The most cost-effective time to visit is during the autumn term, from just £79 per person. Schools will fight for summer dates, but don’t rule out autumn – with

highs of 14 to 16°C in September and October, the sun still shines over the Anglesey centre! Schools come to Anglesey as late as November and December, and love the quiet seasons, since they offer more in-depth learning experiences and greater exclusivity of the site, whilst beating the crowds! And what better way of building resilience through outdoor learning than with a good old Anglesey downpour?

Why should schools choose Conway Centres, Anglesey?

Set on the Menai Strait and nestled beneath the Snowdonia National Park, our team are all outdoor learning experts, and live and breathe adventure! From kayaking to the Antarctic, to climbing El Capitan – some staff even commute to work by kayak or boat. Schools often tell us that our staff are what sets Conway Centres apart from the others, and therefore keeps them coming back year after year...

What’s the difference?

- + Experience off-site visits to all of North Wales’ hotspots
- + Boost grades and raise attainment with an exam support course residential
- + Whether you want to bring a small class of 30, a whole year or even your MAT, Conway Centres, Anglesey can accommodate all schools’ requirements. Just let the team know, and they will work their magic!

THE TS GUIDE TO... OUTDOOR LEARNING

The curriculum may be packed, but escaping the confines of the classroom every once in a while can inject some dynamism into your lessons, and provide students with memorable learning experiences they'd never get to have indoors...

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IN FIGURES: HOW DO CHILDREN FEEL ABOUT SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS?

76%

of children aged 7 to 14 want to spend more time outdoors

56%

of children want to see improved access to nature and green space

63%

of parents take their children out to spend time in nature once a week or less, citing accessibility as their main barrier to doing so

Source: March 2024 survey by Censuswide of 1,000 children aged 7 to 14 and their parents, commissioned by the National Trust and First News

3

TEACHWIRE
ARTICLES
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CALL OF THE WILD

What good can come from taking a group of Y9s wild camping in an environment they're completely unfamiliar with? Quite lot, as it happens, explains Steve Friday...

bit.ly/138special1

A POLICY PRIORITY

At Bohunt Education Trust, outdoor learning is embedded within the ethos, says Philip Avery - and the benefits are both profound and measurable

bit.ly/138special2

THE BEST USE OF WHAT YOU HAVE

Rebecca Leek highlights what schools can do to give students' learning an outdoor dimension without any costly procurement or site redevelopment

bit.ly/138special3



No parks? **NO PROBLEM...**

Gordon Cairns explains why you don't necessarily need ample wooded or cultivated green space to put on some forest school activities for your students...

Would it be fair to divide teachers into 'indoor' types and 'outdoor' types?

Those needing four walls and a ceiling to be in place before they can even think about their five-minute starter can find it tempting to stereotype the latter group – think ruddy complexions, walking boots worn in the classroom, constant stares out of the window as they gauge that day's weather prospects. (Of course, those outdoor types may just as easily roll their eyes at colleagues who insist on driving two minutes to pick up their lunch.)

Shed those misconceptions

However, our 'indoor' teachers could perhaps learn something from their outward bound colleagues. If they can adjust their mindset to the outdoors, they may be able to deliver a range of benefits to their charges that simply can't be achieved within the school building. For one thing, recent studies have found that being exposed to green space reduces behavioural problems, gives young people a cognitive boost and could even lead to improved academic achievement.

Another piece of research from 2016 examined attitudes towards teaching outside among education professionals based in Amsterdam – a city with a marked lack of green spaces near schools. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the researchers found that teachers were more likely to use green spaces if any happened to be situated near their school – but also that these same teachers were more likely to organise excursions to other green spaces situated further away. Teachers who possessed little or no experience of actual

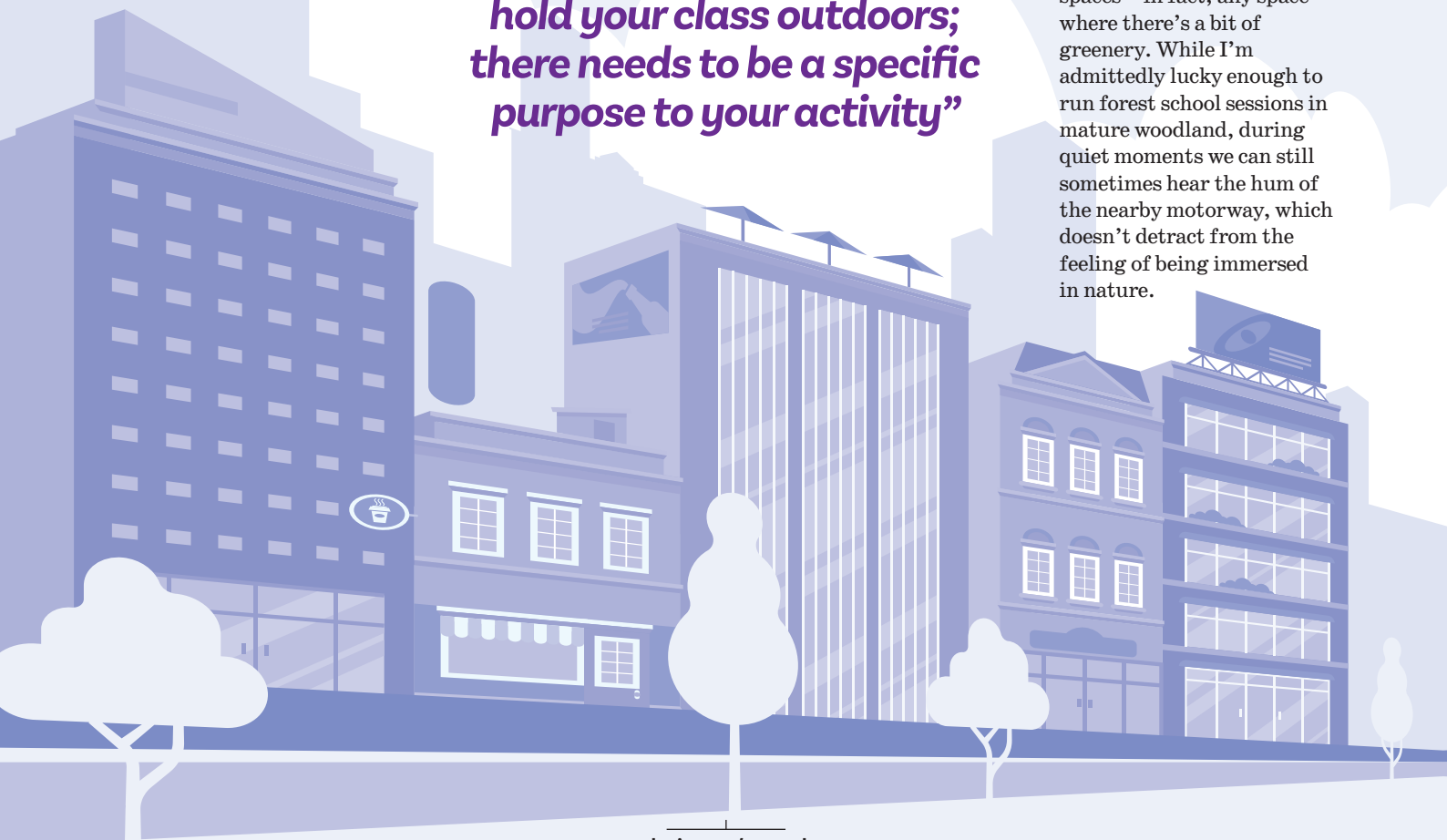
fieldwork were altogether less likely to take their students out on excursions.

It seems that once teachers become comfortable with taking their students outdoors, they're more likely to repeat the experience. And that when they do, they'll typically shed some common misconceptions surrounding forest schools – namely that you need a forest, or a wood, or at least a few trees before being able to use elements of forest school in your teaching practice.

Little city oases

Which is lucky, since most forest schools in England today are run in urban open spaces – in fact, any space where there's a bit of greenery. While I'm admittedly lucky enough to run forest school sessions in mature woodland, during quiet moments we can still sometimes hear the hum of the nearby motorway, which doesn't detract from the feeling of being immersed in nature.

“It's not enough to simply hold your class outdoors; there needs to be a specific purpose to your activity”



And yet, at a time when more young people than ever need the mental and physical nourishment that comes from being outdoors, these little city oases come at a premium. A 2021 study of green spaces in Greater London found that just 3 in 10 of the city's 1.3 million school students have a public park within walking distance of their school.

The present situation is far from ideal, then, but it is still possible to find accessible green spaces reasonably close by to most schools in England. The government advisory body, Nature England, runs a 'Green Infrastructure Mapping Database' (see tiny.cc/ts138-FS1), highlighting the proximity of any given location to green space. Teachers can use this online tool to plan local excursions, viewing the extent to which the green area(s) close to them will allow for different types of activities.

Another misconception is that you need to be a trained forest school practitioner to utilise the techniques of forest school. Many of the activities I undertake with my own forest school groups are essentially based around the teaching of fairly simple skills, except in an outdoor environment.

That said, it's not enough to simply hold your class outdoors; there needs to be a specific purpose to your activity, because if nothing

else, you'll otherwise have a riot on your hands, due to the kids having nothing to do!

Embrace the 'strangeness'

One of my fondest memories as a school pupil was sitting in the garden in the grounds of my primary, reading a version of *The Iliad* with our teacher (though now, whenever I think of the Siege of Troy, I picture a housing estate in the east end of Glasgow). As an English teacher, I find that reading outdoors is both the most straightforward and most powerful activity we can do. A book with an outdoor or forest theme, such as *Wolf Brother* by Michelle Paver, is ideal. The only resources you need would be a couple of groundsheets, or some waterproof squares for each student to sit on.

There's a huge range of subjects that can be taught outdoors – perhaps even all of them, barring any tasks that specifically require a PC. A food technology lesson in bread making, for example, can be made more dynamic within a forest school environment. Damper bread dough could be mixed in the classroom, before being taken outside and wrapped around a stick for cooking over an open log fire in a local park.

Art classes can be enlivened by collecting tree debris for autumn collages and incorporating bark rubbings. D&T classes could put their woodworking skills to use by sawing and chopping found wood from outdoors, while calibrating the density of different wood types and how age and weather exposure might affect their use. The class could then be made to choose which wood they should use for, say, making a mallet compared to a medallion.

Even schools in heavily built-up urban areas will surely have at least one small space somewhere in their local vicinity with enough natural life to try out such activities. Taking your class to a derelict site that's returned to nature, or a green verge, or a grassy bank might draw some strange looks from passers-by (and potentially elicit reluctance from members of your class), but each subsequent trip out will become easier. Sometimes, just the very 'strangeness' of learning in a different setting will make the teaching points easier to recall.

BETTER LEARNING OUTDOORS

1 No matter how small an area might be, researchers have found that simply being in a green space is good for mental health, reducing stress levels and lowering rates of depression and anxiety. Spending 45 minutes in a local park might not seem like it's having any effect at first, but the resulting benefits of repeated exposure to green space will build up over time.

2 Further research has found that being outdoors for a period of time improves the quality and duration of sleep. As such, taking your lesson outdoors might mean that at least some of your students will come to school in the morning better rested and more ready to learn.

3 For neurodiverse young people, being in a space where it's possible to walk off frustrations and escape the hum of a modern classroom can act as a calming mechanism, reducing anxiety and stress.

4 Outdoor settings can have the effect of letting some students shine, who might otherwise normally struggle in the classroom. Young people who have previously gone camping with a parent, for instance, might be good at getting a fire going.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Cairns is an English and forest school teacher who works in a unit for secondary pupils with ASD; he also writes about education, society, cycling and football for a number of publications

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STUDYLINK

Venturing FORTH

If you want to organise a memorable school trip, you need to talk to the right people as early as possible, advises **Daniel Harvey**

Often, our own holidays and travels can inspire us to take our students out of the classroom and somewhere different, engaging and stimulating that will hopefully provide a compelling experience.

All being well, the environment you've chosen will leave some lasting lessons, as well as perhaps some special memories – that first trip on the London Tube, a boat trip along the Thames, or chortles when remembering that time Mr Smith got drenched as a bus drove too fast through a puddle...

So, you're inspired to get a trip up and running for your students, and have a great idea to suggest, Maybe it's a curriculum-focused visit to the Churchill War Rooms, a viewing of a play at the RSC or a field trip to Kenilworth Castle – what should you do first?

Notice and cover

The single best way of getting a trip authorised, at the lowest possible cost, is to discuss the purpose and audience of the trip with your school's educational visits co-ordinator (EVC) at the earliest opportunity, having worked out all the details regarding staffing and costs (transport, entry and cover) beforehand.

This will get your trip confirmed on the school calendar at the earliest opportunity, give staff notice of the event and any impact in their classrooms, and provide your school (specifically, the

person who organises cover – someone you should keep sweet at all times) with plenty of time to work out the best way of covering you and any accompanying colleagues.

It also gives your school the chance to work out how best to pay for any bought-in cover, if needed. There will be three options here – you have very nice colleagues who'll happily cover any absences for those attending; the school pays for cover; or the cover expenses are added to the cost of the trip paid by students' families.

Seeking approval or

school calendar early on to ensure there are no other events in the offing) and unexpected disruption for colleagues. This could result in higher costs for the trip, or a flat refusal for the trip to take place at all. Push too hard and too late, and it could even result in you sustaining reputational damage and make any future trips you plan subject to greater scrutiny.

Details and time

Don't get me wrong – every now and then a fantastic opportunity can come along at very short notice. If that

Working out details early lets you examine those important details – such as whether the school minibus(es) will be available, along with staff qualified to drive them. It might be possible for support staff to provide such assistance, and potentially attend the trip as staff, thus reducing the cost for students and alleviating cover issues.

The earlier the trip can be confirmed, the more time you'll have to complete the necessary admin your school will need for the trip to be fully authorised – particularly those essential elements, like completing risk assessments and ensuring that a first aider will be in attendance.

School trips are important for letting students experience events or places they wouldn't otherwise get to see, or even know about. A colleague once took some of our students to the coast, one of whom remarked that it was the first time they'd ever seen the sea!

So, to all those staff who organise the trips, provide those unforgettable experiences and leave wonderful memories –

I salute you, and thank you. Just make sure your school processes are followed at all times, and seek out your EVC at the earliest opportunity. Happy travels!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

“The earlier the trip can be confirmed, the more time you'll have to complete the necessary admin”

confirmation for a trip at comparatively late notice can cause a number of issues, such as difficulties booking transport at competitive prices, potential calendar clashes (which is why you should always check your

happens, then it's incumbent upon you to make leadership and your trips coordinator aware as soon as possible, if you want to improve the chances of the trip being greenlit and given the necessary support.



The long-term view

Jenny McLeod on why secondary schools can learn a thing or two from the primary phase when it comes to the benefits and practicalities of outdoor learning...

Forest School and outdoor education have long been mainstays of early years and primary school education – but we shouldn't be so quick to let outdoor education fall by the wayside once students transition to secondary school.

There are a whole host of advantages to be had from continuing to offer older students access to outdoor activities, whether it's improved wellbeing, or advances in their personal development and improved academic engagement.

At Stephen Perse Cambridge, we've sought to leverage the unique outdoor spaces available to us both on-site and around our local community, and embed outdoor learning and the concept of eco-classrooms into the curriculum, right through to Sixth Form.

Improved wellbeing

Acknowledging the well-established links between the great outdoors and positive wellbeing is one of the simplest ways in which schools can support students' overall mental health during the more academically demanding years they'll experience at school. Many of our GCSE and A Level students often tell us that outdoor trips and residential have enabled them to get some much-needed time away from the pressures of the classroom, impending exams and homework demands.

There are, however, some students who might worry about taking time out of their studies to participate in

such activities. Outdoor learning can present a good opportunity to show them how maintaining a healthy balance between their personal and academic lives can be hugely beneficial – not just for their physical and mental wellbeing, but also their ability to study, and subsequent academic outcomes. Swapping pens and screens for nature will moreover enable them to return to their studies feeling invigorated and motivated.

At Stephen Perse Cambridge, we encourage students to take up lifelong sports that they can take away with them and continue

career outcomes later down the line.

As the students get older, our outdoor tasks go beyond simply developing their leadership skills, and into building their resilience in face of challenge, and abilities to follow and listen to their peers – a lifelong skill that will be applicable to many different scenarios.

For those sixth formers looking ahead to their future university and job prospects, outdoor challenges such as Duke of Edinburgh expeditions will provide them with valuable opportunities to put into practice the team-building, resilience and problem

Time spent outside has also been linked to improved concentration levels. Just taking short breaks away from desks can act as a refresher for children who might be struggling to concentrate during their lessons.

With the secondary school curriculum becoming ever more exam-based, getting out and about can see to it that schools are still meeting the needs of, and engaging with different types of learners. The hands-on application of learning that takes place during outdoor experiments and other such projects can be hugely beneficial for some students' understanding of a topic.

That said, taking learning outside can ultimately help *all* learners to build a better understanding of how far-reaching, topical issues such as climate change and sustainability are impacting their immediate surroundings.

“Swapping pens and screens for nature will enable them to return to their studies feeling invigorated”

in later life. From badminton, to running and yoga classes, we aim to offer activities that students are much more likely to continue doing once they leave school and enter university or the wider world of work.

Preparing for the future

When students join secondary school, it's important that they're able to continue building on the skills and foundations they will have developed at primary school. Research from The Sutton Trust has shown that skills learned in co-curricular activities can be directly linked to improved educational and

solving skills they will have learnt, in real-world settings away from the classroom.

Academic engagement

Outdoor learning opens the door to many engaging cross-curricular opportunities. This might involve, for example, a pairing of biology and geography when undertaking a river study, or combining history with English literature on a visit to the trenches of WWI. Art lessons can be taken outside, so that students are able to take inspiration from the sights to be found in local nature spots.

Cost-effective ideas

However, not all schools have access to large outdoor facilities, which means educators must sometimes get creative with maximising the opportunities available on their doorstep. For us, we're admittedly fortunate

to be situated in the city centre of Cambridge, where we can take students to the local Botanic Gardens, or explore the city's historic architecture.

Even setting aside a small part of the school grounds to host a gardening or allotment club can prove popular with

students who wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to get involved in gardening at home.

For trips that venture further afield, many local councils have outdoor centres that offer affordable, high quality outdoor learning activity days and residential, without the need to travel too far from the school.

Staffing and upskilling

Coordinating outdoor learning doesn't require a full-time member of staff, though it may be practical to assign a staff member responsibility for identifying extra- and cross-curricular opportunities, and then mobilising relevant staff across the school. This could involve speaking with heads of departments to check whether they've considered potential opportunities for incorporating an outdoor activity, or encouraging them to collaborate with other departments on cross-curricular outdoor learning initiatives.

Upskilling staff where possible is another relatively affordable way of

diversifying your school's outdoor education offering at KS4/5. Whether it's Duke of Edinburgh preparation or bushcraft training, if a school has enough trained staff capable of delivering outdoor learning activities, then doing so in-house will always prove more cost-effective in the long term, compared to working with an external provider.

School-wide sustainability

Outdoor education can also encourage older students to see work around sustainability and carbon offsetting in a new light. If, for example, a school sports team travels to a sports fixture by coach, this could present an opportunity for students to consider the carbon cost of their journey. How might they minimise this? Could planting trees on school grounds help in some way to offset some of the travel they've undertaken throughout the year?

In this way, outdoor education can become a useful tool for alerting students to complex, real-world issues that society continues to grapple with.

Outdoor education must be carried all the way through secondary school to sixth form. The important pastoral and pedagogical benefits that come from being able to learn, explore and spend time outside makes outdoor learning an extremely powerful way of supporting and energising older students as they complete the final years of their school education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenny McLeod is Deputy Head of Co-Curricular at Stephen Perse Cambridge



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The Inside Story

CAMERON SHEERAN

Executive Principal of Cowley International College, St Helens

From Merseyside to Beijing: How a school trip transformed our students' lives



For students from a small town in the northwest of England, travelling 8,000 miles to experience a new culture, visit iconic landmarks and practise Mandarin in real-world settings was truly life-changing.

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We joined the programme in 2017 as part of the second cohort, having wanted to expand our curriculum opportunities. Significant Chinese investment was taking place in Merseyside at the time, so we wanted our students to have the skills needed to seize on future career opportunities. We also saw the programme as a way of building cultural awareness and broadening the students' horizons.

I believe that school trips and international experiences provide a unique and powerful learning opportunity for young people. I have been involved in many over the years, but nothing comes close to the impact of one particular international visit to China.

In summer 2024, we were part of the largest ever school trip to China, where nearly 1,200 students from 61 schools across England embarked on a journey that I'm sure they'll remember for the rest of their lives. The trip was part of the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) – an initiative that has helped over 13,000 young learners in England on their path to fluency since its launch in 2016.

Opportunities like this can be rare for our students. 40% of those who travelled were in receipt of Pupil Premium funding, and many had never left the country or even been on a plane before. Our school is situated in a community where opportunities for students to travel abroad are often limited. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is twice that seen nationally. The school supports a significant number of priority families and high numbers of looked after children.

The trip was particularly meaningful for our students, and its impact cannot be overstated, but

this was no holiday. The programme aimed to challenge and develop our students, and it certainly did that. I was so proud of how they responded to the challenges they were given.

The students took part in an extensive cultural and language learning programme, connecting with pupils in Chinese schools throughout the experience. The blend of lessons, activities and visits was perfect. The study trip also inspired our students to consider new opportunities, such as those discussed during a talk by the British Council in Beijing, which highlighted the value of learning Mandarin and how it could enhance their career opportunities. Having the skills to converse confidently in Mandarin will indeed open doors, and could prove to be life-changing.

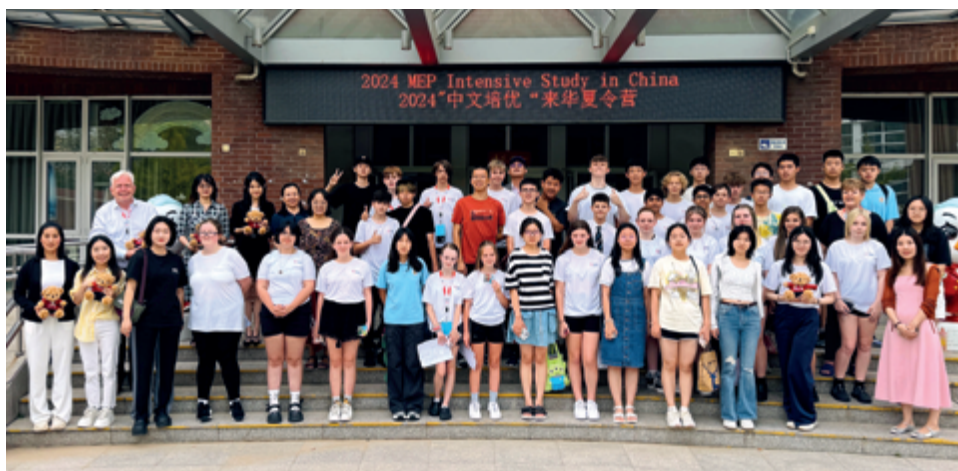
Since returning from China, the students' confidence has noticeably improved. The depth of their Mandarin knowledge, and courage in speaking the language have increased significantly. They are excited about the opportunities they experienced. The trip has clearly inspired them and deepened their engagement with the subject.

Research from the British Council shows that nearly two thirds of language students at university were inspired to pursue language degrees by an international exchange trip while at school. The impact of school trips and international experiences for foreign language learning cannot be underestimated.

I would like to see more schools teaching Chinese follow the lead of the MEP and organise their own visits to China. If your school is able to take students abroad, even for a short visit, I would wholeheartedly recommend it - the impact can be truly life-changing.

Contact:

For more information, email
mandarinexcellence@ucl.ac.uk



The Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) is delivered by the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) and in partnership with the British Council.



**Mandarin
Excellence
Programme**

Winter school trips

Stuck for ideas on where to take your students for an educationally nourishing school trip? Here are some destinations that we'd recommend...



1 BLACK COUNTRY LIVING MUSEUM

Explore the rich history of a small region that made a big impact on the world at Black Country Living Museum. Historic characters bring history to life in the Museum's open-air setting, made up of rebuilt and replicated houses, shops and industrial areas.

From becoming a 'history detective' to a 'time-traveller', there are so many ways your students can discover the tales of Black Country folk from the past. Explore an underground mine, head to the Edwardian era for a school lesson you'll never forget, discover the trends of the 1940s to the 1960s, and watch sparks fly at the chain-making workshop. Find out more at bclm.com

CONWAY CENTRES, ANGLESEY

Recent recipient of the 'Best Residential Experience' award at the latest School Travel Awards, Conway Centres, Anglesey is located on the Menai Strait, within easy travelling distance of North Wales' key sights and attractions. The venue can readily cater for single classes, right up to whole year groups and even larger cohorts of students drawn from across a MAT.

The Centre's long-established exam support and revision courses are joined this year by three newly improved programmes that make booking a residential easier than ever. These include *Conway Outdoors*, giving schools an affordable route into outdoor residentials; the more teamwork-focused *Conway Connect*; and a dedicated offering for thrillseekers known as *Conway Ultimate*, providing access to the most intense and exciting activities available on-site, as well as an off-site day. For more information, visit conwaycentres.co.uk



2



3

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With over 30 years of experience, SkiBound is a trusted leader in school ski trips. Its team – from expert Account Managers through to on-site staff – will ensure smooth, hassle-free travel to ski destinations across Europe and North America. Exclusive Clubhotels in the French Alps provide affordable, premium access to top resorts, with dedicated staff and in-house ski technicians ready to support groups on arrival.

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For more details, visit skibound.co.uk



NATIONAL JUSTICE MUSEUM

Discover bespoke, curriculum-informed opportunities to learn about the role of law in society and active citizenship across all Key Stages with the National Justice Museum, which provides award-winning education programmes in Nottingham, the Royal Courts of Justice in London, and in settings such as the Greater Manchester Police Museum and Manchester Metropolitan University.

Tying in with themes of British values, careers and PSHE, the National Justice Museum's inspirational educational visits use real courtrooms, student role play, actors, museum spaces and objects to help students gain a hands-on understanding of the law and justice. View the full range of sessions at nationaljusticemuseum.org.uk/museum/learning

YMCA LAKESIDE

Discover one of the UK's most stunning outdoor classrooms at YMCA Lakeside, in the Lake District National Park. Boasting half a mile of shoreline on Lake Windermere, 100 acres of private woodland and expert staff and instructors, it's the perfect setting for groups to learn, grow, and connect with nature.

Choose from 50 exciting land and water-based activities – from kayaking to rock climbing – designed to build confidence and develop new skills. If you are planning a winter residential take advantage of reduced rates from November until March, and enjoy unique experiences like afternoon campfires, torchlit walks and stargazing. Whatever your group's goals, YMCA Lakeside creates unforgettable learning opportunities that inspire, empower and prepare students for the future. Email lakesidebookings@fyldecoastymca.org or call **01539 539 000** to find out more.



COLCHESTER ZOO

Colchester Zoo is more than an award-winning family day out; it offers an inspiring backdrop for education too. Colchester Zoo provides a wide variety of engaging school sessions full of inspiring content, with direct links to the national curriculum. From art to geography, science to debating skills, there are sessions for all ages.

During the workshops, learning is brought to life through the use of biofacts.

Skulls, feathers, furs and taxidermy – the zoo's biofact store contains hundreds of amazing items. With the help of conservation educators, these interesting objects are used to enhance learning opportunities, inviting visitors to get up close and personal with the wonder of wildlife! To learn more, visit colchester-zoo.com or email education@colchesterzoo.org

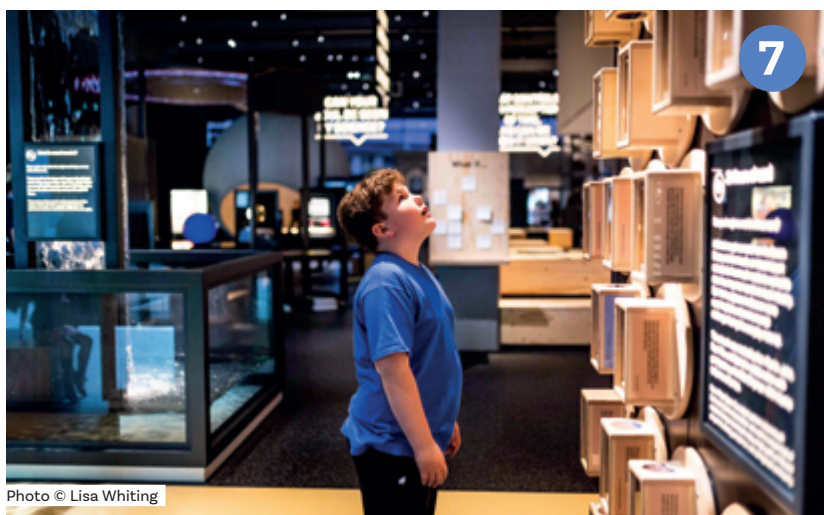


Photo © Lisa Whiting

WE THE CURIOUS

Looking to build interest and confidence in STEM this winter? Check out Bristol's playful science experience, We The Curious, which reopened earlier this year. Located on Bristol Harbourside, it's brimming with interactive exhibits that explore illusions, sound, space, animation and much more. Students can take a trip to the stars in the 3D Planetarium, and reflect on some of life's big questions in the unique 'Project What If' exhibit. School groups can also attend practical, curriculum-linked workshops led by experienced presenters on topics ranging from climate change to earthquakes, forensics and psychology. To find out more, visit wethecurious.org or email education@wethecurious.org

ASK THE EXPERT

The Upside-Down Resort

Tom Head, SkiBound Account Manager, offers insight into why Les Deux Alpes is a top ski destination



SkiBound
SNOWSPORTS FOR SCHOOLS



1 HIGH-ALTITUDE SKIING ALL SEASON

Les Deux Alpes offers one of the most reliable skiing experiences in Europe, thanks to its high-altitude location and boasting Europe's largest skiable glacier. With snow conditions guaranteed all year round, schools can plan their SkiBound trip with confidence, knowing there will always be ample snow. This makes Les Deux Alpes an ideal choice for any time of the season.

2 IDEAL FOR ALL ABILITIES

Les Deux Alpes is perfect for school groups, offering over 330km of ski runs. Beginners can learn on gentle slopes, intermediates can build confidence and advanced skiers can test themselves on

more challenging terrain. With its wide variety of runs, the feedback we get from schools is that every student finds something suitable, ensuring an inclusive skiing experience for all.

3 OUTSTANDING RESORT FACILITIES

Les Deux Alpes boasts top-quality facilities to enhance the school ski trip experience. Students can make the most of a world-class snowpark and an exhilarating bordercross course – perfect for schools with experienced snowboarders and skiers looking for something different. These state-of-the-art amenities provide excellent opportunities for students to improve their skills, while enjoying the resort's modern features.

4 EXCITING APRES-SKI ACTIVITIES

The fun doesn't stop when the skiing ends. SkiBound can arrange an exciting choice of apres-ski activities for students, including laser games, bowling and evenings at local cr peries and pizzerias, all within Les Deux Alpes. These off-slope activities create an environment in which students can bond, relax and make unforgettable memories beyond the skiing experience.

At a glance

- Snow-sure skiing with glacier access
- Catering to all skill levels
- Top facilities and engaging apres-ski

Contact: 01273 244 570 | info@skibound.co.uk | skibound.co.uk

we the curious School trips for tomorrow's scientific thinkers



- / Spark curiosity over two floors of interactive exhibits
- / Search for alien life in the 3D Planetarium
- / Build confidence through practical, curriculum-linked workshops

Find us on Bristol's Harbourside



We The Curious is a registered charity (no. 1049954)

Image credit: Lisa Whiting

wethecurious.org

Nudge, DON'T SHOVE

Fostering a genuine love of reading among students is possible, says **Kelly Ashley** – but it's a process that calls for careful long-term planning

With so many competing interests in young people's lives, how can we tempt them into reading for enjoyment?

Their motivation to do so can emerge from extrinsic, intrinsic and social sources of influence. Extrinsic motivations, such as reward or points systems, can offer short-term boosts of engagement, but these outwardly-driven systems won't develop the inward (intrinsic) habit of reading for pleasure in the long term.

As observed by Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston, the power of social influence on reading behaviour becomes particularly palpable in adolescence (see tiny.cc/ts138-L1).

Knowledgeable adult and peer reading role models can build strong readerly connections over time.

Finding ways of gently 'nudging' readers into spaces where

personal motivation can thrive is central to solving this influence puzzle. Volitional readers who choose to read demonstrate agency. Adults can curate social, inviting spaces that welcome and entice, thus 'nudging' – rather than shoving – readers into this field of engagement.

Get their attention

Influencers need to know their audience. Do you know the interests of the pupils you teach and the types of reading they prefer – be that graphic novels, poetry, magazines, song lyrics or something else? Take the time to identify those reading likes and dislikes,

and ask about their particular choices and habits when reading in school and at home.

Uncovering your students' reading identities can help you connect with them.

Review the breadth and diversity of texts you have available, and ask your school librarian about sourcing selections from booksellers with a focus on diversity.
– A New Chapter

(anewchapterbooks.com) and Letterbox Library (letterboxlibrary.com) are two organisations doing fantastic work in this area. You can otherwise look to the shortlists of the Diverse Book Award and the Jhalak Prize, which both often showcase newer, bolder selections.

You can also be a reading role model yourself by sharing and discussing your reading life – what you're reading, what you tend to avoid and why. Encourage reading recommendations and reciprocate with some of your own. Encourage others to view you as a reader within the school community, since reader-to-reader conversations really do matter.

Urge into action

Your school's library or learning resource centre can be used as a space for keen readers to meet, socialise and share those recommendations. Think about how the materials in these spaces are displayed and which are most popular. Vivid displays of Manga, comics, newspapers and other types of engaging reading material can gently bring new readers in. Be clear, both explicitly and implicitly, that *all* forms of reading are valued, and that wide reading really matters.

Where possible, try to plan school visits from a local author, poet or comics creator for each year group. Young authors can be perfect influencers, offering insightful perspectives on their craft and opening up new avenues of conversation. Building connections with your local library and independent bookshops can be great avenues for making

contact with potential visiting authors.

Aim high with a clear strategy

When building a reading for pleasure culture, you need a clear and consistent strategy. The Open University offers a unique, year-long programme of strategic reading for pleasure development for secondary schools through the OU KS3 Reading Schools programme. A central tenet of the programme is to help schools acknowledge their unique starting points, before moving forward with clear, purposeful intention.

Strategic planning shouldn't involve a rush to action, but rather be a steady and considered process during which you keep a close eye on impact over time. It entails refining your approaches and measuring subtle shifts in reading attitudes and behaviour, with a clear idea of what 'success' should look like.

Moreover, the role of 'reading influencer' needn't fall solely within your English department. Consider appointing reading champions from across the staff team, because helping to influence students' reading choices and regular habits is something everyone can play a part in.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Ashley is a lecturer in Reading for Pleasure for The Open University and author of *Word Power: Amplifying Vocabulary Instruction* (£20, kellyashleyconsultancy.wordpress.com); to find out more about the work of the OU's Reading for Pleasure Team, visit ourfp.org

5 REASONS TO TRY... CPD from the Historical Association

History teachers keen to develop their subject knowledge will want to take a look at this affordable, yet comprehensive CPD offer



30 SECOND BRIEFING

The HA's history-specific CPD empowers teachers to excel, elevating the profile of history within their schools and beyond. Carefully crafted, based on research and school feedback, our CPD delivers high-quality professional development tailored to real training needs.

1 SUBJECT-SPECIFIC CPD
The Historical Association's CPD is tailored to support teachers at every career stage – from early career teachers to experienced leaders – covering topics such as pedagogy, curriculum, department management, Ofsted preparation and subject knowledge development. The HA's subject-specific CPD ensures that each school's unique needs are met. Generic CPD can make it difficult for teachers to address specific challenges in the history classroom, but the HA's programmes offer solutions directly relevant to history educators. For more details of the current CPD on offer from the HA, visit history.org.uk/go/whatson



Historical Association
The voice for history

Contact:

0300 100 0223 | enquiries@history.org.uk | history.org.uk

2 SUPPORT FROM TRUSTED EXPERTS
The HA is the leading provider of history-specific CPD, offering schools tailored support to elevate history teaching. Investing in subject-specific CPD refines teaching practices, boosts teacher confidence and ensures pupils receive the best possible history education.

The HA's CPD helps teachers create engaging, purposeful lessons that align with school development goals. From informative resources and reading materials to engaging conferences, our programmes provide high-quality learning experiences that will directly benefit both teachers and students. Whether you're a newly qualified teacher or a senior leader, this training builds the confidence and expertise necessary to deliver impactful history lessons. Schools that invest in subject-specific CPD foster a culture of excellence, helping teachers develop the skills to engage their students and meet diverse learning needs.

3 RELIABLE GUIDANCE FROM SEASONED PRACTITIONERS
The HA's CPD is led by experienced history educators with a wealth of expertise across various roles. Trainers bring extensive knowledge and years of evolving thought on key issues in history education – insights shaped by the extensive knowledge shared from the journal *Teaching History*.

This extensive knowledge base ensures that participants receive tailored advice, mentoring and practical insights to address real-world challenges. Whatever the issue, HA practitioners offer solutions that can be directly applied to your classroom and curriculum.

4 FLEXIBLE DELIVERY METHODS

Historical Association CPD is designed to fit around the busy schedules of teachers with various training methods available – including live webinars and recordings, one-day in-person courses, on-demand

options and longer immersive programmes, like the Subject Leader Development Programme. Networking opportunities provide ongoing peer support on the immersive programmes. The HA's CPD adapts to the needs of history teachers, making it easy to stay engaged without disrupting your day-to-day responsibilities. To view the methods and programmes on offer, visit history.org.uk/go/secondarycpd24

5 GENUINE IMPACT
Earn professional accreditation and certificates upon completing HA history-specific CPD, highlighting your development. More importantly, bring lasting, impactful changes to your classroom that will benefit your students and enhance your school's history provision. Prioritising subject-specific CPD in meetings is crucial for meaningful improvement, despite the many administrative demands faced by schools.

Key Points

Benefit from CPD delivered by a trusted organisation with over 100 years of expertise in history education, offering high-quality, subject-specific training at an affordable cost

Access a full CPD calendar, including our highly commended Subject Leader Development Programme

Delivered by experienced experts and professionals who are either current class teachers, school leaders or teacher trainers

To regularly receive practical support, updates and resources tailored to secondary education, sign up for our free monthly newsletter at history.org.uk/go/newsletter

teach SECONDARY AWARDS 2024

BEST IN CLASS

After the submission of entries, the whittling down and analysis by our expert judges, we're now ready to unveil the winners of this year's Teach Secondary Awards...

When deciding on which services, resources, tools, books and other items deserve a place in their school, teachers and leaders will often be at a disadvantage. There's certainly no shortage of options out there – decades of knowledge sharing, product development and technological advances have led to a healthy market for education solutions – but usually precious little time in the day to research what precisely what those options are, and which will be most appropriate.

Because decisions over which resources a school should use, when and to what end are never taken lightly. In many cases, it can come down to word of mouth, a recommendation from a fellow practitioner or leader, a suggestion from someone who knows what they're talking about. Those first-hand experiences can be invaluable, and make all the difference between those purchases that work as advertised, and those that simply doesn't measure up.

That's why the Teach Secondary Awards are set up as they are. Readers can be assured that the products and services highlighted across the following pages really do deliver on what they set out to do, and meet the quality standards of individuals who will have road-tested and deployed many such resources themselves over the course of their careers.

HOW IT WORKED

Companies and individuals were invited to enter one or more of their products and/or services for consideration in the 2024 Teach Secondary Awards between May and July 2024. From the entries we received, we then produced a shortlist for each of our eight categories, before passing these on to our panel of expert judges. Depending on the nature of the entries, our judges proceeded to carefully examine the merits of all shortlisted entries between August and October 2024, using print copies, online logs and/or review samples as applicable.

The judging criteria varied in part according to category, but our judges were all asked to consider the following when reaching their verdicts:

- ▶ Does this resource satisfy a genuine need or concern?
- ▶ What is its impact likely to be?
- ▶ How easy is it to use in practice?
- ▶ Could the resource be deployed within, and potentially be adapted for, different situations and settings?
- ▶ Does the resource represent a good investment?

Our judges were each tasked with awarding one overall category winner, followed by second and third place entries they felt to be deserving of 'highly commended' status.

MEET THE JUDGES



ASSESSMENT

ED CARLIN

is a deputy headteacher at a Scottish secondary school



CPD

DR CHRIS BAKER

is leader of professional development at Cabot Learning Federation



CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT

NIKKI CUNNINGHAM-SMITH

is an assistant headteacher based in Gloucestershire



EDTECH & SOFTWARE

ROB WRAITH

is head of learning, technology and digital learning at NCG



FREE RESOURCE

HANNAH DAY

is head of art, media and film at Ludlow College



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

ANN MARIE CHRISTIAN

is a safeguarding and child protection consultant, trainer, author and troubleshooter



SCHOOL BUSINESS

HILARY GOLDSMITH

is a school business leader, consultant and NAHT mentor



SEND

REBECCA LEEK

is an experienced school leader and former SENCo, as well as a regular education trainer, speaker and writer

Strawbees.®

A STEAM EDUCATION

There's **a** reason it's the first letter
of the **al**phabet

education
creativity
learning
communication
collaboration
innovation
achieve
arts



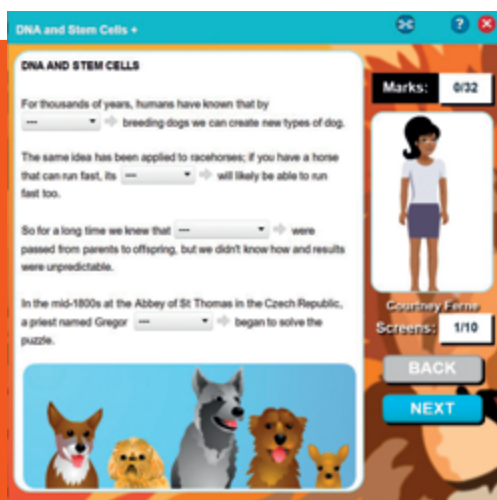
Simplifying STEAM Learning by Supporting
Educators and Inspiring Learners

Strawbees.®

WINNERS ASSESSMENT

WHAT WERE WE LOOKING FOR?

Resources and services aimed at helping teachers check students' understanding, improve feedback, track progress and drive school improvement

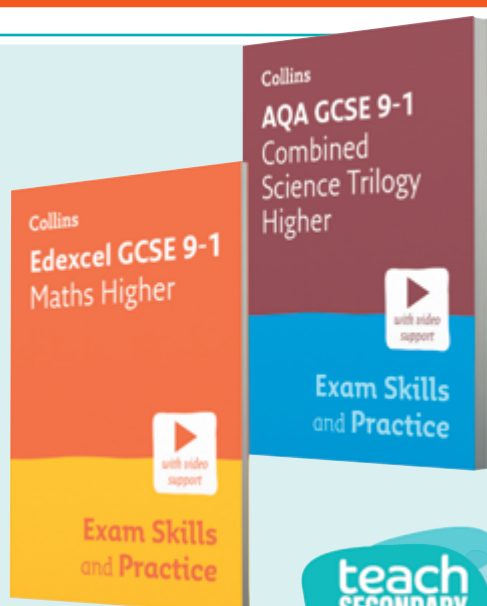


teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
WINNER

SAM LEARNING

SAM Learning
samlearning.com

"Despite the high cost, the adaptive learning and comprehensive subject coverage should make it a popular choice among schools. I think this resource gets better and better every year – the website aesthetic is very appealing, with great resources, and removes much workload for teachers." – Ed Carlin



GCSE EXAM SKILLS AND PRACTICE

Collins
tiny.cc/ts138-TA1

"I really liked the structured approach around command words, and students will find the QR code videos particularly helpful." – Ed Carlin

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY
COMMENDED



ED TECH COACHING PROGRAMME

Performance Learning
myperformancelearning.com

"The focus on both academic skills and wellbeing provides a unique and valuable support system for students and parents." – Ed Carlin

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY
COMMENDED

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
FINALIST

CATEGORY FINALISTS:

SMART REWISE | Craig'n'Dave
BOOST INSIGHTS | Hodder Education
SECONDARY LANGUAGE LINK | Speech & Language Link



WINNERS HEALTH & WELLBEING

WHAT WERE WE LOOKING FOR?

RSE teaching materials, safeguarding solutions, guidebooks and other resources that can supplement a school's provision of mental health and wellbeing support



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
WINNER

STUDENT HEALTH GUIDE

Student Health Guide

studenthealthguide.co.uk

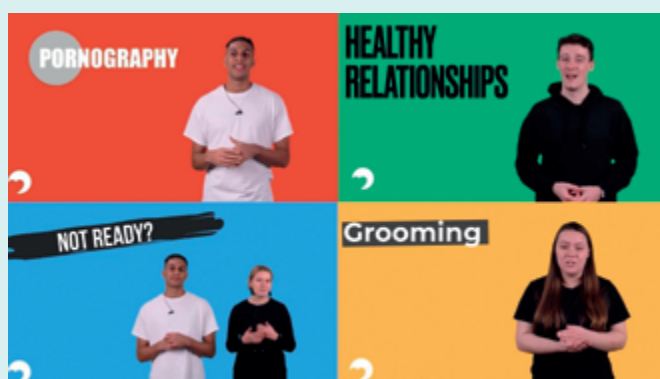
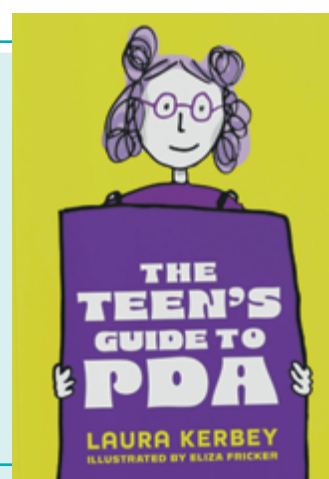
"An excellent resource, pitched well. The Guide covers content relevant to student life relating to physical and mental health. Research tells us that students are experiencing more mental health challenges, including stress and poor choices about sexual health – and this resource is perfectly positioned to meet the needs of Generation Z." – Ann Marie Christian

THE TEEN'S GUIDE TO PDA

Laura Kerbey (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)
tiny.cc/ts138-TA2

"A good resource about a topic that isn't discussed enough. It conveys the lived experience of teenagers and PDA children and is easy to read, explaining the impact it has on children and young people's lifestyle, as well as offering strategies to families and young people." – Ann Marie Christian

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY COMMENDED



RESPECTED RSE PROGRAMME

Respected
respected.org.uk

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY COMMENDED

"A useful resource for schools needing specialist support for the delivery of their RSE. The clips and resources are child-centred and relatable, tackling difficult topics that young people need to be aware of." – Ann Marie Christian

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
FINALIST

CATEGORY FINALISTS:

THE COMPLETE GET REAL SESSIONS | Get Real Sessions
MAKE TIME FOR YOGA | Magnificent Me Magnificent You
THE WELLBEING HUB | Teen Tips Ltd



The VESPA Handbook

VISION — EFFORT — SYSTEMS — PRACTICE — ATTITUDE

40 new activities to boost student commitment, motivation and productivity

Steve Oakes and Martin Griffin

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
WINNER

THE VESPA HANDBOOK

Steve Oakes and Martin Griffin
(Crown House Publishing)

tiny.cc/ts138-TA3

"At a time when schools are looking for additional levers to improve student outcomes, *The VESPA Handbook* is a guiding light. Broken into logical sections, the book explores the theory and practice of effective learning from the student's point of view, using practical activities to strengthen each element. A must-read for anyone looking to empower their students." – Chris Baker

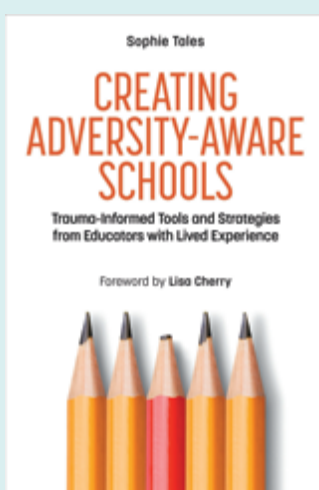
CREATING ADVERSITY-AWARE SCHOOLS

Sophie Tales (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)
tiny.cc/ts138-TA4

"This is an important book for school leaders and all teachers looking to better understand the challenges of childhood adversity. Structured around the

continuum of school needs, the book expertly uses case studies to set the stage for an exploration of practical tools and strategies that can take readers from awareness to action."

– Chris Baker



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY COMMENDED



SUBJECT LEADER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Historical Association
tinyurl.com/ts138-TA5

"A really useful, evidence-based and academically rigorous exploration of subject leadership, with a nice balance of theory and practical guidance. The online content is of a high quality, but the real gold is in the proactive creation of learner communities, and the mentorship provided by the course leaders." – Chris Baker

teach
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AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY COMMENDED

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
FINALIST

CATEGORY FINALISTS:

GRAPPLING WITH GRAPHS: A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS OF 11-16 SCIENCE | Association for Science Education
SECONDARY MUSIC LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE | Music Education Solutions
INTRODUCTION CERTIFICATE IN TEACHING SHAKESPEARE | Royal Shakespeare Company



know my school

**Bringing balance to
school improvement**



**teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024**
HIGHLY
COMMENDED

Leadership and management tools to recognise what you do well, and identify areas for improvement. Empower your community to drive positive change and sustainable excellence.

- ✓ **Efficient self-evaluation:** Utilise Coach to seamlessly evaluate and enhance your school's performance with our expert-driven tools.
- ✓ **Strategic improvement planning:** With Hub, effortlessly manage and track your school's development plans, ensuring every task aligns with your goals.
- ✓ **Centralised policy management:** Streamline policy access, updates, and compliance through our comprehensive Policy Portal, maintaining governance with ease.
- ✓ **Inclusive Multi-Academy insights:** MatDash offers a top-level view across your trust, helping to inform shared strategies and success.
- ✓ **Time and stress reduction:** By automating and streamlining complex processes, Know my School reduces the workload on senior leaders, allowing you to focus more on strategic leadership and less on administrative tasks.
- ✓ **Enhanced collaboration:** The platform encourages collaboration among staff, governors, and other stakeholders, ensuring everyone is engaged in the school's improvement journey.
- ✓ **Manage school improvement at scale:** Efficiently oversee and implement improvement plans across multiple sites, making it ideal for Multi-Academy Trusts or large educational institutions.



Visit: www.2simple.com/secondary-know-my-school

WINNERS SCHOOL BUSINESS

WHAT WERE WE LOOKING FOR?

Products and services designed to address non-curricular, whole school needs in areas such as student administration, IT and finance



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
WINNER

HUBMIS

WCBS

wcbs.co.uk/hub/mis-cloud/

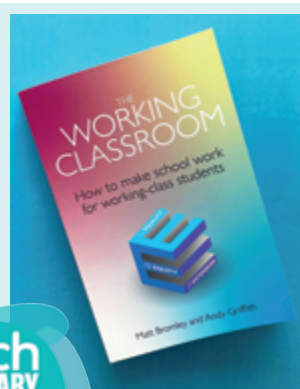
"A truly innovative MIS based around School Leadership drivers. This refreshing and innovative platform is designed with senior leaders in mind, delivering fast, highly visual and accessible information, without the need to filter data from complex reporting processes. The clever grouping of data by leadership responsibility allows for a truly collaborative approach to data sharing and review across senior teams. The ability to view live data, incidents, intervention and progress in the same place gives headteachers and their teams an extraordinary new 'live action' view of their schools. Every school leader will love this MIS!"

– Hilary Goldsmith

THE WORKING CLASSROOM

Matt Bromley and Andy Griffith (Crown House Publishing)
crownhouse.co.uk/the-working-classroom

"A bold and unapologetic book which challenges our preconceptions about the links between poverty and progress. Using a mix of personal testimony, academic theory and professional expertise, the authors give practical and tangible examples of how schools can, and do level the playing field for their students by refusing to accept the societal expectations of progress across social classes. This challenging and refreshing approach fully explains not only the possible impact of change, but also provides leaders with the tools and knowledge needed to tackle inequality."



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY
COMMENDED



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY
COMMENDED

KNOW MY SCHOOL

2Simple

2simple.com/know-my-school

"Targeted at leaders preferring to take a methodical and structured approach to school evaluation, Know My School breaks the Ofsted framework down into visual categories, with example criteria and descriptors by which leaders can carry out a thorough self-assessment. The ability to attach evidence and 'prove' grading offers a useful way of supporting both new and experienced leaders with all the figures, evidence and assessment needed for external school inspections."

– Hilary Goldsmith

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
FINALIST

CATEGORY FINALISTS:

CLASSROOM.CLOUD | NetSupport

SAFEGUARDING AI | Real Training and Educate Ventures Research

SACHEL ONE | Satchel

AWARD WINNING
SEN TOOL

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY
COMMENDED

SNAP MATHS

Assess. Plan. Do. Review. For Maths.

Online, diagnostic profiler for Maths Learning Difficulties
with learning strategies included.

bett | AWARDS
2024
● A Hyve Event

WINNER

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
besa | 
BRITISH EDUCATIONAL
SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION

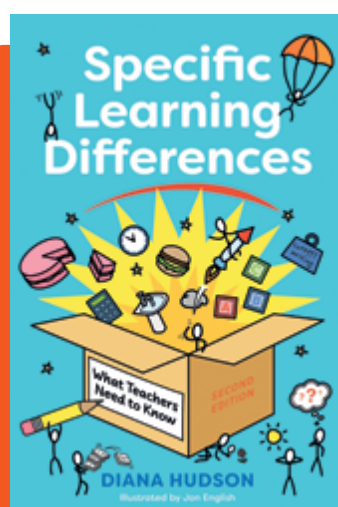
Scan
and
learn
more





WHAT WERE WE LOOKING FOR?

Physical items and electronic resources designed to support students with additional needs and make schools more inclusive

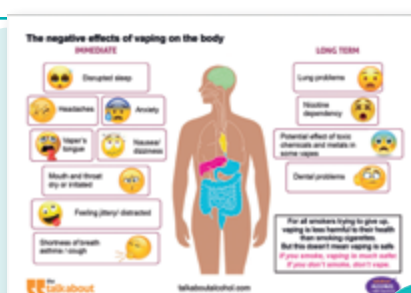


teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
WINNER

SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFERENCES - WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW (2ND ED.)

Diana Hudson (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)
tiny.cc/ts138-TA6

"This is one of those books that tells you, through its words and through its design, that it's been written and published with great care and expertise. Kindness and compassion runs throughout it - the author is clearly on these students' side, and has set about - very effectively - raising the chances of them meeting well-informed and supportive adults on their journeys through school. It should be on the reading lists of all new teachers, experienced teachers, headteachers, everyone. I'm a total fan." - Rebecca Leek



TALK ABOUT ALCOHOL - GAMES AND ACTIVITY BOX

The Talk About Trust
talkabouttrust.org

"It's reassuring that there's such an excellent and meticulously designed resource to help schools support young people in this critical area. Any kind of dependency or experimentation with substances brings risks, but especially so for vulnerable young people. This pack is sensibly put together and manageable, being the kind of thing that busy teachers can easily explore and use to prepare and deliver lesson content. My congratulations to all involved with its production." - Rebecca Leek

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY COMMENDED



SNAP MATHS

Hodder Education
tinyurl.com/ts138-TA7

"A resource that enables schools to develop a more targeted approach when implementing student support for the most universal of subjects. Developed by specialists in the field, the SNAP Maths assessment is both holistic and precise. This would have been very useful to me as a secondary school leader and SENCo when ensuring that students aren't left behind until it's too late." - Rebecca Leek

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY COMMENDED

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
FINALIST

CATEGORY FINALISTS:

100 IDEAS FOR SECONDARY TEACHERS: SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ADHD | Jannine Perryman (Bloomsbury Publishing)
UK BEHAVIOURWATCH | Education Brands
WORDSHARK ONLINE | Wordshark Online

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



Schools hub

Explore online resources that support Art & Design and History learning through the world's greatest collection of portraits.



Find out more at
npg.org.uk/schools-hub/

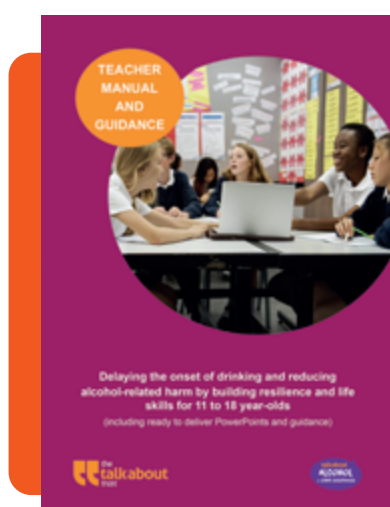
Image (top right): Queen Elizabeth I (The Dishley portrait) (detail) by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, c. 1592.
Image (bottom left): Mai (Omari) (detail) by Sir Joshua Reynolds, c. 1776. Purchased jointly by the Board of Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery and the J. Paul Getty Trust, 2023, with support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and Art Fund and other generous supporters.
All images © National Portrait Gallery, London.

WINNERS

FREE RESOURCE

WHAT WERE WE LOOKING FOR?

Print and electronic resources available to secondary schools entirely free of charge, other than for P&P (excluding any time-limited offers)



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
WINNER

TALK ABOUT ALCOHOL - TEACHER MANUAL AND GUIDANCE

The Talk About Trust
talkabouttrust.org

"This resource features exercises designed to accurately assess your students' understanding of drinking, with many options for tailoring the content according to the needs and level of your class. The information provided is easy to follow, well-designed and sensibly focused." – Hannah Day

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY
COMMENDED

SCHOOLS HUB

National Portrait Gallery
npg.org.uk/schools-hub

"The National Gallery has developed a range of activities pertaining to a wide range of portraits that encourage detailed looking over a period of time, which is a great way of helping students get past those initial glances and start thinking more deeply about art. The focus is largely on observation and discussion, and while I would have liked to see some more links to practical work, what's here is easy to navigate and use as a discussion base." – Hannah Day



Safeguarding INSET pack



teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
HIGHLY
COMMENDED

SAFEGUARDING INSET PACK

High Speed Training
tiny.cc/ts138-TA8

"A well-trained staff body is key to good safeguarding. This in-person INSET content is easy to deliver, with slides and additional resources that are clearly presented, and covers all key points." – Hannah Day

teach
SECONDARY
AWARDS 2024
FINALIST

CATEGORY FINALISTS:

APP FOR SOCIAL ACTION COURSE | Apps for Good

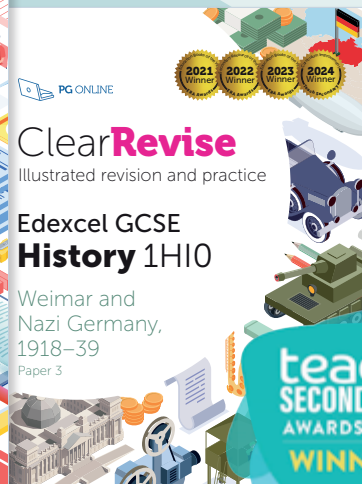
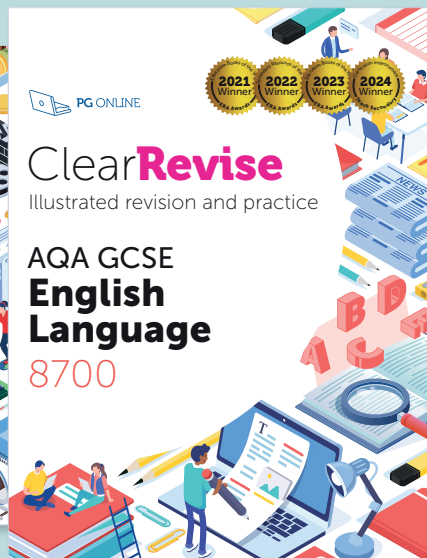
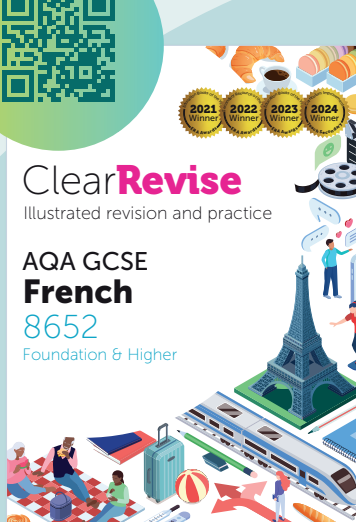
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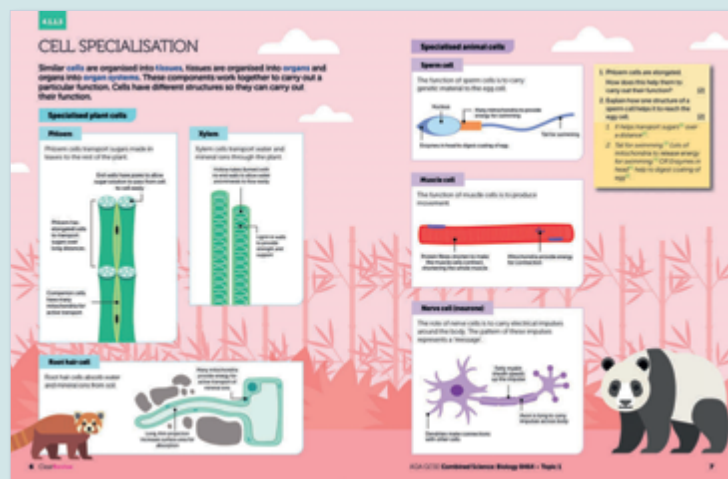
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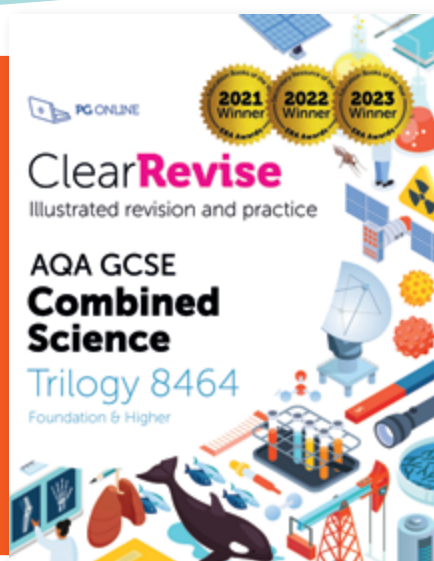


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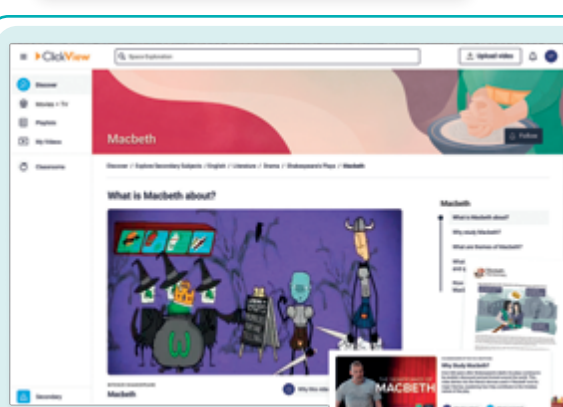
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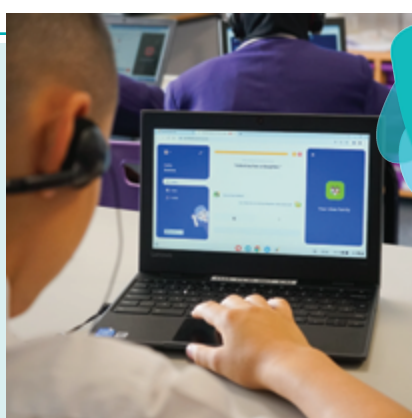
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Strict, yet kind

Paul Dix explains how to balance the strictness needed for behavioural rules to be established, with the kindness that ensures students will want to follow them...

Strict teachers in the common imagination are terrifying beasts. Physically imposing, gratuitously loud and generally terrifying. Trunchbull doesn't do relationships, the Demon Headmaster likes control too much and Professor Snape don't play.

In real teaching, strict is good. Being nasty with it is not. It's a fine line for some. You can be strict whilst being kind, and you can be strict while being relational. Just don't be strict and be a dick with it.

Consistency of response

Nitpicking and over-controlling through a million unnecessary rules does nobody any good. Micromanaging humans never goes well. Just think about your own autonomy at work. If you want to be strict

from teaching, or so that multiple spreadsheets of responses can be produced by the spreadsheet people. Plan it so that it is *strict* and *kind*, and it will be.

Allow everyone to improvise their own responses to poor behaviour, and the variables will kill your consistency stone dead. Gaps will appear, and those students who like to take advantage of such gaps will be encouraged. It's the gaps between adults that allows, and can even foster poor behaviour. Lack of clarity, lack of agreement and lack of consistency are sweet treats for the impulsive ones.

Take-up time

That's why you need a simple plan for the wobbly moments. All adults with the same consistency. A tight and kind response. Imagine the impact of that on the behaviour of your class or school, just for the next

script for when a child is repeatedly disruptive, a plan in each classroom that's designed to support (not simply to sanction), and language that seeks to encourage, not condemn.

The speed at which warnings and reminders can be delivered by a frustrated adult is incredible. Poor behaviour tempts us into an unnecessarily urgent emotional response, when what's really needed is 'take-up time' between conversations – time for the irritated, seething and/or embarrassed student to recover, time for you to catch up with those who have been on it from the start, and time for you to *breathe*.

“Poor behaviour tempts us into an unnecessarily urgent emotional response”

and utterly reasonable you need to centre your behaviour work around three simple rules and what we know works – a properly consistent response.

Maintaining a consistency of response from all adults working with children and young people is critical. It's important enough to put every other strategy into a firm second place, so it makes sense to plan it and agree on it.

Not, mind you, so that all human empathy is sucked

30 days. It would be transformational.

Behaviour would be as much about the team as the individual, as it should be.

If you can embed a consistency that makes it impossible to put a cigarette paper between the response of one adult and the next, that transformation will last.

None of this needs to be oppressive. You can have a well-structured intervention



The minute we need

Standing over a child and demanding that they immediately comply might feel like the right thing to do in the moment, but there are always consequences – and not just for the child. Take-up time slows escalation, protects pride and minimises disruption. It ensures that students are never cornered.

Often, a reminder or a warning of poor behaviour is just bare. It might be given across a crowded room, or incidentally and not be underlined. Better instead to deliver it privately, with one minute of your time, because that investment of a minute now could save a great deal of time later.

The minute is a check-in to make sure that they understand the task. That they're sitting where they

can focus. That they can calm their other thoughts. It's the minute all of us need when we wobble. Done gently, it's always seen as fair and kind. It's a relational minute that the student will remember, even if things don't go the way you want: *'I know, you checked in with me too, I'm sorry, but...'*

Whatever the outcome, your behaviour starts to have an effect. You're paying currency into the emotional bank, even when things are difficult. That matters.

Unexpected moments

Even with the best planning, we can be blindsided. You might have given perfect private reminders and warnings, but they didn't quite land, and now the student decides to escalate.

The third time you intervene will be the last time that the student gets to be in control of what happens. After that point, you'll decide if they move

Instead of reaching for the panic button, try reminding the student of their previous good behaviour. I know that sounds counter-intuitive, but it works. Right at the moment when you land the consequence on the child and they start to protest, you lead with, *'Do you remember earlier/ yesterday/last week, when you worked with so much determination? That is who I need to see today.'*

From the child's perspective, this is an unexpected moment. Conversations don't usually go like this. Just as their urge to protest the consequence is rising, they're reminded that they're better than that. That they can and will achieve. That they can find calm and focus in your classroom.

Reminding them of previous good behaviour is easy if you practice positive noticing – then you'll have lots of ready examples of the good stuff.

Three simple rules

'Strict' is about making sure that students follow the rules, so it makes sense for those rules to be made as simple as possible. No more than three, represented by three words, and referred to in every conversation around behaviour, be it to correct or to praise – the same three pegs that everyone returns to.

They shouldn't be rules that fall from the mouths of adults and are endlessly repeated on roller banners around the site. They should be rules that make sense, and can be adapted to any and every situation. You don't need the false consistency of 50 rules; you need the true

BEST BITS OF SCRIPT

What you say matters, and what you say in those tricky situations matters most of all. Your tone and physical language also matter, of course – but which words work best?

- Use **'I've noticed...'** when correcting poor behaviour, or recognising those going over and above. That way, there is no judgement or blame assumed.

- Try saying the words, **'I hear what you are saying, and yet...'** to direct conversations back to where they need to be

- A positive segue from a difficult conversation can be to say, **'It is important that we remember our rule about Respect – thank you for listening so well, that is how we do it here.'**

consistency of three.

There is a deep consistency to the same three words – Ready, Respectful, Safe – being used consistently, every day, by everyone. Very quickly, these rules become *'How we do it here'* and the school culture shifts. Before you know it, parents are using the same rules at home, and relational practice starts to make sense in school and beyond the school gates.

If you want to upgrade your school culture, then being strict is important. Being kind is essential.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Dix is a children's behaviour expert, bestselling author of the *When The Adults Change...* series and creator of the online Behaviour Change programme for schools; his latest book, *When the Parents Change, Everything Changes*, is available now (£10.99, Penguin)

within
the
room or
need to
move out of
it. It might
be tempting
to deliver
the third
intervention a
little more harshly.
Almost as a threat to
what might happen:
*'If you don't stop doing
that RIGHT NOW, I will
have to have you removed
by the gnarled deputy head
with the shiny suit and
thousand-yard stare...'*

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ABOUT ME:

Andrea Tyrrell is a Head of Faculty at The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls, juggling various roles as a mum, ECT mentor, staff governor, associate professional development leader and advocate for the National Centre for Computing Education (NCCE).



TALKING ABOUT: COMPUTER SCIENCE CPD AND CERTIFICATION

“How did you find out about the KS3 and GCSE Computer Science subject knowledge certificate?”

It was April 2022. I signed up for the certificate at the start of the school year, but as a busy head of faculty, I ignored the emails for a few months. Then, however, I started attending CPD courses where I'd pick up useful tips on how to approach topics, or make notes on nifty resources shared with us by an NCCE facilitator. It made me pick it back up.

I would get a buzz every time I earned a badge, which there are plenty of. I loved how the system kept track of what I participated in, so I kept at it. It just goes to show that we teachers love a bit of praise and recognition, just like our students!

“Why did you decide to sign up for the certificate?”

I knew that to improve as a teacher and head of faculty, I'd need to carve out some time for my own learning. I wanted to complete something tangible and useful. After all, I didn't want to suggest courses to other members of my department and encourage them to complete the certificate if I hadn't attempted it myself.

It was also the right time for me to connect with other computing teachers outside of my school, try out new teaching methods and share ideas. The great thing about the NCCE CPD is that you can meet people from across the country who may be teaching in different setups, and you can share knowledge and some hints and tips.

“Has your teaching changed since earning the certificate?”

The most significant transformation I've experienced is a heightened awareness of

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inclusive computing. I've actively worked to create a more welcoming environment for everyone who enters computing. My goal is to avoid overwhelming students who might feel that computer science is not for them.

I want more pupils from all backgrounds to choose computer science as a GCSE option. We are (thankfully) moving away from this idea that computer science is 'hard', and that only 'strong maths pupils' should sign up for it. There's more work to be done in this area, but the certificate and courses are a start.

“Would you recommend the certificate to other teachers?”

Yes, definitely! The certificate is awarded by BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT – a recognised professional body. I believe it has bolstered my academic reputation, and further enhanced both my credibility and that of my department, since most people don't see how much computing teachers work behind the scenes. The certificate is a reminder to us all of the hours we have put in, and that our subject involves deep learning and constant practice.

The certificate inspired me to encourage my own students to consider careers in computing, and to help them accept that learning never stops – especially in the field of technology.

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TEACHING *in the round*

Nikki Cunningham-Smith sets out the tangible improvements to behaviour, workload and mental health you can secure – for teachers and pupils – via holistic teaching techniques

As an educator, thinking back on how you first started on your journey into teaching, you might recall spending time in a lecture theatre, being drilled on various educational theories and pedagogies. There may have been periods when you were carefully considering the type of teaching style you were going to adapt, and the type of scenarios best suited to each (The Authority Style, The Delegator Style, The Facilitator Style, The Demonstrator Style, The Hybrid Style and so forth).

Perhaps you were among those tasked with thinking about learning styles. Depending on where you were and when, you might have initially looked at three, only to see them expand over the next few years – visual (spatial), aural (auditory), verbal (linguistic), physical (kinaesthetic), logical (mathematical), social (interpersonal), solitary (intrapersonal)...

In most instances, it's those seemingly strong theories that we'll tend to reflect upon the most, if only because their tangible nature allows us to assess their effectiveness. Yet as we navigate a modern teaching landscape where Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) are increasingly the dominant factors in students' ability (or otherwise) to access the curriculum and/or progress their learning, might there be an opportunity for us to

foster the principles of holistic teaching, in relation to the school curriculum?

Holistic teaching adopts the philosophy of educating the whole person, beyond the academics. Emphasis is placed on creating positive learning environments, in order to remove external factors that may be presenting barriers to learning. It's far from a new concept, having been

“You might be surprised by the extent to which you're already promoting holistic learning”

developed and refined over the years to varying degrees, in practices made famous by the likes of Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner.

So how can we practitioners create a holistic learning environment? Well, you might be surprised by the extent to which you're already promoting holistic learning through your practice as a matter of habit, without even realising it. Let me outline here some key elements of holistic teaching to help you identify those strategies you might wish to develop further, and others that you could incorporate within your daily practice for your students' benefit.

Integrate social emotional learning

By explicitly teaching skills such as empathy, self-regulation and conflict resolution, and incorporating

these into your lessons, you can start to build a safe learning environment that promotes a freedom to learn, free of distractions. Utilising key skills such as active listening and regular check-ins throughout the lesson will, over time, help you more accurately gauge pupils' readiness for learning, and their level of understanding and engagement with the topic.

Personalise learning

Providing multiple pathways for students to access content – through different levels of difficulty, varied materials or flexible grouping – will empower learners to work at their own pace. This can be further supported by providing pupils with personalised goals and targets that they can achieve and manage individually throughout the lesson.

Promote collaborative learning

Group work and peer learning lets pupils put into practice any skills they've been taught around strengthening their emotional intelligence. Encouraging pupils to work in diverse groups on solving problems, learn from each other and share ideas will not only improve their

understanding of the topic at hand, but also build on their 'hard' collaborative skills (communication and teamwork) and 'soft' skills (social awareness).

This will present opportunities for you to develop your classroom space as a community. Bestow upon your pupils responsibility for ensuring that everyone in class can exercise their right to learn. All being well, this should result in a better sense of shared responsibility and mutual support.

Use real-world examples

Incorporate real-world examples and actual events into your planning where you can. This can make your pupils' learning more meaningful to them, and help them apply the academic context of what they're learning about to their everyday lives, personal interests and local communities. It may also present students with deeper learning opportunities at home, bringing about a further cementing and embedding of knowledge outside the classroom.

Provide regular feedback and positive reinforcement

Giving pupils timely and specific feedback will help you look beyond just their academic outcomes and stay

focused on their efforts and growth. By doing so, you can help pupils better understand their own learning processes and how they might be improved – think ‘show your working’ in a maths equation, but applied to a pupil’s learning journey.

Accompanying this should be celebrations of pupils’ achievements, big and small. Marking those small wins will foster a positive, growth-orientated classroom atmosphere, while also bringing about a form of

intrinsic motivation that’s hard to achieve, but plays a big role in educating the whole self.

Build strong teacher-pupil relationships

Taking the time to learn about your pupils’ individual needs, interests and strengths can produce strong and trusting relationships that will thrive within a supportive learning environment. A willingness and ability to model positive behaviour in your interactions with pupils will demonstrate to them

your genuine care for their wellbeing, and further contribute to the creation of an environment where learners feel safe in expressing themselves.

This can also help you navigate and manage the fear some pupils can have of appearing wrong in front of their classmates, and prevent them from opting to disengage so as to avoid humiliation. If they can feel safe in their incorrectness, yet supported in their willingness to try regardless, then a willingness to learn through uncertainty will surely follow.

Incorporate mindfulness practices

Engaging with widely used mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing or guided imagery, could provide pupils with a valuable form of support and help them manage their stress levels. Mindfulness activities can potentially take place during natural transition periods within lessons, thus avoiding any impacts on learning time.

For example, when a resource is being handed out to the class (think books or worksheets), use that time to practise box breathing (see panel) to help get the class more focused. When transitioning from group to individual work, you could deploy a music cue to trigger a change of work tone, or a movement break, to help pupils re-energise and refocus.

Get creative

Interdisciplinary approaches to learning present opportunities for connecting across subjects, which can in turn create space for self-expression and critical thinking beyond the curriculum – fusing, say, elements of history and art together, or combining



TRY IT YOURSELF – BOX BREATHING

- ▶ Sit or stand in a comfortable position – eyes can be open or closed
- ▶ Relax your shoulder and jaw muscles
- ▶ Inhale slowly through your nose while counting to 4
- ▶ Hold your breath for a further count of 4
- ▶ Slowly exhale through your mouth while counting to 4
- ▶ Having exhaled, hold your breath again for another count of 4
- ▶ Repeat the process until you’ve attained the desired level of relaxation and focus

science and drama.

By utilising holistic approaches to teaching, you’ll be able to build an environment that’s more impactful for the learning experience. If educators are willing and able to look beyond their immediate curriculum demands and engage with such practices, then there’s a high likelihood that pupils’ motivation levels will increase, accompanied by boosts in their persistence, resilience and eventually, overall performance. Your classroom environment will have become a more engaging and positive space in which to spend time, making pupils more inclined to return to that place lesson after lesson.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nikki Cunningham-Smith is an assistant headteacher based in Gloucestershire

Embrace YOUR FLAWS

Every teacher has their weaknesses, concedes **Colin Foster** – but instead of letting ourselves be hindered by them, let's harness them...

Every teacher has weaknesses. We're all bound to be better at some things than others, and being aware of what they are is surely a good thing.

All of us will have some weaknesses in aspects of our subject knowledge. We'll lack experience in dealing with certain situations, or in leading certain kinds of classroom activities. Some of us may have emotional weaknesses or triggers of various kinds that can prevent us from doing the job in the way that we would wish to.

All this is inevitable, as long as teachers continue to be drawn from members of the human race. AI might be getting better, but hasn't taken over completely just yet...

Covering up

There are many ways in which we might try to work on these things, so that over time we 'improve' ourselves. But this is an exhausting, lifelong process, and often one with no quick, easy fixes. This means that we must often simply learn to live with some of our weaknesses – at least to some extent – and make peace with them. In these cases, then, what should we actually *do* with our weaknesses?

Every teacher must be a learner. We're all on a similar journey, though we also know that we'll never reach the destination of being a perfect, '*super teacher*', with a formidable set of superhero

skills and zero weaknesses. On the contrary, every teacher has to live day to day with being imperfect.

At which point, the question then becomes, '*How do we do that?*' Related to which is a follow-up question: '*Should we try to hide our weaknesses from the students we teach?*'

There can certainly be an incentive in some schools for teachers to try and conceal their weak spots. This may be especially the case for

“Every teacher has to live day to day with being imperfect”

teachers with any kind of leadership responsibility, or ECTs who feel – or are – ‘on probation’ in some sense. We want to make a positive impression on our colleagues and parents, and of course, win the confidence and respect of the students that we teach. Otherwise, our daily lives will be difficult, to say the least.

Covering up your weaker sides is a natural, human response to fear of other people's reactions. Advertising our vulnerabilities may not always be best advised, if we want to gain and retain people's respect – but what if people see our attempts at covering things up? Might this not turn the teacher into a less positive role model?

If students see us apparently ashamed of our weaknesses, and trying desperately to hide them,

will they start to assume that that is what they must also do with theirs?

Subject-specific anxiety

Let's take the specific example of subject-specific anxiety (though related issues will similarly apply across many other areas). According to a recent YouGov poll commissioned by the Maths Anxiety Trust, between 20% and 30% of secondary mathematics

teachers have reported sometimes suffering from maths anxiety during lessons.

Note that this specifically relates to mathematics teachers, rather than secondary teachers more generally. We might expect the percentage to be higher – perhaps considerably so – for teachers of other subjects. Among those mathematics teachers surveyed, 5 to 10% of them reported that maths anxiety occurs 'often' for them. There were similar percentages among primary teachers and TAs.

These statistics correspond to a lot of teachers and other professionals employed within schools, and yet this is still just one area. There are plenty of other subject-related anxieties that teachers might experience across other subject areas,

making this potentially just the tip of a much larger iceberg.

Misplaced confidence

We might well ask ourselves at this point, what are these teachers supposed to do? How would you advise them?

An emphasis on 'putting children first' might make us concerned that teachers' anxieties will be 'passed on' to the children, perpetuating the cycle, and that they therefore shouldn't be revealed. However, research seems to suggest that we should perhaps worry less about this than you'd think.

Adults I know with maths anxiety tend to have unfavourable memories of their school mathematics teachers. But among the people I've spoken to, at least, these are much more likely to be over-confident teachers harbouring barely any doubts about their own excellence in the subject, rather than the teacher who happens to have maths anxiety themselves.

The maths-anxious teacher might not be spreading their maths anxiety around as much as their more confident colleagues are.

Masking the issue

Putting a brave face on it, all day every day, is going to be extremely draining – and most likely, ultimately unsuccessful. Children have a knack for seeing through adults' attempts at concealing things. They may be able to detect that something's not quite right, even if they can't put their finger on what it is. Unless the teacher is a highly proficient actor, there's a good chance that they'll see through the well-meaning deception.

Where does this attempt to conceal come from, and what is it likely to lead to? It could be that teachers have internalised a view that the 'best teacher' is some flawless individual who effortlessly masters every skill and situation, but this is a fiction that's unhelpful to everyone.

Maintaining a conspiracy of silence and denial over conditions such as maths anxiety will only lead to stigma and shame, and is unrealistic and unhealthy for everyone – students and teachers alike. Do we wish to protect our students from ever knowing that such a thing as maths anxiety even exists? By doing so, don't we end up communicating that *'No one with maths anxiety should expect to succeed in becoming a teacher?'*

Honesty is the best policy

These are all deeply unhelpful messages. A more positive one might be, *'Some people get anxious about all sorts of things, and that can include maths. You don't need to be maths anxious, but we should all try to understand.'*

Perhaps schools should start viewing a maths anxious teacher as a great resource, rather than a problem. After all, here's someone with lived experience, who understands a condition that's very common in society and often found among students. Rather than attempting to hide or deny it, schools should instead *value* a maths-anxious teacher's perspective and seek to support them, while benefiting from their experience. Because they could well bring understanding and wisdom that other teachers would find it hard to provide.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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FOCUS ON: SEND

This issue, we look at how inclusive classroom practice calls for clarity as to what students need, and lessons that bring out the best in everyone...

How can we ensure that students with SEND aren't ill-served by the organisation and content of their lessons?

THE AGENDA:

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The time you set aside for creating pen portraits and pupil passports will be time well spent, advises Rebecca Leek...

70 DIFFERENT FOR GIRLS?

Hannah Day highlights the lesson adjustments that teachers can provide for students with autism – and girls, in particular



IMAGINATIVE LEAPS

Alice Guile considers how certain teaching approaches and activities can help neurodiverse students play to their strengths

The mainstream education system is designed for neurotypicals. Not *deliberately*, but rather because the system has been designed to educate the largest number of people as affordably as possible.

Since most students are neurotypical, the education system has essentially been built with their needs in mind. This means that many young people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and other neurodiverse traits will struggle to fit in educationally and socially.

Clashes between the system and the needs of neurodiverse students can cause some students to fall behind their peers educationally, and sometimes develop behavioural issues. Neurodiverse traits will hence tend to be labelled as disabilities, since the design of mainstream education system causes them to be so. In reality, however, they're *different abilities*; different ways of thinking.

Outside the box

Negative views of neurodiversity run deep. My own parents suspected me of having ADHD for many years until my partner nagged me into pursuing a diagnosis at the age of 29. They'd kept their suspicions a secret, as they thought I'd be insulted by the suggestion. In reality, it was a relief to discover that certain things I'd particularly struggled with were due to a medical issue I'd been born with. It explained a lot.

Scientifically speaking, there can be many benefits to neurodiversity. Individuals on the autistic spectrum can

be unusually sensitive to their environment, while less socially focussed. In hunter gatherer societies, individuals highly sensitive to small changes in their immediate environment would have been vital for group survival. It's entirely possible that sensitive autistic individuals would have been the first to hear predators, for example. Being sensitive to taste and smell may have further helped with alerting groups as to which foods were edible.

Additionally, neurodiverse people can often perform better than their neurotypical peers at creative

designs, the students with ADHD were more likely to include features entirely atypical of existing fruits, such as tongues, straws and even hammers.

Elsewhere, a former engineer and businessman turned dyslexia trainer, advocate and therapist named Ronald D. Davis has done extensive work showing how the ability of dyslexics to think in pictures can confer a good grasp of 3D spatial thinking – an important skill for sculptors, designers and engineers, all of whom require the ability to think in 3D in order to succeed in their roles.

body in proportion. Next, I taught them how to draw clothes on the body, and then told them to add to their basic body outline to create a quality fashion illustration. I informed them that the best designs would get a positive phone call home and be displayed on the wall.

The success criteria called for original ideas and accurate drawing – ideally both, but focussing on one would be fine. I suggested that students focused more on the originality of their ideas think of their fashion

“Neurodiverse people can often perform better than their neurotypical peers at creative thinking and imaginative problem solving tasks”

thinking and imaginative problem solving tasks. In a 2019 article for *Scientific American*, for example, cognitive psychologist Holly White described how her studies into creativity and ADHD demonstrate that people with the condition find conceptual expansion (popularly known as ‘outside the box’ thinking) much easier than their neurotypical peers (see tiny.cc/ts138-SN1).

One study saw White set university-age students with and without ADHD the task of designing a fruit that might exist on an alien planet, ending with the ideas of the ADHD group being rated as more original. While both groups incorporated fruit type features in their

Accuracy vs. originality

As a teacher with ADHD, I'm passionate about designing lessons that highlight the strengths of neurodiverse students, and encouraging other teachers to try them out. Inspired by Holly White's research, I've designed a scheme of work that rewards both *accurate drawing*, regardless of an idea's originality, and *original ideas*, regardless of the quality of drawing.

I teach both art and textiles, and settled on a series of lessons that would culminate in students creating a fashion illustration. I taught students an easy step-by-step method which would allow them to draw a basic human

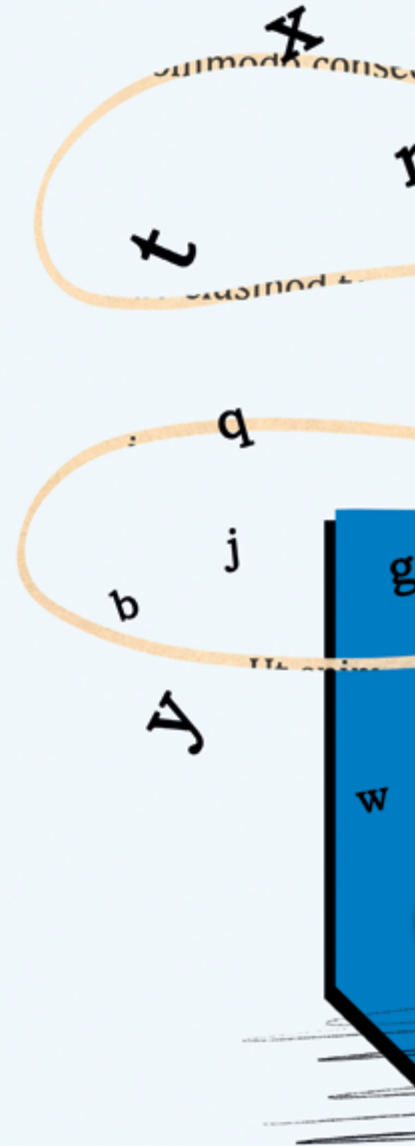


illustration as a character, and then invent a personality for them. What followed was very interesting to observe.

Some students chose to concentrate on drawing neatly and accurately, and created nice drawings with good shading, but went blank when asked about the personalities of figures wearing just a simple t-shirt and jeans.

Other students came up with creations that weren't drawn as realistically, but from which did emerge from some incredibly imaginative ideas, accompanied by descriptions of their figure's personality and even some comic impressions. One

student added to their basic figure by making them extremely overweight, describing how their fashion illustration showed an obese female drag racer. When I later called home, the child's mother told me that it was the first positive phone call home her son had ever had, and was thrilled when I praised him for his imagination.

Another student created a boxer character with a black eye called Jim Bob. A third drew his character naked, but with a black rectangle positioned in a strategic place. This latter student, on a previous occasion, had once drawn a large, inappropriate body part on my classroom wall in red crayon when my back was turned. He used the fact of him concealing his

figure's groin area with a modesty rectangle as proof of his improved maturity, and was very pleased with his achievement. I put his work on the wall.

Broaden your scope

What I've found from my teaching practice is broadly in line with Holly White's findings, in that students with ADHD, ADHD-like symptoms or who are simply more lively than average, *tend to come up with the most original ideas.*

These were the students giving the most amusing presentations of their fashion illustration characters. A secondary success criteria of the presentation was being able to make the class laugh; students who would regularly attempt this already by being disruptive

were thus able to channel their class clown talents in a more positive direction.

I would encourage any teachers wishing to support their neurodiverse students to create opportunities for imaginative, out of the box thinking and creative problem solving – something which can be done in any other subjects.

A geography teacher, for instance, could teach town planning by having students answer questions set by a textbook and writing notes, before completing a quiz in the next lesson to check their recall. Alternatively, the students could be allowed to research what town planners might need to include when planning a new town, and then give a presentation on an original idea for an eco-friendly town.

In both cases, the students are learning the same thing, but the second approach offers far more scope for out-of-the box thinking, and therefore be more likely to highlight the strengths of neurodiverse students. (Conversely, any students struggling with creative demands of this second approach could be set the first task.)

For any teachers of traditionally 'non-creative' subjects, who would like to make their teaching more creative, I'd recommend collaborating with your art, drama or music departments. Neurodiverse students have many positive qualities to contribute to the world, making it incredibly important that we create the best learning environments possible, in which they can reach their full potential.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Alice Guile is a secondary school art teacher





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Freedom from FRICTION

The time you set aside for creating pen portraits and pupil passports will be time well spent, advises **Rebecca Leek**...

In September 2024, I lost my passport for around 72 hours, and it was incredibly stressful. I needed it to change my driving licence, as I'd recently moved. Not having it made simple things, like upgrading my broadband, into an administrative nightmare.

In everyday life, a passport isn't usually essential. We can survive without one, but it does act as a gatekeeper to a better existence. It smooths the way. 'Yes you can come in,' says border control. 'Yes I can do that for you,' says the bank clerk.



'With', not 'to'

Pupil passports (also known as 'pen portraits') have been used in schools for many years now, though they became more common following the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice in 2015. Around this time, the sector was shifting its efforts towards co-production – the idea that all of those involved in SEND provision, and especially the young person themselves, should formulate a support plan together, so that final plans are done *with*, rather than *done to*.

A pupil passport, or pen portrait, is a means by which students can influence what adults know about them, in their own words. The process of creating the pupil passport itself will involve thinking about the most useful information the young person's teachers and support staff should know.

If produced correctly, the finished document can then smooth a young person's passage through their days at secondary. No longer will they have to repeatedly

advocate for themselves: 'Please, can I have the enlarged paper copy?'; 'May I leave five minutes early, as it takes me longer to walk to the dining room?'

As teenagers, having to find the strength to continually ask for these reasonable adjustments is, quite frankly, not reasonable. A good pen portrait will let their days flow more easily: 'Here is your prepared material,' says the maths teacher. 'Please go to your next lesson when you're ready,' says the cover supervisor. Doors are opened, and difficult encounters become rarer.

Key considerations

However, pupil passports are only of value if done *well*. If they're not, they'll barely be worth the paper they're written on – so be sure to consider the following:

1. Has enough time been allocated for co-production? There should be no quick 'copy and paste' job from last year's document to the next.

Pupil passports should be based on conversations with the young person, their parents and those teachers who know them well. Discerning and capturing what's really useful to know – that's where the value lies.

2. Are these documents 'lit up' for staff?

A pupil passport sat in a filing cabinet helps no one. Have you allowed enough time at the start of the year for INSET sessions? Do your heads of department talk to their teams about them? It can be helpful to invite teachers and/or students to talk to staff about the difference a pupil passport has made for them.

3. Is the content properly understood?

Your school's SENCo should be willing and available to talk staff through the more specialist wording that can be found in a pupil passport. If a student's document states that they have 'interoception difficulties' or 'hyposensitivity relating



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A pupil passport template
bit.ly/ts138-PP1

to temperature', what does this actually mean?

4. Is the information practical?

It's all very well recording that the young person can 'Get overwhelmed in a noisy classroom' – but what can we actually do about that?

Provide guidance: 'I can get overwhelmed in a noisy classroom – give me a warning if it is going to be a loud, interactive lesson, and the option of sitting outside and working in a pair or on my own.'

Pupil passports can help to oil the cogs in a busy secondary school. Co-produced carefully, their very creation will help your young people feel consulted, listened to and involved, and help smooth their – and your – path through the day. Lower stress leads to more learning, making for a win-win.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

DIFFERENT FOR GIRLS?

Hannah Day highlights the lesson adjustments that teachers can provide for students with autism – and girls, in particular

We frequently don't understand how autism impacts upon the daily lives of 50% of those affected by it. That's because autism in girls and boys looks different, with the most commonly understood traits being found in boys. To put it another way, autistic behaviours in girls don't always look to us like typical autistic behaviours.

As a result, a significant proportion of girls aren't diagnosed until their late teens, often after experiencing severe mental health issues. In many cases, had their autistic status been known sooner, these challenges could have been lessened, if not avoided altogether.

We must do better. By understanding how autism is more likely to manifest in girls and picking up on signs sooner, we can adapt our teaching to ensure more supportive and inclusive classrooms.

While each person, autistic or not, will have their own mix of the behaviours discussed below, they're among those that girls with ASD are more likely to experience. So what can we, as teachers, do to help?

Perfectionism

It's wonderful when students want to work hard, but perfectionism can cause unnecessary stress. Autistic girls are more likely to want order; a need for control and a desire to avoid confusion or uncertainty can feed into perfectionism. Factor in the way in which they're also

more likely to have black and white thinking, and you have a student who will work until a simple task has turned into a week-long endeavour – often at the cost of rest and good mental health.

Introducing time limits or word counts to tasks can help to prevent this kind of burnout. By referring to work in progress as a 'draft', we can also show how learning is a *process*, thereby lessening the pressure further.

It can also be helpful on occasion to highlight mistakes of your own – either as they occur, or when errors from your past might be relevant to the situation at hand. This lets all students know that you're learning and reflecting too, alongside them.

Responding to change

Consistency helps people with autism manage the world, which is why sudden changes can throw them. If we can somehow manage that change, and show how elements of it can still be controlled, then those stress-related changes can be shown as being not so scary after all.

Give students all the

themselves, and what will be done for them. Be clear as to what is and isn't their responsibility, and give them clarity on precisely what they'll need to do. They'll need to get themselves to a new room, but you will have the space set up and ready for them.

Involve them. Ask if there's anything in particular that they're concerned about, and work through how you can potentially lessen those worries. Could a new room be visited beforehand? Can photos taken at a planned trip destination be viewed online in advance? The process of considering how they will navigate their new surroundings or arrangements will serve to empower them, and make

the change itself easier to adjust to.

Difficulty with instructions

Autistic girls generally fall into one of two extremes – very compliant, or very oppositional. ODD

“Defiance can be the result of frustration at not understanding instructions”

information they'll need to do this in advance of any major changes. Walk them through it, covering what they'll need to do



(oppositional defiant disorder) is often linked to ASD, but that's not to say the two are always linked. Defiance can be the result of frustration at not understanding instructions or social context.

Avoid vague terms. For example, when asking a girl with autism for a range of examples, you need to give a firm number. You may find yourself needing to rewrite instructions to make certain expectations and parameters more clear.

Above all, be sure to break instructions down. Some students might need to be provided with one requirement at a time, while others can handle more, so familiarise yourself with how much your ASD students can manage.

Tell them what they're going to do each lesson and how the course builds. Year plans can be particularly useful, and be sent home so that parents can help to prep the students over the coming months. Give examples where you can – such as how to lay out their work – so that students can see exactly what will be required of them.

Reticence in class

While delayed speech is part of autism, the worry of not understanding cues, questions and implied expectations means that talking in class can entail huge additional stresses for an ASD child. Among girls, the extra effort that goes into masking awareness – if not practical understanding – of social expectations can turn speaking up into a terrifying experience. Which is why these students should never be put on the spot.

Flipped teaching can give ASD girls questions in advance, allowing them to select which they would like to answer. If needed, they

could write their answers out beforehand and once in class. They or you could then read the answer out, removing the fear of them forgetting or tripping over their words. Techniques such as Think, Pair, Share will allow ASD girls to work with others and share their ideas in groups, thus avoiding the stress that might come when addressing the whole class.

I'm also a huge fan of the personal whiteboard. Using them to write answers down and display them, rather than voicing them aloud, will ensure that everyone is still able to contribute to whole class activities at all times.

Another approach can be to use Post-it notes, or organise silent debates, where ideas and questions regarding the lesson content can be collected without a word being spoken.

Difficulty expressing emotions

To properly understand and express your emotions, you have to first be able to identify and label them – a huge challenge for many on the ASD spectrum.

Often, the more emotional an ASD girl becomes, the harder it will be for them to actually express what they're feeling. We mustn't fall into the trap of believing that a failure to *show* emotions is the same as not *feeling* emotions.

Red/amber/green-rated armbands can be a useful tool for communicating emotions non-verbally. These can let autistic girls signal, for example, that they're *'feeling fine and are happy to be involved in the lesson'* (green); *'happy to be there and work, but reluctant to work with others or be asked too many questions'* (amber); or *'I'm struggling and may need to leave the room'* (red).

I've found this to be a great way of letting students silently let me know what approach to teaching and questioning they can manage

AT A GLANCE

Place this chart somewhere you can regularly review, allowing yourself to become familiar with these key recommendations

Perfectionism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce time limits and word counts • Refer to work as a draft • Point out your mistakes
Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give info in advance • Be clear on what they need to do and what will be down to you • Allow them to see new spaces beforehand – digitally, if doing so in person won't be possible
Difficulty with instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid vague language • Break down instructions • Share course structures so they can see at a glance what to expect • Use examples of past work.
Speaking in class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't put them on the spot • Use flipped teaching so they can pre-prepare answers • Think, Pair, Share. • Whiteboards and Post-it notes can be a substitute for verbal answers
Difficulty expressing emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAG-rated armbands
Difficulty starting projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid demanding terms • Encourage one task at a time

each lesson – sometimes with bands changing midway through a class.

Difficulty starting tasks

This can be one of the most frustrating aspects of ASD, and not just for teachers. Like many aspects of autism, it can overlap with a possible diagnosis of PDA (pathological demand avoidance) – but whatever the cause, building a relationship based on trust will need to be your foundation.

Avoid demanding terms, such as 'must', 'now' or 'need'. Instead, try to present options, such as a choice of which task to do first, which pen to use, or if possible, whether to attempt a task by hand or by using a computer. This can give the ASD girl a sense of control.

Encouraging one small job at a time – even it's simply

adding a title to a piece of work – can help the student to focus on each successive stage, rather than the whole task at once. This is obviously time consuming, however, so if possible, enlist a TA to break those tasks down and prompt the student as needed.

The approaches outlined here – some of which have previously been suggested to me by students or their parents – have helped us to become a more inclusive and effective college. We hope to continue on this journey, to ensure all students, including our ASD girls, can truly flourish.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hannah Day is head of art, media and film at Ludlow College

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What's New?

Our pick of the latest solutions and innovations for secondary education

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4 Year-round history support

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5 Effective maths transitions

The New Group Maths Test (NGMT), developed by assessment experts GL Assessment, is a new termly, adaptive assessment that's especially effective for supporting teachers with pupils moving from primary to secondary school.

Its adaptive algorithm adjusts question difficulty based on responses, offering you valuable insights into each learner's strengths, knowledge gaps and areas for development. Auto-marked for efficiency, NGMT will save you time, reduce your workload and provide you with reliable data. It also integrates with GL Assessment's Testwise reporting platform, offering custom data views by class, gender or SEND status to support more targeted teaching. Find out more at gl-assessment.co.uk/ngmt



6 Cutting-edge knowledge

Learning never stops, especially in the field of technology. Consider the story of Andrea Tyrell, Head of Faculty at The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls, who achieved a computer science subject knowledge certificate

through the National Centre for Computing Education, and has this to say: *“It’s impacted how I approach topics at KS3 level and has changed the order of topics we teach...I believe [the pupils] are experiencing an effective and engaging learning experience as a result.”* Read more about Andrea’s story via tiny.cc/ts138-NCCE, and find out why more teachers should consider enrolling on the programme today by visiting nccce.io/ks3-gcse

7 Simplifying STEAM

Strawbees provides hands-on learning that sparks curiosity and develops essential 21st century skills, with the understanding that the arts and creativity are as important as other STEM subjects.

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8 Free space education

As part of the UK Space Agency’s Space to Learn programme, the National Space Academy is offering space science workshops, careers conferences and space camps to UK secondary students – completely free of charge.

Space Camps are taking place across the UK, providing students with exciting and immersive space science experiences that feature hands-on activities and talks from STEM professionals. The one-day Careers Conference events, meanwhile, allow your students to explore the huge variety of space careers out there, and hear from real space industry professionals.

Finally, the Space Masterclasses are delivered by specially trained science teachers, who can visit your school to conduct a curriculum-linked workshop of your choice. Learn more and apply at nationalspaceacademy.org/space-to-learn, or email spacetolearn@spacecentre.co.uk



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10



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The projects funded by the grants can cover any area(s) of STEM, and must provide students with opportunities to develop and embed key skills, such as research, problem solving and data handling. Through the scheme, students can also gain insights into potential careers through regular engagement with one or more STEM professionals. Lots of support is available from the Schools Engagement team, ranging from online introductory sessions, to feedback and guidance on applications. Find out more at royalsociety.org/partnership



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Sort your CYBERSECURITY

LGfL's Gareth Jelley discusses the elements that ought to form the foundations of every school's cybersecurity policy

What should be the starting point for a school's cybersecurity policy?

Much of it comes down to setting expectations. A cybersecurity policy needs to set out the roles of different parties within the school and what's expected from each, before going into more detail regarding expectations around cloud services and user account standards.

The latter might include things like setting password policies that require a certain level of password complexity, mandating multi-factor authentication wherever possible, establishing the need for regular data backups, and generally defining the things everyone assumes will already be in place (while checking that they actually are).

How large should a school's technical team typically be?

This can vary significantly depending on the school's approach to technology. An average-sized secondary school will likely have between two and four people – one appointed as a network manager, and others in technical or supporting roles.

A network manager's responsibilities will include carrying out regular replacements of IT kit based on a 3- to 5-year lifecycle and overseeing the school's IT network as a whole, ensuring all devices are protected with

appropriate antivirus measures, that servers are frequently backed up, and so forth.

Since network managers are less likely to be tasked with everyday troubleshooting, they should have the capacity to monitor this bigger picture, and attend to the strategic planning that will be needed if a school's cybersecurity measures are to work effectively.

What attributes should school leaders be looking for when appointing staff to those roles?

Besides obviously needing someone who's technically competent, you'll want a capable communicator with good organisational and strategic planning skills. There's nothing worse than a network manager who rarely leaves the office to talk with staff, as they'll be the last ones to discover that, for example, all staff have started using a third-party piece of software that the school's data has been exposed to.

What does best practice for logging IT management activity look like?

There should be an IT risk register to help you plan the replacement of items falling out of support. What schools can often overlook, however, is the importance of keeping good IT *asset registers* to track things like security certificates, which operating systems run on what devices and the software being used in school – crucial details for keeping your school's IT secure.

Where's the dividing line between a school's day-to-day management of their cybersecurity, and any policies/measures set by their governance structure?

Matters of decision-making and how budgets should be allocated from available funds are largely delegated to schools themselves. Within MATs, however, there can be huge variations between smaller trusts made of several local schools and those that operate nationally with a far more centralised approach to doing things.

The latter will usually have strong core IT teams in place that essentially dictate what their schools need to be doing. They'll often invest in skilled central teams, and appoint individuals to central roles with cybersecurity oversight spanning multiple schools as one of their key responsibilities.

Schools left to manage cybersecurity matters for themselves will mainly refer to guidance passed down from the DfE. The department's Cyber Security Standards for Schools and Colleges (see tiny.cc/ts138-HT1) are now starting to drive improvements in how schools see and focus on cybersecurity issues.

Is there a core list of cybersecurity tools and measures that no school should be without?

The DfE cyber security standards is a good place to start. Among others, they mention the requirement for good backup solutions and state that schools need to have enterprise-grade antivirus solutions in place.

However, since they are standards, as opposed to regulations, it's advice schools can choose to take on board, or decide is less of a priority compared to other areas. There is, however, a clear bridge from there to issues of safeguarding – and with Ofsted as

focused as it is on safeguarding matters, that can be a major factor on school's decisions around cybersecurity.

If you're not doing enough to look after your students' data, you're not keeping them safe. Information concerning where they live, what clubs they might belong to, who their appropriate contacts are – it's going to be stored on an IT system. If that system's insecure, that's a safeguarding failure.

When deciding between and testing different security solutions, what avenues are open to schools that they might not be aware of?

When choosing products and systems, schools face the same kind of challenges that corporates do. You've got to either

believe the sales pitch from the vendor, or spend time setting up, testing and reviewing the solution yourself. There are some publications out there which perform independent reviews – like *AV TEST*, which performs a monthly test of antivirus products – so you can trust what they're talking about.

There are also some tools that many schools will already have as part of an existing service subscription, but which they might not know about. Office 365 Education, for example, includes a feature that will give your school a security score out of 100, which you can improve by turning certain security settings on or off.

What are some of the main cybersecurity oversights or pitfalls that schools can overlook?

Make sure any new kit acquired by your school is properly configured and has its default passwords changed, and avoid consumer-grade devices. The latter can be seen in, for instance, the growing uptake among schools of IP-enabled doorbells for security purposes. They're cost effective and easy to use, but the products won't have been subject to rigorous security testing to check whether it's actually a good fit.

CCTV systems can present particular risks. If configured to be remotely viewable off-site, they can present an

4 STRATEGIES FOR TECH-ENABLED SAFEGUARDING

In a constantly evolving digital world, safeguarding strategies must keep pace to ensure that technology supports, rather than hinders schools' responsibility for keeping their young people safe.

The four key strategies below can help schools use technology to both enhance students' learning and strengthen their safeguarding practice.

1. Set clear policies and procedures

It takes everyone in a school to keep children safe, which is why clear safeguarding policies and procedures matter. Schools should avoid vague or confusing language in shaping safeguarding guidelines. A simple statement of a school's commitment to protect all children online can underpin everything else – including clear instructions on how teachers should report safeguarding concerns, gather key details and contact parents. This will help to ensure issues are managed confidently and consistently right across the school.

2. Establish robust systems for safeguarding support

Technology can be a powerful safeguarding tool in schools, but the systems teachers use must be set up to prevent children who may be at risk from slipping through the cracks.

Software that flags unexplained absences in real time will help teachers identify any safeguarding concerns and respond to them quickly – but if a system automatically generates alerts

throughout the day when a child is off school ill, it can distract the teacher from spotting genuine issues requiring immediate attention.

3. Engage partners

When you have a child who is being bullied online it's not always easy to know how to help – But teachers aren't on their own when it comes to keeping children safe.

The relationships between schools and parents can be a firm foundation from which to start addressing issues together. With support from both home and school, it's easier to spot signs of social withdrawal, anxiety or declining academic performance that may indicate a child is struggling.

Schools concerned about cyberbullying can also partner with local charities specialising in teaching young people about online safety and mental health. School staff can then keep their focus on the safe use of tech for learning.

4. Regular training

Not every teacher has the technical knowledge and skills to keep sensitive data on young people safe. Regular

training can help staff use the tools they have access to more effectively, in line with broader safeguarding policies.

Teachers need to know how to use their own mobile devices to access and share student data securely, for example. A regular course aimed at keeping their skills up-to-date could help them work more efficiently, without putting sensitive data at risk. The right CPD will give teachers more confidence to explore the exciting digital tools available to enhance their teaching.

The Bottom Line

Safeguarding and technology are deeply interconnected. By keeping strategies straightforward and focused, you can help to ensure that technology enhances your school's safeguarding mission.



Matt Tiplin is a former school senior leader and Ofsted inspector, and currently VP of ONVU Learning; find out more at onvulearning.com





behalf, requesting transfers of funds or belated invoice payments. Since finance staff are responding to emails from a seemingly legitimate sender, those payments can, and will be transferred immediately.

Guarding against this might involve implementing more secure financial processes so that any changes of bank details will be checked, or alerts issued if something doesn't quite look right. Adopting an open policy or ethos across the school can empower junior colleagues to pick up the phone and check whether a senior colleague genuinely gave the relevant instructions.

What approaches to training staff in cybersecurity matters would you recommend?

That's something many schools can work on using existing product licences. LGfL makes Sophos Phish Threat available to schools, which includes simulated phishing emails and training. Users can generate reports on who's clicked through after how long, how much of their details they entered, and so on, which can definitely help to raise awareness.

One new area now addressed by the DfE

standards is including students in cybersecurity awareness sessions as well, since they too will have accounts on your network. The risk of them clicking on something they shouldn't when using a school device is really no different to that of a teacher doing the same thing. Once attackers establish that initial foothold, they can traverse laterally to servers and other devices.

What's critical is securing time from SLT that can be dedicated to cybersecurity awareness, and for there to be a 'drip feed' of cybersecurity awareness throughout the academic year. That drip feed, combined with simulated phishing emails, is a great way of improving cyber awareness.



Gareth Jelley is Product Security Manager at LGfL – The National Grid for Learning; for more information, visit lgfl.net

easy way for attackers to access your school's camera feed and network. If the device or system is procured from outside of an IT department's oversight, this can be missed – until the IT department has to deal with the subsequent fallout. It's important to adopt a joined-up approach, whereby key individuals will regularly meet before procurement processes even start.

What are the most salient cybersecurity issues at the moment that schools ought to be aware of?

The biggest threat remains phishing emails.

Everybody's familiar with those these days, but they're still a surprisingly easy way of gaining access to secure systems. They'll often go hand in hand with other vulnerabilities, so that if someone can be prompted to click on to a webpage and enter their school email address and password, and have a remote desktop environment set up, you've effectively given away that account login for remote access.

Setting up multi-factor authentication within a school environment can present challenges, but will provide an important line of defence against that kind of easy access into your network.

Something else we see quite regularly, but which gets comparatively little press, is financial fraud. Keeping in mind those phishing emails, this will often come down to a compromised account belonging to a headteacher or school business manager. The fraud occurs when emails are sent on their

“If you're not doing enough to look after your students' data, you're not keeping them safe”



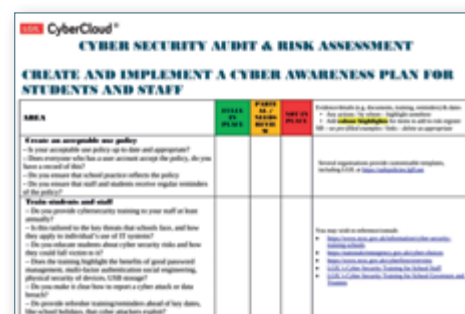
THE ELEVATE CYBER SECURITY TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS

Schools keen to start developing or renewing their cybersecurity policies will find a range of useful documents and templates within the LGfL-produced Elevate Cyber Security Toolkit for Schools.

Its roots lie in a joint audit carried out by the National Centre for Cyber Security and LGfL back in 2019, which found that while many schools did have technical safeguards in place, they tended to lack essential documentation and planning processes. Fewer than half of those schools surveyed had documented their core IT services, or prepared a full contingency plan for potential cyberattacks.

The resulting resource is free to download, and intended to help schools respond to the DfE's latest Cyber Security Standards for Schools and Colleges. Its contents include a self-led cybersecurity audit template that schools can use to evaluate their existing cybersecurity provision and identify any strengths and weaknesses, as well as further templates for drawing up a cybersecurity policy, incident response plan and risk reporting system, presented using language that doesn't assume specialist cybersecurity knowledge on the part of teachers

There is also an example risk register, asset register and software register, all saved as fully editable xlsx files. To find out more and to download the materials, visit elevate.lgfl.net





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On the right path

Alessandro Capozzi unpacks the DfE's recently updated school absence guidelines, and explains what the changes mean for online AP providers and users alike

Last autumn term, persistent absence rates in UK stood at 19.4% – down from 24.2% in 2022-23. This is marked progress, but with a significant proportion of students continuing to be frequently absent, it seems that schools are still struggling to get their students to re-engage with learning.

In the wake of these concerns, last August saw the DfE update its 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance (see tiny.cc/ts138-AP1). One amend that's of particular note, especially for schools using online AP, is the revision around Code B: "Attending any other approved educational activity."

'Appropriate access codes'

The guidance now states that remote education should be recorded "Using the most appropriate absence code,"



including authorised absence codes. In simple terms, any remote learning outside of school can't currently be marked as attendance, whether you're using unregistered provision, or have opted for DfE-accredited, live online teaching of the sort available through Academy21.

Naturally, this will raise questions for those (many) schools that have seen students thrive again with online provision, but it's crucial to note that the DfE still values online learning. In

fact, in a recent sector update, the DfE stated that, "This does not prevent schools using remote learning if it's in the pupil's best interest."

So, what does this mean for schools? Despite the changes, schools can remain confident in choosing online provision to make the best decision for a student's learning. Physical attendance remains the current priority, but if remote education is the right form of support for a learner, schools should feel empowered to use it.

the best standards for pupils.

The DfE's Online Education Accreditation Scheme (OEAS) has made the decision to commission online AP easier, since accredited providers are those found to meet rigorous standards pertaining to academic standards, leadership and welfare. Adaptive live teaching and flexible programmes will help to ensure that the provision is tailored to each child's needs, targets, and overall best interests.

For some, it can be worth exploring hybrid approaches to online provision. Whilst learning on-site won't be possible for every child, students physically in school and supervised, but learning online can be marked as 'present'. Schools are seeing great success with this model, particularly when it comes to facilitating reintegration – though ultimately, we naturally believe that all students should be recognised equally for their efforts in learning, regardless of where this takes place.

So while attendance guidance may require some administrative adjustment from time to time, online AP continues to be a valued and effective intervention. It can still be an incredibly powerful way to improve confidence and outcomes – and when you work with an established and experienced provider, you can be sure of getting all the expertise and support that you'll need.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alessandro Capozzi is Executive Head at Academy21

AP AS ATTENDANCE BOOSTER

Online AP is increasingly being used as an effective solution for driving engagement and attendance levels for many reasons – including the following:

1 Flexible schedules:

Tailored commissioning ensures that young people can access education around their needs.

2 Live and adaptive learning:

Via live online teaching, content and delivery can be tailored to individual pupils to help boost their engagement and confidence.

3 Real-time monitoring:

Virtual classrooms can provide comprehensive engagement and

participation insights that flag when intervention might be needed.

4 Support for complex needs:

Top online providers may also offer SEND and wellbeing services that can help young people overcome their original attendance barriers.

5 Collaborative tools:

With access to online collaborative tools, you'll get a unified approach to re-engagement.

Best practices and approaches

During a DfE Sector Comms webinar held ahead of the update, it was stressed that schools, "Won't be looked on unfavourably for having the correct absence codes."

Emphasising a support-first approach, the DfE wants to see schools keep students' wellbeing and quality of learning at the forefront, prioritising best interests over what's recorded on the attendance register.

Of course, the process of selecting the best available online provision remains crucial. Working with trusted, high-quality online AP providers that deliver live teaching and excellent monitoring tools will ensure

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A curriculum for what?

Meena Wood considers whether the government's current curriculum priorities risk being overtaken by wider societal trends...

One of the earliest actions taken by the current government was to commission a wide-ranging Curriculum Review overseen by Dr Becky Francis – who has been quoted as saying, “If we put anything in, we have to take something out!”

It appears that this Review will be informed by existing thinking, based on seeing children as ‘vessels’ that we fill with knowledge. With Ofsted downgrading schools when children can’t demonstrate that they retain the holy grail of ‘sequenced knowledge’, it would seem inspectors remain less concerned with children’s ‘soft skills’ in applying what they have learnt.

AI on the rise

Set against that, however, is a recent survey commissioned by the outdoor education provider Inspiring Learning, which reveals that a third of 16- to 24-year-old employees lack key employability skills, with over a quarter demonstrating insufficient communication, resilience and problem solving skills in the workplace.

Elsewhere, research by Internet Matters has found that over half of all students regularly use generative AI tools for their schoolwork, yet two thirds of schools don’t discuss with students their use of AI.

Nor is it just students turning to AI. Research by Teacher Tapp suggests that growing workload demands and ongoing teacher shortages have resulted in AI becoming an essential daily support tool, with some four in ten teachers making



regular use of AI in their daily duties. This can include using it to craft quizzes, develop topical lesson plans and ensure that teachers’ own questions are sufficiently inclusive and accessible.

Fresh perspectives

At this stage, we know that AI can be a valuable technological tool that enables iterative ideation and metacognitive reflection. AI tools can also support neurodiverse students, by helping them to structure workflows, devising study strategies and revision plans, and making otherwise overwhelming tasks much more manageable.

Moreover, if used carefully, ChatGPT can already present students with fresh perspectives, alternative viewpoints and persuasive arguments by

playing the role of a virtual debating partner. Students can potentially interview ‘Picasso’, a rocket scientist or a WWI conscript, and thus draw on their literacy and oracy skills in the course of their history studies.

One history professor has successfully used generative AI to create a ‘Black Death simulator’, creating voices and observations that give students a more visceral sense of life during The Plague, and later events that subsequently led to the development of vaccines.

The key question

For all their promise, however, current AI technologies do remain highly prone to citing factual errors or creating instances of misinformation.

Critical and digital literacy skills, if structured into curriculum, can act as a

bulwark against information overload and more irresponsible uses of AI, enabling students to sift knowledge, analyse sources and more confidently evaluate the accuracy of what they see and hear.

Taken together, the methods by which schools are already using AI seem to be paving the way for big shifts in teaching and learning – which in turn will have huge ramifications for how and what Ofsted will inspect in future.

The Curriculum Review’s current approach seems to be ‘Evolution rather than revolution’ – yet the stark reality is that global developments in technology will inevitably filter through to our young people, whether we’re ready to embrace them or not. If we want AI to evolve as friend, rather than foe, then a focus on teaching ‘soft skills’, combined with better classroom training and support for practitioners and students should be our priority.

Upskilling students so that they can be independent, resilient learners, and articulate critical thinkers with reasoning and problem-solving skills, is what will equip them for the future. The key question for our time is now surely, ‘How can education best shape future generations of young people?’



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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Seeing is achieving

3 things we've learnt about ... TEACHERS' INTERACTIONS WITH PARENTS

We look at how teachers *really* feel about those parts of the job that entail responding to parental queries and complaints...

1

Relationships with parents can create stress

Back in 2018, one-in-five teachers reported that parental engagement had caused them regular stress. More recently, those figures have worsened – not least due to the lasting effects of the pandemic. In May 2024, more than a quarter of teachers and half of headteachers say they're regularly stressed for reasons related to parental engagement.

During the 2024 spring term, the most common complaint headteachers received from parents (84%) concerned a sanction their child had received. Other issues included parents not being supportive of attendance (81%) and parents' unhappiness with certain school rules (74%).

Sadly, verbal abuse of teachers from parents has also become more commonplace, with 25% of secondary classroom teachers saying that they have been subject to such abuse during the 2023/24 academic year.

2

Parental engagement can be demanding

Managing parental contact can take its toll on teachers' time. 57% of teachers state that their school has a policy specifying how quickly it should respond to parental contact. For 48% of teachers, these response times are within 48 hours – even at weekends.

The sheer scale of contact can also be a burden, with more than one in five classroom teachers, and around half of headteachers saying they'd had at least one parent complain to them about a sanction given to their child in any given week. Almost a third of secondary classroom teachers say they've had at least one parent contact them three or more times in the same week!

Even if sanctions are issued, there's no guarantee that they won't be undermined. More than a third of teachers say that in any given week, a parent will have undermined a behavioural sanction that they've given out.

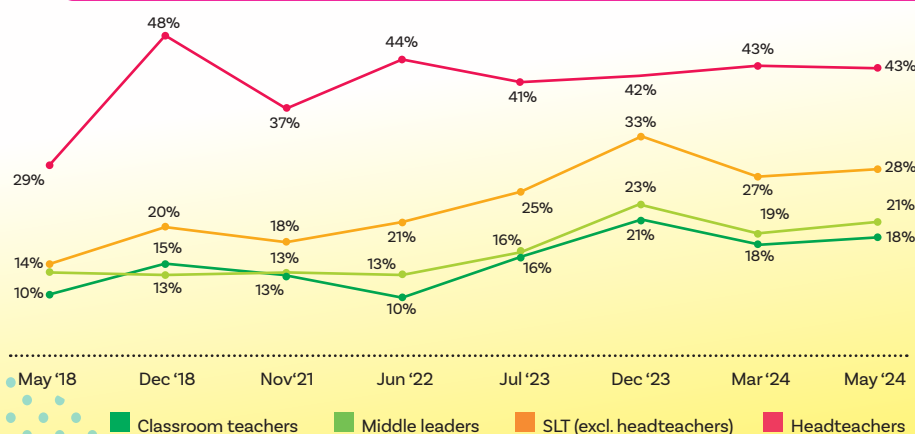
3

What's the solution?

With that in mind, it's perhaps little surprise that many teachers find parental relationships stressful and difficult to navigate – though this may also be due to the fact that half of secondary teachers say they've never received any training on how to manage such relationships. Among those who have, this has mostly been delivered internally by other teachers in the school, with just 1% of teachers telling us they received parent relationships management training through a specialist outside course. This type of training seems to be popular, with 42% of classroom teachers saying they would welcome such training if it were offered to them.

One in 10 senior leaders meanwhile say that they would prioritise hiring a parent-link worker, if they could secure the funding. Over 75% of secondary teachers say the main thing preventing them from engaging with parents is lack of time. Having a dedicated member of staff managing those relationships would certainly help.

HAVE YOU BEEN STRESSED OR UNHAPPY DUE TO RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS WITHIN THE LAST 2 WEEKS?



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LEARNING LAB

IN THIS ISSUE

- + Why schools should be backing improvements to oracy provision
- + A step-by-step guide to embedding those essential classroom rules
- + The 'assumed knowledge' that some young people have and others lack
- + How schools can benefit from the National Theatre Collection
- + The importance of cultivating and maintaining a positive student mindset
- + An end-of-term quiz in which students have to spot the AI fakes
- + A further 5 ways of reframing classroom behaviour

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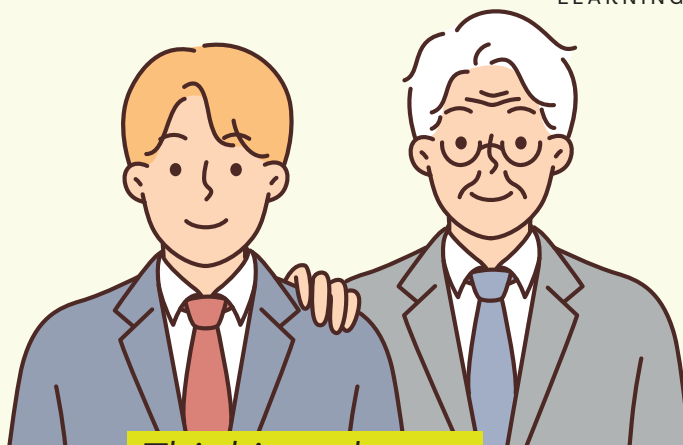
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ZEPH BENNETT

PE teacher and school achievement leader



Thinking about...

MENTORING

Being asked to be an ITT mentor is an enormous privilege, and indicative of your school valuing what it sees as your effective teaching practice.

It's a role formally recognised by the DfE, which ensures that all school-based mentors undertake 20 hours of initial mentor training – so if you're considering taking on the role of an ITT mentor, here are some essential points to bear in mind:

1. Be honest and listen

Providing honest and constructive feedback on planning, lesson delivery and the challenges of working in education is an essential element of effective mentoring. Share the challenges you experienced yourself earlier in your career, and allow your trainee to express themselves. In feedback conversations, probe the choices and decisions they make. Understand their perspective and allow them to find their own voice.

2. Narrate the process

To a novice, expert teachers can seem 'perfect' and 'natural'. Trainees won't be aware of the nuances involved with teaching and how strategies need to be developed over time. To remedy this, narrate your thought processes so that trainees can see how teaching isn't some magic, unattainable art, but a skill honed through experience. Allow the trainee to observe you and provide asides: *'Did you see how I resolved that situation by...'* *'Watch how I model...'* Explaining your process will reassure the trainee that they too can become an expert.

3. Know your stuff

Keep up with the latest pedagogical theory and evidence base. As part of their initial 20-hour training, mentors will explore how to apply Rosenshine's Principles within the classroom – the cognitive science relating to how children learn – as well as how to safeguard and support trainee teachers. Mentoring is a great way of staying at the cutting edge of the profession.

4. Be flexible

If you recognise that your trainee is overwhelmed, you might want to reduce their teaching hours that week. If you can see that your trainee is struggling to adapt their planning to meet the needs of their learners, sit and plan alongside them. Allow them to observe you teaching a class, so that they can see an expert in action, or else encourage them to meet with a TA or SEND specialist in order to develop their expertise.

5. Stay organised

As a mentor, you'll be required to organise timetables, observation opportunities and meetings for your trainee teacher. You'll also need to complete assorted mentor training and paperwork relating to the role, such as assessment review points – all in addition to juggling your already busy teaching timetable and other personal commitments. Taking on a mentoring role comes with its challenges, but the benefits as you watch your trainee flourish can be enormously satisfying. Every trainee will remember the mentors that helped shape their journey into the profession.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Newton is secondary partnership manager at the Tommy Flowers SCITT provider of primary and secondary PGCE and apprenticeship courses

FOCUS ON... ORACY

The ability to communicate – to possess the emotional, linguistic and cognitive skills needed to express yourself and engage with others – is increasingly critical to society at large, with many employers regularly highlighting it as one of the most important skills needed by tomorrow's workforce. In a world that's becoming ever more connected, and yet also more polarised, being able to advocate well for yourself and your community could play a crucial role in creating a more cohesive and harmonious society.

The past few years may have seen the explicit teaching of such skills queried and de-prioritised in the context of wider education policy, but refreshingly, more recent developments indicate that things may be starting to shift.

The recent publication of 'We Need to Talk' – a new report from The Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England – marks an important moment in the discourse surrounding the topic.

The report is wide-ranging, spanning all phases of education, and highlights the many ways in which oracy education ought to become an established practice within classrooms. It presents evidence showing the profound impact that teaching oracy can have on young people's outcomes – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For those of us in the oracy space, these arguments are very familiar. At the English-Speaking Union, we've observed countless times just how profoundly impactful and life-changing oracy education can be in developing students' confidence and building valuable life skills.

The 'We Need To Talk' report describes 'oracy education' as having three overlapping dimensions: supporting children and young people in learning *to* talk, learning *through* talk and learning *about* talk. At the ESU, we've witnessed the remarkable ability of students to seamlessly navigate these dimensions when they participate in our programmes.

An individual taking part in one of our long-standing debating or public speaking competitions, for example, must engage with the speeches of others (teammates and opponents), before considering their most effective response and deploying this via an appropriate form of expression and performance – all while bearing in mind the judging criteria being used to assess their choices. Students who have learned how to talk effectively through talking with others,



and studied effective communication techniques will be much more likely to succeed in our competitions (and, indeed, in the wider world).

The report also advocates for an 'oracy entitlement' throughout a child's education. The Commission argues that children should be given frequent opportunities to engage in four distinct 'modes of talk' – building understanding; debating and persuading; negotiating and making change; and expressive performance. These modes of talk are all present within the programmes we offer at the ESU, but the people best placed to make the most meaningful changes for the highest proportion of students are teachers.

The ESU therefore agrees with the report's authors when it states that, *"We have to accept that we need to support teachers to foster these critical communication skills in as many moments in the classroom and school life as possible. The ESU thus agrees with the report's authors when it's stated that, "Teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skill required to support all students' learning to, through and about talk, [as well as] listening and communication through professional learning, from ITT to leadership development. This cannot be confined to a one-off course, or INSET day for teachers with a particular interest in oracy."*

Oracy should be developed in the practice of *all* teachers – not just a select few tasked with doing so as a specialism. Through our work, the ESU has seen how oracy development is most effective when approached with an holistic, whole school mindset; when a school's leadership promotes its value and creates constant, multimodal opportunities for young people to engage with it.

It's clear to us that teachers would welcome and value training in oracy, yet struggle to find the space for it. Providers must offer support for varying timetables and budgets – but meaningful support and resourcing must also flow from government policy.

The ESU looks forward to the outcome of the curriculum and assessment review currently being undertaken by Professor Becky Francis and her colleagues. We hope it will support the Commission's oracy recommendations, and that this in turn will help galvanise the government into helping education leaders prioritise oracy in their settings.

DO THIS

EMBED THE RULES

Exercise better class control with these tips from Robin Launder...

A structured 5-step activity I'll typically use a week into the start of a new academic year:

1. Cover your classroom rules display. Tell students they have 2 minutes in silence to write the rules down *exactly* as they're written on the now concealed display. It doesn't matter if they can't remember the precise wording; what matters is that they're *trying* to remember the wording, and thus really thinking about what the rules are.
2. Students share their written responses with a partner.
3. Ask a student to read what they've written for rule 1, then uncover rule 1 on the display. Thanks to steps 1 and 2, our student will be invested in finding out its exact wording. Repeat this approach until all rules are displayed, with students correcting their work along the way.
4. Ask the question, *"Which of these rules is the one that will help you learn best in this classroom?"* Allow students 30 seconds of thinking time, followed by 2 or 3 minutes of writing time. All written answers must include the word 'because'.
5. Students share their pair work; you then select two or three pairs who will read their responses out to the class. Praise any pro-learning or pro-social points, and drill down for deeper thinking if needed. Finish by crisply moving on to the next part of the lesson.

Robin Launder is a behaviour management consultant and speaker; find more tips in his weekly Better Behaviour online course – for more details, visit behaviourbuddy.co.uk

34.6%

of 8- to 18-year-olds say they enjoy reading in their free time – the lowest proportion recorded by the National Literacy Trust since its introduction of childhood/adolescent reading surveys 19 years ago

Source: 'Children and young people's reading in 2024' report produced by the National Literacy Trust

New research by the Social Market Foundation has shed light on the extent to which young people from more affluent backgrounds benefit from access to a form of 'assumed knowledge' that puts them in a better position to realise education and employment opportunities.

As detailed in a report titled 'Things worth knowing: The role of assumed knowledge in youth transitions from education to employment', the researchers define assumed knowledge as "*The things that some might assume everyone instinctively knows about 'how the system works'.*" and cite several examples to demonstrate how such knowledge is skewed towards affluent families and the children of graduates.

Young people eligible for free school meals (FSM) were less likely to know that graduates typically earn more compared to non-graduates, but more likely to erroneously believe that students loans could lead to bankruptcy. 35% of 15- to 21-year-olds from less advantaged backgrounds meanwhile couldn't identify the University of Cambridge as the most prestigious institution from a list of universities, compared to 25% of that age group as a whole.

The contrasts become starker when applied to knowledge of the workplace, with only 47% of FSM-eligible young people being aware that salaries could be negotiated, compared to 64% of their comparatively well-off peers. 60% of 15- to 28-year-olds with non-graduate parents recognised value of networking, compared to a far higher 81% of those with graduate parents.

The report was commissioned by the education charity Speakers for Schools, and recommends rolling out two weeks' worth of work experience for all young people, closer linking of subjects to careers, and a more proactive post-18 National Careers Service. Read the report in full via tiny.cc/ts138-LL1.

CLOSE-UP ON...

THE NATIONAL THEATRE COLLECTION



"Having the ability to share these productions has opened up students to a whole new world of possibilities" – English teacher and enrichment co-ordinator at Horbury Academy, Yorkshire

This month marks the fifth anniversary of the National Theatre Collection – an educational streaming service (free for all UK state-funded schools), which enables teachers and students to watch world-class productions in the classroom at any time, wherever they are in the country.

Over the past five years, we've seen how vital the resource has become in helping teachers bring theatre directly into their classrooms. 89% of state secondary schools are now signed up to the resource, with 1.3 million students watching a production via the NT Collection last year.

Teachers who regularly use the NT Collection have told us that they believe it offers students access to cultural opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have. With 70 productions to choose from, there's something to support teaching and learning at every key stage:

- Introduce KS3 to the magic of theatre, and spark their imaginations with vibrant productions like *Peter Pan* and *Treasure Island*
- Support GCSE English students with their studies of set texts, including *Macbeth* (pictured above)

- Prepare GCSE and A Level drama students for writing a live theatre review
- Instigate discussion and learning about a broad range of experiences and cultures, with productions like *Small Island* and *The Great Wave*
- Explore craft, design and technical theatre skills with students studying for vocational qualifications at KS5

Each production is supported by learning resources created in collaboration with teachers. These resources are curriculum-linked, with classroom activities and extension exercises that can be easily integrated into lessons or set as homework.

Direct curriculum learning aside, use of the NT Collection can help to build students' cultural capital, and support them in developing critical responses and articulating their opinions. We hope that having access to these productions in the classroom will inspire students to further explore careers in theatre, thus supporting the pipeline of talent development within the creative industries, as well as fostering the kind of creative skills now considered essential for almost any career path.

So why not join other teachers across the UK in exploring our library of productions and inspiring your students with the power of theatre? You can find out more via tiny.cc/ts138-NT1.



JANE BALL IS DEPUTY HEAD OF SCHOOLS ENGAGEMENT AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE

45%

of UK students now use ChatGPT when completing schoolwork and homework

Source: 'A Student's Perspective on the Modern Classroom' report by the educational ICT consultancy, Computeam

Need to know

When teenage girls start puberty, many will experience a crisis of confidence that extends through their adolescence and into adulthood, negatively impacting upon their levels of physical activity and general wellbeing, while boys' experiences and attitudes remain relatively consistent. That's the Youth Sport Trust's takeaway from its latest Girls Active survey, which drew on responses from 15,000 girls and boys aged 7 to 18.

The survey found that 86% of girls aged 7 to 8 said they enjoyed PE, but that just 56% of girls aged 14 to 15 said the same. Only 23% of girls aged 14 to 15 stated feeling confident when wearing their PE kit, compared to 65% of girls aged 7 to 8. 61% of girls aged 11 and older expressed worries over leaking in their PE kit, with 58% of the same group wanting more PE kit options to choose from.

Commenting on the findings, Youth Sport Trust chief executive, Ali Oliver MBE, remarked, "We must proactively support girls through puberty, listening to and responding to their needs if we are to build their confidence and capability. Without this support, we know their experiences at school can alienate them from sport and physical activity for life."

DON'T OVERLOOK... STUDENT MINDSET



One of the most rewarding experiences I've had in my teaching career was helping a student move from Grade 2-level GCSE maths to Grade 5 in just a few months. That transformation didn't happen through an elaborate curriculum, or the application of some hyper-advanced teaching techniques. It all came down to one key factor – that of *mindset*.

This simple mindset shift led to a dramatic improvement in his maths performance, increased his confidence – despite the presence of significant language barriers – and left him with a strong determination to succeed, no matter the obstacles put in his way. Here's now.

CONSISTENT ENGAGEMENT

When the student in question first joined my class, he had only recently arrived in the UK. He possessed very limited English, and at that point hadn't attended school in years. His maths knowledge was largely restricted to basic addition and subtraction, yet I could quickly tell that he was eager to learn.

He didn't allow the language barrier or his lack of prior education to hold

him back. Each day, he showed up ready to listen and act on feedback. The mindset he adopted at this time proved crucial – it wasn't his intelligence or background that determined his progress, but rather his willingness to consistently engage, ask questions and improve, and this is why:

- He always acted on every item of feedback I gave him
- He never let corrections go unaddressed, which enabled him to make rapid improvements in a relatively short span of time
- Despite moving between foster homes and having to deal with constant changes in his home environment, he stayed focused on growth, not obstacles, never citing his personal circumstances as an excuse
- He would always ask for extra time to complete a task and never give up
- From requests for basic tools and equipment to seeking clarification on complex topics, he was never afraid to ask for help

The proactive approach he adopted empowered him to stay on track. And the best part? I never had to resort to complicated teaching methods or

constant reinforcement. I simply did what I could to further nurture the growth mindset he was already demonstrating, and provided him with whatever support he needed along the way.

As exams season approached, it became clear that his maths skills had improved significantly, but that the language barrier still presented an issue. We collaborated with English Learning Support, breaking down key concepts in ways that he could understand. By the time he came to take his exam, he wasn't just a better maths student – he was a much more confident learner overall.

SURPASSING EXPECTATIONS

Having entered my class with the equivalent of a Grade 2 in maths, he eventually left it with a Grade 5. His story shows that mindset really is everything; that when students believe they are capable, they can surpass their own expectations.

As teachers, we need to remember the vital part that mindset plays in our students' capacity to learn and succeed, and how this can be as important as the content we teach. Because when we focus on developing a growth mindset among our students, the sky is the limit.



GLORIA DALAFU IS A LEAD PRACTITIONER IN MATHS, OVERSEEING TEACHING AND LEARNING



On the radar *The 'AI Or Real?' end of term quiz*

BBC Bitesize is hosting a special 45-minute livestreamed Christmas quiz for schools across the UK on **Wednesday 18th December** to celebrate the end of term.

The 'Other Side of the Story' team provides resources on misinformation and fake news, helping students understand everything from algorithms and unconscious bias to

echo chambers. Now they're inviting classes to battle it out in one of their most popular features – the 'AI Or Real?' Quiz.

The quiz will consist of questions featuring images of popular celebrities – but while some will be real, others will be faked using generative AI. Will you and your students be able to discern one from the other in time?

The livestream will be hosted by TikTok influencer and CBBC presenter Joe Tasker, and commence at 2pm. There will even be opportunities to get your class on camera!

Any readers keen on taking part should email othersideofthestory@bbc.co.uk with an expression of interest and look out for more information

TRENDING

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

MANAGED DECLINE?

The National Foundation for Educational Research has recently published a three-part series of blogs examining the responses of schools, LAs and policymakers to falling pupil numbers, with details of the options available to them for managing the resulting impact. tinyurl.com/ts138-LL2

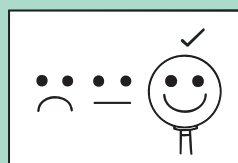
IN IT TO WIN IT

The educational design agency Promote Your School has launched a free to enter prize draw that will see one school get to overhaul their library space with bespoke wall art up to 30 sq. metres in size, new bookshelves, furniture and a bundle of books. The closing date for entry is 31st December 2024. tinyurl.com/ts138-LL3

TEACHER WALKTHROUGH

REFRAMING BEHAVIOUR – PART 7

ZEPH BENNETT PRESENTS PART 7 OF HIS VISUAL GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE BEHAVIOUR STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM



1

STAY POSITIVE

Be positive and teach with an encouraging mindset – even when you yourself are having a bad day.



2

TELL THEM

Let students know when they get it right. Correct behaviours need highlighting, so praise good behaviour regularly and consistently.



3

PREPARE BACKUP TASKS

Make sure you have a 'task B' ready to go in case any students complete their work more quickly than expected. Never let students simply sit and twiddle their thumbs.



4

FOLLOW UP

Any sanctions should always be followed up with a conversation around how the student can improve their behaviour (though usually not in the same lesson).



5

MODEL BEHAVIOUR

Consistently model good behaviour in your classroom – such as using a hands-up signal for 'Quiet in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...'

ZEPH BENNETT IS A PE TEACHER AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT LEADER WITH 25 YEARS' TEACHING EXPERIENCE; YOU CAN FIND MORE OF HIS EDUCATIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY FOLLOWING @ZEPHBENNETT.BSKY.SOCIAL

Got a great learning idea? Email editor@teachsecondary.com or tweet us at [@teachsecondary](https://twitter.com/teachsecondary)

ADMINISTRATION →

ActiveHub



Stay on top of students' progress and drill down into what your assessments are telling you, with the aid of this sophisticated learning platform

AT A GLANCE

- A dynamic data-driven learning platform to help boost student progress
- Available for KS3 and KS4 core subjects (English, maths and science) and KS4 MFL, geography and history
- Powerful online teaching, learning and assessment tools
- Time-saving teacher guidance and resources
- Tools for accurately measuring progress

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



Pearson's ActiveHub is a digital learning platform that combines interconnected assessments, data-driven insights and comprehensive resources and interventions, all in one place. The focus here is very much on aiding progression and bridging learning gaps, so that a detailed picture can be made of all the performance and progression being made within a specific school and/or across an entire Trust.

Students can be assigned ready-made assessments from the platform's Assessment Library, which contains an array of end of unit/term/year tests, past papers and mark schemes. Alternatively, you can create your own and tailor them to your needs using a bank of questions via the Assessment Builder feature.

The results of any assessments you carry out are then fed into ActiveHub's Insights Dashboard, which lets you generate performance indicators with next-step suggestions, or assignable resources for addressing specific deficits in learning. The latter enables users to zoom in at an individual, group or class level to get a more detailed view of grade breakdowns, question-level analyses and next steps.

ActiveHub's included resources span eBooks, videos, worksheets, PowerPoint presentations and auto-marked activities, students' use of which can be fed directly into the Insights Dashboard. Choose which subject(s) you want to focus on, then access

whichever classroom resources or homework materials you might need, along with all required planning and assessment materials.

There is a range of online independent practice activities that can be assigned to students and completed by students on any device for homework or in the computer room. These contain hints and tips and are mostly auto-marked, they can be used to check understanding after teaching a topic, or as a check in prior to teaching, or as a recap. The insights from them can be used to identify students that need extra support or further stretch.

The differentiated activities on offer help students take a more active role in the assessment process while progressing at their own pace and level. There are thousands of questions available within the platform, all of which can be presented alongside on-screen hints and instant targeted feedback, thus encouraging students to work independently and identify what it is they should do next in order to improve.

ActiveHub is an incredibly well thought out digital platform that's rich in content and generous in the support it provides. It seamlessly links together the processes of teaching, learning and assessment in a continuous cycle that will likely prove valuable and rewarding for students and teachers alike.

Pearson have really excelled themselves with this learner-centric platform that's easily as good as any I've ever seen before. ActiveHub truly goes the extra mile in helping you ensure that your pupils are on track to meet their targets – so jump on, and see where it can take you.

**teach
SECONDARY**

VERDICT

- ✓ A multilayered, versatile and well-rounded learning platform
- ✓ Contains a range of creative and engaging activities
- ✓ Provides access to a fully integrated curriculum
- ✓ Promotes self-guided learning

UPGRADE IF...

...you're looking for a polished and professional data-driven learning platform with extensive content, insights and resources for monitoring progress, personalising learning and boosting students' confidence.

No obligation, 30-day free trial available; for more information, visit [pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/activehub](https://www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/activehub)

LITERACY



Bookbuzz

An imaginative initiative that offers early KS3 children the chance to choose and own a book from a carefully curated selection



AT A GLANCE

- Schools receive the resources needed to launch a reading engagement scheme
- Pupils are introduced to an expertly curated range of books
- School libraries receive two copies of each title
- Pupils get to each choose one book to keep from the list
- Organised by BookTrust – the UK's largest children's reading charity.

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



It has to be the Holy Grail of the literary world – getting 11- to 13-year-olds into reading. Yet I don't think the difficulty of doing so comes down to lack of choice. Enter any major bookshop and you'll be faced with an almost overwhelming range of 'young adult' titles. No, the challenge, I suspect, is getting the right books in front of the right children at the right time. And this is where Bookbuzz can be a real boon for secondary school libraries.

Managed by BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity, Bookbuzz is an imaginative initiative that works on multiple levels. First and foremost, it's a scheme intended to get younger secondary students reading, building on or re-instilling a love of books that would hopefully have been nurtured through primary school. It also helps to smooth the transition from KS2 to KS3 by fostering a sense of communal interest in books that can draw pupils together.

At the core of Bookbuzz is a carefully curated collection of age appropriate titles. And to the cynics among you, no, said selection is not based around those publishers with the loudest marketing

departments. Instead, it's the result of a panel of librarians, teachers and other relevant experts whittling a longlist of over 300 nominated titles down to a final 16. And as you'd hope, the final selection spans fiction and non-fiction and reflects admirable diversity, so that there really is something for everyone.

As part of the launch pack, schools signing up to the scheme will receive two copies of each book, plus a host of other goodies such as bookmarks and posters to generate interest in the scheme. They'll also gain access to videos that provide brief introductions to each book, along with a host of other online resources.

Once they've seen what's on offer, each pupil is then allowed to order one book from the list to keep. This is important, since personal book ownership *really* matters. I've personally held on to a number of books from my childhood – not least because they were chosen by me, and belonged to me.

Schools already part of the scheme report that it has helped to boost reader engagement and build bonds between new pupils during that crucial transition

phase. Furthermore, with the price of admission set at only £3.45 per head, that makes each pupil's personal copy almost as cheap as a politician's remaindered memoirs, while at the same time providing a very welcome boost to their school library's stock. Now, that's what I call a happy ending...

teach SECONDARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent value
- ✓ Promotes engagement with books
- ✓ Encourages book ownership
- ✓ Boosts school libraries
- ✓ Supports the primary to secondary transition

SIGN UP IF...

... you want to boost reading engagement amongst Y7 and Y8 pupils via a targeted and generous book selection scheme.

Priced at £3.45 per pupil; for more information, visit booktrust.org.uk/bookbuzz



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

Urgent correspondence



John Lawson invites the Education Secretary to reflect on his most cherished pedagogical rule – look, listen and learn...

To the Rt. Hon, Bridget Phillipson MP...

Every Secretary of State for Education should appreciate that there are teachers in every staff room across the country who will have forgotten more about education than they will ever know.

Education Secretaries will happily acknowledge the ‘brilliance of teachers’, but many of those teachers will be excluded from your red carpet visits because they won’t smile politely for dignitaries when there are uncomfortable truths to address. So seek them out, and invite them to help you solve problems. You’ll reap rich rewards from listening to them.

Square shapes, round holes

It’s currently compulsory for young people to be in education or training until the age of 18.

England’s post-16 education programme was perhaps a tweak or two away from being among the world’s finest, until the previous administration rashly introduced that requirement, minus a workable plan for implementing it.

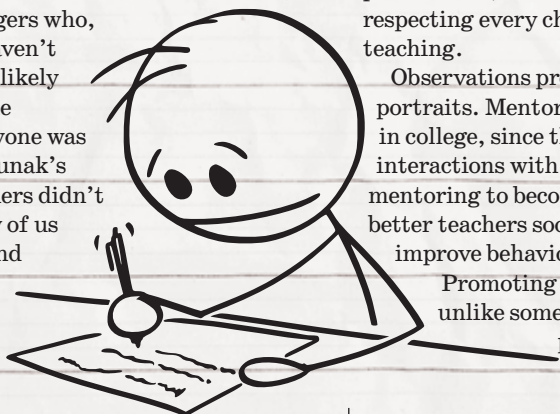
Why burden yourself with their mistakes? Most schools and colleges can, and do accommodate students wanting to study for their A Levels, T Levels and so forth – but what’s available for those who struggled through GCSEs? Where will they go for further training or education? We don’t have enough classrooms, highly skilled teachers or stimulating courses to offer them.

At any given time, there will always be thousands of students who simply never flourish in school settings, studying ‘one size fits all’ school curriculums that don’t fit them. Let’s stop squeezing them into round holes and start helping them to shape their own futures.

Capricious laws

Following a prescribed curriculum for 11 years is surely enough. Millions of us can’t draw, act, play an instrument or fathom calculus, but can still add to our rich culture. Let’s stop focusing on what teenagers can’t do and start celebrating their talents. If 16-year-olds are old enough to vote, it follows that they also know what subjects suit them best.

Important as maths is, teenagers who, after 11 years of daily classes haven’t achieved a GCSE Grade 4 are unlikely to ever excel at, or even enjoy the subject. Post-16 maths for everyone was a blinkered obsession of Rishi Sunak’s that ever added up. Maths teachers didn’t request the policy change. Many of us will use arithmetic, intuition, and logic in our daily lives, but not maths we can barely understand.



We shouldn’t impose capricious laws, or rules that are impossible to enforce – and that includes compulsory post-16 education. Instead, spend wisely and fund FE colleges so they can embrace students when they’re ready to appreciate their education and training.

Compassion and respect

Everyone accepts that schools have had to work within severely limited budgets (including your colleague Rachel Reeves, as per her recent Budget speech). You should therefore be heartened to learn that many game-changing ideas are both eminently workable and comparatively inexpensive.

Our finest schools have visionary leaders, engaging teachers, focused students, and supportive staff and parents. We can’t turn ‘underperforming schools’ into centres of excellence overnight, but we can continually improve by following a formula that works.

Visionary leaders will tell you that everything else falls into place when we get behaviour right – so let’s stop putting the interests of a disruptive minority before the safety and wellbeing of the compliant majority. ‘Zero tolerance’ approaches needn’t preclude care, compassion or respect. We cannot continue with over 780,000 suspensions a year.

What should unsettle you more is the vast number of abusive incidents that aren’t officially recorded. We need to stop accepting the unacceptable and offer – online, if necessary – alternative programmes to those for whom mainstream schooling doesn’t work. If we truly respect our students’ families, then we must challenge them and stop accepting antisocial behaviours.

Weaponised stress

Finally, teachers rarely benefit from high-stakes observations, which can be stressful, subjective, superficial and too easily weaponised. In five minutes, supportive mentors can teach ECTs priceless insights that might have otherwise taken them five years to learn themselves. Half the ECTs I mentor can’t initially articulate the differences between discipline and punishment, and explain why maintaining composure while respecting every child’s dignity is so crucial for effective teaching.

Observations provide snapshots; mentoring reveals detailed portraits. Mentors can teach neophytes what’s rarely learned in college, since the best insights tend to emerge from interactions with real students in real classrooms. Were mentoring to become normative nationwide, we would get better teachers sooner, significantly raise achievement, improve behaviour and enhance morale across the board.

Promoting all of the above will ensure that you – unlike some of your predecessors – ultimately leave a positive mark on the teaching profession.



AN EXTRAORDINARY
LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A young girl with long dark hair, wearing a school uniform consisting of a grey blazer, a white shirt with a striped tie, and a grey pleated skirt, stands with her hands on her hips and her head tilted back, looking upwards. She is positioned in the center of the frame. The background is a deep blue with a bright, circular light source behind her, creating a halo effect. Scattered throughout the blue background are various white letters of different sizes, some of which are partially obscured by the girl's figure.

ROALD DAHL'S
Matilda

THE MUSICAL

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SCHOOLS RESOURCES AND WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

*Subject to availability. Terms and conditions apply.

#MatildaPose

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- Geography
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- Build confidence supporting your students with assessment
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