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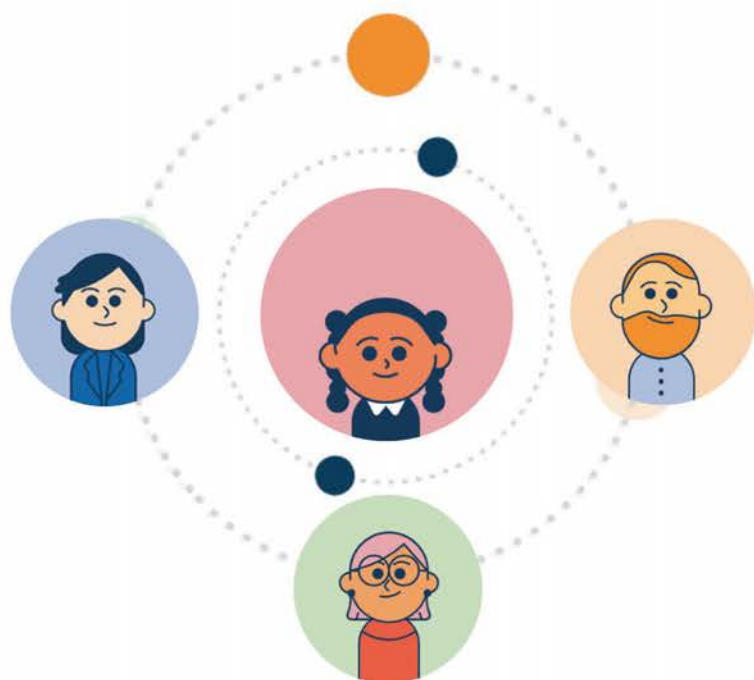
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## From the editor



It has been a tough start to the year and I hope many of you were able to get some rest over the February half-term. There may be some dim light at the end of the tunnel as the Covid-19 vaccine rollout seems to be on track and gathering pace.

At the time of writing there is still no set date for a time when schools can fully reopen. However, we could see pupils back in March but, as with all that has happened during this pandemic, things are very fluid and apt to change at the last minute. As always, though, school leaders have soldiered on to try and provide the best possible education for their pupils and support the wellbeing of staff. In this issue, we take a look at teacher wellbeing and provide some advice and considerations for leaders looking to build healthier and happier schools.

With pupils learning remotely we take a look at the issues of safety online as we interview Will Gardner OBE, the CEO of Childnet International and the organiser of Safer Internet Day. The use of EdTech in schools has been really important during the pandemic and lockdown. We take a look at some applications that could prove extremely useful in saving time for hard pressed headteachers and school leaders.

Covid-19 has also played havoc with school budgets as more cleaning, PPE and hand sanitisers take up costs. The lockdown and social distancing has also seen vital funding streams being cut off. After school clubs and the renting out of school facilities have all dried up. However, there are ways that new funds can be drummed up and we examine examples of innovative avenues to raise more cash. These are tough times for all, parents included, and this can lead to a number of issues that have to be dealt with. Handling complaints can be an exhausting situation but we take a look at ways to cope with them and remain sane.

Enjoy the issue,

Mark Hayhurst  
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## Our experts this issue



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**Graham Cooper,**  
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officer at Juniper  
Education



From the makers  
of **Teach Primary**

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# Online safety is vital for children

Will Gardner OBE, CEO Childnet International and author of Tes Educare Online Safety Courses, talks about his career and Safer Internet Day

## Could you tell me about your early career?

I joined Childnet in 2000 as a research and policy officer but before that I was teaching adults and children in the UK and internationally. But we're talking 21 years ago. So really, my focus has been online safety for children since the days when the internet made a noise and you couldn't be on the phone at the same time.

## How was your first experience at Childnet?

Day one was the breaking case of the first child in the UK who had been groomed online in a chat room. At that moment, I could see how important this issue was. The parent contacted the CEO of Childnet to say that their child had been groomed. They'd worked in the internet industry for the previous ten years and said if they didn't know what was happening then no other parent would know. So they asked us to help tell that story. We worked with the family to raise awareness about that issue.

## Covid-19 has seen a huge increase in children online. What impact has that had?

Over the last year we have seen the online space become so important for their educational lives, but also it becomes even more important for their social lives in lockdown. It has been a form of emotional support and I think that's an important element for us to recognise. The internet does bring friends who are experiencing similar issues together and it can provide comfort to children during this time.

## How should people approach raising safety issues on the internet?

It has to be relevant to children's lives and engaging. An approach that we've taken, education-wise, has been very much a problem-solving issue. If we can get young people engaged in trying to solve problems in certain scenarios, then they can look to try and work out what advice they would give to somebody else in that situation. We want to try and encourage young people to own some of the situations which they might come into and practice strategies they can put in place in order to respond to them.

## What trends do you see for the future of internet safety?

The internet has become much more personalised and it is accessible to incredibly young children, to the extent that some have access to their own devices. All the issues which I was talking about back 20 years ago are still things that we need to talk about, grooming and cyberbullying. The risks facing children are the four Cs. You have the contact risks, content risks, commercial risks and the risks of conduct. The question we need to ask ourselves is how well can we keep pace and support young people in this environment. But also, I'd like to see how we can mobilise young people and give them agency in this space. They can be an incredible asset as we try and promote online safety through school communities and homes. A programme that we've run, called the digital leaders programme, sees us

training young people in school, through an online platform, to become digital leaders in their community. We started this programme more than five years ago with secondary schools but primary schools said they wanted it as well. So we have young people who have trained online to be digital leaders and are then delivering sessions for peers, parents and staff. We have some who are in Year 2, seven-year-olds who are active digital leaders in their community, and I think that is a real asset to all of us as we try and keep everything current. If we mobilise young people their voice is enormously powerful in this space, parents will come and listen to young people talk about online safety.

We must not be frightening children and young people, or their parents and carers. It's very easy to choose a case that shows the risks at the extreme ends in relation to the internet. So you have to put everything in context. The worst thing that can happen is that by raising people's fears we deny children access to the technology they need. So we need to be responsible in our awareness raising and recognise that the benefits are extraordinary. But, in order to harness those, we need to be working to equip young people with the necessary facts.

## Keeping children safe online is paramount. How does Safer Internet Day help?

This is a fast moving environment and it's vital that we are working to keep pace with the experiences that young people have. Safer Internet Day happens every year on the second day of the second week of the second month. We choose a topic each year that we think is particularly relevant and pertinent at the time. Young people are very

“The worst thing that can happen is that by raising people's fears we deny children access to the technology they need.”







pioneering in the online space. It's an area where they are pushing boundaries and using services which their parents or teachers may not be familiar with.

It's important that we use this day to find out more about what young people's experiences are. What do they think about it? How do they respond to it? What advice would they give to others? And what changes do they want to see? We try to make it as easy as possible for anybody to support Safer Internet Day and we give resources for primary schools with a range of different content for them to have this conversation with their children. They have assemblies with scripts, lesson plans and adaptation elements for remote learning content.

All that content is there, filmed content as well. Of the schools who supported the day last year 40 per cent responded that it led to disclosures of potential online safeguarding issues.

#### **What has the impact of Safer Internet Day been?**

It shows that schools can take the first step and talk about the internet and how to use it safely. This helps to encourage young people to come forward and talk about the things that are worrying them. And that's the same for parents and carers. Then we are really building a bridge from both sides to stimulate that conversation and level of support between parents, carers and children. Last year, we reached 49 per cent of children and

26 per cent of parents. That's amazing for a one-day campaign.

#### **What was the focus of Safer Internet Day this year?**

We focused on critical thinking and exploring the reliability of things online. We chose this theme because it's an issue that affects the whole of the four Cs. Young people are having to make decisions about content and contact all the time, often several times a day. They have to assess the reliability of what they're seeing or the friend request that they've received. This also encompasses clickbait images, images you see on social media and whether they are filtered or not. We want to hear what young people's experiences are and what they're doing about it.

#### **CAREER TIMELINE**

1995

Teaching children and adults in the UK and abroad

2000

MSc from LSE in Development Management

2000

Joins Childnet as a research and policy officer

2009

Appointed CEO at Childnet

2011

Launches and becomes a director of the UK Safer Internet Centre and ran the first Safer Internet Day

2019

Awarded an OBE for services to children's online safety



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# School Improvement

## DO YOU HAVE EVERYTHING IN PLACE?

Lucy Marcovitch asks if you're prepared for the Primary Relationships and Health Education deadline?

**S**eptember 2020 saw the introduction of statutory primary Relationships and Health Education.

Although many schools already had their curriculum up and running, some will have taken advantage of the grace period offered by the DfE to push back readiness to the start of this summer term. With that deadline approaching, now is a good time for all schools to take stock and check everything is in place.

### AUDIT YOUR CURRICULUM PLANNING

Set your curriculum against the statutory guidance and check for gaps. If your school has a PSHE programme of study, or uses a published scheme it is likely that you are already delivering the requirements. The DfE guidance sets out what a child should learn 'by the end of primary school' rather than by age, so use that top-level detail as the starting point and tick off everything within

your planning which addresses it. You may find gaps, especially in terms of creating a spiral curriculum which builds on children's learning up to Year 6.

### REVIEW YOUR POLICY

All schools must have a published RHE policy which 'meets the needs of pupils and parents, and reflects the communities they serve'. If you already have one, check when you last reviewed it. Does it reflect the new guidance? Are references to other policies - such as safeguarding, diversity or online learning - up to date? Give some thought to the importance of RH(S)E to your pupils. A carefully-considered policy captures why your school is doing things the way it is and why this is in the best interests of pupils. This is especially useful for sensitive subject areas and for feeding back to parents who might have questions. It can also boost staff confidence by giving clarity of purpose. If you are teaching sex education it enables you to specify content and thus what parents are entitled to withdraw their children from.

Guidance and examples on creating a policy can be found in the DfE guidance, or on the PSHE Association's website ([www.pshe-association.org.uk](http://www.pshe-association.org.uk)).

### PARENT COMMUNICATION

Schools should 'work closely' with parents over subject planning delivery, and 'must consult' with parents over their policy. Some teachers will be feeling anxious about how parents might respond to statutory RHE, especially where primaries



have taken the decision to deliver sex education. Open communication is key. Most parents want what is best for their children and trust the school to deliver, but they might still have questions. If a school is clear about these things then they are better equipped to respond. Showing parents the materials you will be using helps too. Often schools report that reluctant or even hostile parents are supportive when they see what their children will be learning. Keeping communication open gives the reassurance that the majority need.

## REVIEW YOUR RESOURCES

A published programme can give schools the structure and resource materials they need to establish the subject or enhance their existing provision.

There are many resources of varying quality available. Take the time to review these and consider their suitability for your school. And check that they're inclusive and safe. Anything which contains material designed to shock or scare pupils, isn't diverse or requires them to provide personal information and make judgements against others should be avoided.

## ENSURE EQUALITY

All aspects of a school's RHE planning and delivery must be accessible to those with special educational needs, and not discriminate in relation to the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010, including sexual orientation and gender reassignment. The 'needs of all pupils' should be met, and 'all pupils [should] understand the importance of equality and respect'.

You can make these checks while auditing your curriculum planning and resources, checking that the materials you use are broad and inclusive. It is important to remember that while content should be sensitive and age-appropriate, parents only have the right to withdraw their children from sex education and not because they disagree with a lifestyle or family set-up which is presented.

*Lucy Marcovitch is series editor of Discovery Education Health and Relationships, a whole school digital PSHE programme covering the full relationships and health education objectives for primary schools. The programme is available for free until October.*

*Visit: [www.discoveryeducation.co.uk/rse](http://www.discoveryeducation.co.uk/rse)*

# READING AIDS CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

Stacey Mitchell says supporting emotional wellbeing as well as delivering education is vital

**W**e recognise that for each child to be able to reach their full potential, they must also learn how to look after their wellbeing.

The uncertainty and constant change since the beginning of lockdown has really tested the resilience of children across the country. A report from Ofsted found that children have lost stamina in their reading and writing, some have lost physical fitness, and others are showing signs of mental distress, which as an education provider we find really concerning.

## READING FOR WELLBEING

At Marine Academy we have endeavoured to use the pleasure of reading to support our children not just with their education but also with their mental health. Reading can provide escapism for children, allowing them to focus on a story or a character. In school we do 'drop everything and read' sessions every day where teachers read to the children or they read on their own. This session not only highlights the importance of reading to the children and improves their skills, but it also teaches them the discipline of taking time to focus on just one thing. When everything else feels overwhelming, uncertain, or out of control, you can always take time to look after yourself and enjoy a book.

We have always run these sessions in school but during the pandemic we felt it was important for children to continue doing this at home. We included this session in the packs we sent out to children learning remotely so they could integrate it into their day and continue to encourage any pupil who has to learn remotely to timetable this into their day. All of our children can use myON, which provides them with online access to up to 7,000 digitally enhanced books. We also share videos of our staff reading books, we find the children really enjoy seeing their teachers faces if they're not in school.

## A MOTIVATING POOCH

We know motivation is tricky for young pupils if they're working independently. We maintained their drive by offering access to



online resources. Each child was able to use Accelerated Reader by Renaissance to take quizzes on their books; children who achieved 100 per cent in a quiz were rewarded with their name put into a book raffle for the chance to choose one of the books in our vending machine. As the children worked their way through the Reader Certifications, we continued to send home their certificates in the post with a congratulations letter from Watson – one of our school dogs.

The school has three dogs, the Academy dog Watson, the Wellbeing Dog Wilma and a therapy dog called Little Bear. 'Paws to Read' sessions with Watson, which is when children get to read to him in the Academy's library, take place every day so it was important for them to continue to hear from him throughout the lockdown.

My advice to other schools would be to always focus on the joy that reading can bring. We appreciate there will always be reluctant readers in every class, but reading is not a punishment and if framed correctly can be seen by students as a reward and an opportunity to focus on themselves and their own wellbeing. We were delighted to be recognised at Renaissance's Lockdown Learning Awards and we will continue to focus on wellbeing in this year and post Covid-19.

**Stacey Mitchel is assistant headteacher at Marine Academy Primary, Plymouth.**



# Taking a first step

Dr Susan Atkinson examines the challenges and successes of the transition to school

**T**he transition to school is a very big step in a child's life, and in that of their family. It is the moment when they move away from the sphere of the family and take their first step into the wider world with a new identity as a school child.

Research confirms that a successful and positive transition into school where the child settles into the new environment quickly, makes friends, feels confident and is ready to learn has long-term social, emotional and academic impacts.

Changes children negotiate as they enter school include new rules and routines, greater independence in self-care skills such as putting on coats and toileting, making new relationships (with peers and adults), a more formal and more structured environment than they may have experienced in a pre-school setting or at home, and practical changes in travelling to school, getting organised for the day, or getting used to the whole day in the new environment.

## Formal

The UK is unusual in Europe in having a curriculum for the early years (the EYFS) which continues through the Reception year when children are starting school. So although the setting and staff may be new to the child, much of the curriculum, classroom equipment and pedagogy may be familiar. The transition to a new curriculum and, usually, a more formal teaching environment comes with the move into Year 1.

The success of the transition experience is not solely down to the child's adaptability and readiness for school. It also depends on the adaptability

and flexibility of the adults involved at home and at school. Parents may feel less involved and less central to their child's life and learning than previously.

Family language and culture as well as parental experiences of school colour the relationship. Research has found that around ten per cent of children have a negative transition experience, and this is more likely to be the case for children with SEN, EAL, refugee and marginalised groups, and children who have experienced trauma or abuse.

My research suggests that parents and teachers do not necessarily agree on what is important to a successful transition. Parents tend to see academic factors such as making progress and content knowledge as important, whereas teachers rate developing social skills, adapting to school, making friends and knowing school rules and routines more highly.

Advice on ensuring a smooth transition

*“The success of the transition experience is not solely down to the child's adaptability and readiness for school”*

suggests that successful programmes begin in the school year before the child enters school with strong links established with pre-school settings, open days and visits to see the new classroom and meet staff and children, information sessions and establishing good relationships and communication channels for sharing information between parents or carers, school and pre-school.

## Strategies

It is also valuable for children to be introduced to their named key worker well before they start in school and develop an attachment to them, as well as becoming familiar with the setting and its rules and routines. Most children look forward to starting school and expect change, but some continuity with home in the new setting, such as bringing a toy as a transitional object, can be emotionally supportive. Making the transition to school with friends and being grouped with them in class also contributes to wellbeing. Once children enter school, useful strategies include some continuity between pre-school and school curriculum and pedagogy: in England, the same curriculum and approach to teaching and learning is statutory in pre-schools and the Reception class so much is likely to be familiar. Shorter days or a flexible start are recommended initially, as well as good communication, listening to children and encouraging their independence.

**Dr Susan Atkinson,**  
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University.







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# MAKE SURE ALL PUPILS ARE ENGAGED

Lekha Sharma explains how to ensure that your school's curriculum is made inclusive to all, particularly in light of Covid-19

**M**aking learning inclusive is at its very core a matter of equity - it's about ensuring that ALL pupils can access and engage with the curriculum and that the barriers to learning are both mitigated against and managed effectively to maximise pupils' success.

Gathering rich and meaningful information about what the 'gaps' are ensures we aren't building a house of cards in terms of strategic curriculum response. A practical way of doing this is by taking a multi-disciplinary approach to your pupils and considering different factors that are effecting and contributing to pupils' success to unpick this.

## MAKE A COMMITMENT TO THE PROVISION YOU OFFER

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented challenges for educationalists but it has also given the opportunity for us to review our provision 'offer' to see how best we can support all learners. The school closures undeniably exasperated existing gaps and has shed light on our all-important purpose to narrow these gaps for all pupils in the name of equity. Decide on what's on offer, deliver clarity to all involved in this and make a commitment to doing less, better and more consistently. By 'singing off of the same hymn sheet' we can strengthen collective purpose. First we must establish a clear vision of 'what we do' and then we can graduate to the ever-important 'how we do what we do' to ensure consistent quality first teaching for all pupils.

## SUSTAINABLE, SIMPLISTIC MEASURES

School closures and the pandemic have put immense pressure on schools and educators and so it's important that strategic measures taken to address this are sustainable and 'SMART' in design. A minimalist approach is often far more effective. Once you have a clear understanding of where the 'gaps' are and the measures you're going to relentlessly commit to, you can use this to devise a plan that works for your staff and is bespoke for your pupils and your context.

## REVIEW, REFINE AND REVIEW AGAIN

In my book 'Curriculum to Classroom' I share the idea of 'curriculum kaizen' - an ongoing culture of continual refinement and improvement by a collective team-iterations of the 'grand plan' to edge closer and closer to something that works for your schools, teachers and pupils. In the face of the 'shifting sands' that we find ourselves constantly adapting and responding to, the review process is vital. Recognising that not every measure put in place will work and that's ok is crucial to our professional practice (and indeed our sanity!). Swift recognition of this eliminates what doesn't work - leaving more room for what, more importantly, does! Ensuring involvement of all stakeholders in the review process can help you build a reliable picture of what's working in the curriculum and what's not - this can then inform meaningful and appropriate responses..

## 'NAME' OUR PURPOSE

Given the current global and educational context, I've saved what I strongly believe is the most vital recommendation to last - reinforcing and 'naming' our purpose. Keeping the 'why we do what we do' at the heart of teaching and developing a strong ethos around fulfilling this purpose is key to addressing the gaps that have emerged and maximising outcomes for all the pupils we serve.



**Lekha Sharma, vice principal  
Ark Oval Primary Academy  
and author of Curriculum to  
Classroom.**







# THE BEST STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH BULLYING

Dr Elizabeth Nassem explains how teachers and pupils can resolve school bullying together

If you want to improve your understanding of school bullying and resources to tackle it, the best places to start is with the pupils in your school. By engaging in structured and meaningful dialogue with pupils about their experiences of bullying and their ideas for how bullying should be resolved you will become more equipped to handle it.

Your colleagues and pupils' parents also contain a wealth of information to help you address bullying. In my book 'The Teacher's

Guide to Resolving Bullying: Evidence-Based Strategies and Pupil-Led Interventions' I have used my research to create anti-bullying strategies tailored to pupil's specific experiences of bullying for teachers to adopt. These approaches are likely to be more useful than adult-led approaches which children might not actively participate in or engage with. Here is how you can devise pupil-led anti-bullying interventions which are evidence-based.

## A PUPIL-LED FRAMEWORK

Firstly, observe how pupils interact with each other and school staff in class and in the playground. Whilst observing pupils consider when their interactions might constitute bullying. Observations can help you investigate children's behaviour and generate relevant questions to ask pupils about their experiences of school and bullying. Ask pupils in small groups (of about five) about

how pupils experience bullying, how school bullying is dealt with and how bullying should be dealt with.

To further enhance your knowledge, speak to colleagues and pupils' parents about how pupils experience bullying. From this you can interview pupils, school staff and even parents about how to develop strategies to help deal with bullying amongst pupils. You can then work with pupils, colleagues and parents to implement anti-bullying strategies. This might involve facilitating pupil-led anti-bullying assemblies, reviewing and updating policies about bullying and behaviour, and establishing a support group for pupils who are bothered by bullying who want to join a mutually supportive group who they work with to address bullying.

After the anti-bullying strategies have been implemented it would be helpful to interview pupils, parents and teachers to evaluate and further develop them. Observations of pupils can be an additional tool to investigate whether there are improvements in how pupils interact with each other and school staff, and where improvements have been made.

## ESTABLISH AN ANTI-BULLYING ADVISORY GROUP

Establish an anti-bullying advisory group to help your school stay up to date with pupil's experiences of bullying and develop bespoke strategies to deal with these experiences. An anti-bullying advisory group could consist of pupils, parents and teachers who meet regularly to discuss how pupils are experiencing bullying, and design and implement strategies to resolve this. In the anti-bullying advisory group, particularly complex cases of bullying could be discussed so the group can work together to decide on what would be the most appropriate strategies. The anti-bullying advisory group could feed its recommendations into senior management. If your school is reluctant to establish an anti-bullying advisory group then bullying could feature as an ongoing theme to be discussed in staff meetings about pupils, and included on every agenda on the school council.

## CONNECTING WITH PUPILS

Provide children with diaries to write in regularly about their interactions with other pupils and school staff, and even their home life if they feel it is appropriate. Diaries can provide in-depth insight into children's lives and what is important to them. You can learn about children's personal experiences of bullying, how they are interpreting these experiences and the impact these experiences are having on children. Reading children's diaries can also help you evaluate if

children are changing their thoughts and behaviour throughout an intervention, and, if so, where the changes are taking place. Walking interviews involve walking with pupils while interviewing them and can be used to investigate bullying. Some of the interventions that you implement can also involve walking, such as a walking support group. Walking interviews and interventions might make pupils feel more in control of the process than in traditional interviews and classroom activities. This might increase their engagement in the topics being discussed. You might wish to walk with pupils to places which elicit certain feelings such as the playground or an isolation unit. Walking strategies can help to increase the participation of pupils and could be more inclusive than traditional interviews for certain pupils with special educational needs. A child with ADHD might particularly appreciate the activity that walking can bring as opposed to being sat down and feeling entrapped. Walking with pupils in the fresh air, and if possible, being surrounded by nature might help you connect with pupils more so that you can gain in-depth insight into their experiences and perceptions.

“Walking interviews involve walking with pupils while interviewing them and can be used to investigate bullying.”

## A SYSTEM OF DIALOGUE

For schools to deal effectively with bullying, it is vital that school staff having dialogue with pupils is embedded into school policies and practices so that pupils can exercise their voice effectively. This can be partly achieved by developing a mentoring programme for pupils who persistently engage in bullying to learn how to behave more respectfully. One of the main reasons that children engage in bullying is to be popular amongst their peers and exercise social power over them. By listening to pupils and ensuring their voice is heard, pupils are likely to feel empowered which can prevent them from exercising power through destructive means.

A mentoring programme can be facilitated by an educator who focuses on finding out why mentees are engaging in bullying and develops strategies to address the underlying reasons behind the bullying. Mentoring can be provided on a one-to-one with pupils and/or with pupils in small groups. From having

## HOW TO TACKLE BULLYING

- **Change takes time and pupils might improve but then relapse. It is helpful to see the anti-bullying work as a constantly evolving and reflective process.**
- **Find out if children want to change. It is difficult to help children if they do not want to improve. However, if children are upset because they are constantly getting into trouble then ask them if they would like you to help them get along with their peers and/or teachers better.**
- **Replace bullying with something positive. Children might be frightened of losing respect from their 'mates' if they stop bullying. To replace this, help pupils use their power positively, for example, by including ostracised pupils in their games.**
- **Establish a supportive network. Find out who the pupils, colleagues and parents are who want to work with you to tackle bullying. If you are a member of a union they might be interested in supporting you to tackle bullying.**

regular dialogue with mentees generic recommendations about how to improve school policy and practices in behaviour management and tackling bullying might emerge.

Pupil-led strategies which support children to deal effectively with bullying focus on enhancing pupils' personal development which has recently been included in the Ofsted School Inspection Handbook (2019). These strategies are likely to develop pupils' character, confidence and resilience so they learn how to keep themselves mentally healthy, and flourish in school and society.



**Dr Elizabeth Nassem is a lecturer in Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Mental Health at Leeds Trinity University.**

# CALL IN HELP TO RAISE ATTAINMENT

Simon Barnes explains how to make the most of your NTP-subsidised tutoring

**F**or many primary schools, tutoring funded by the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) will be their first experience of tuition not delivered by their own staff. After several conversations with schools in my role as head of one of the 33 NTP Tuition Partners – and a former teacher myself – I understand that school leaders are keen to maximise the opportunity.

Here's how primary schools can make the most of the tuition on offer through the NTP, support the outstanding work their teachers already do and ensure students receive the greatest possible benefit from the programme.

## ADVICE FOR FIRST-TIMERS

Every NTP Tuition Partner offers something different: some are using university graduates as tutors while others, like ourselves, use qualified teachers. Some offer group sessions, while others deliver one-to-one tutoring. Each of these approaches are grounded in extensive evidence that shows tutoring is one of the best possible interventions to help raise attainment. As a school leader, your priority should be choosing a tuition partner that works best for your school's circumstances and your pupils' needs.

Almost all NTP providers offer online tuition. Certain partners – like TLC LIVE – specialise in online tuition, while others are delivering offline sessions online in this period of school closures. You could consider if you'd like tutoring to carry on being delivered online when schools do reopen to all pupils, or if you'd prefer the option of face-to-face sessions when it's safe to do so.

Similarly, it's important to assess the resources and delivery methods of the different tutoring options.

We have found greater success drawing from a large bank of bespoke content designed for online delivery which is then adapted to each student's needs. If you aren't sure what type of content the provider is offering, ask to schedule a demonstration. Most providers offer these for free, and they are a great way to identify whether their approach is right for your students.

## WHEN CAN WE GET STARTED?

After choosing a provider, school leaders often ask how quickly they can begin and what they can do to expedite the process. Each provider will have their own onboarding process, but most partners can get started within days. For example, our online set-up process enables us to begin delivering lessons within 24 hours of sign-up.





“As a school leader, your priority should be choosing a tuition partner that works best for your school’s circumstances and your pupils’ needs.”

To ensure everything goes smoothly on the school’s end, it’s important to identify the specific students who stand to benefit from the programme and the areas they should focus on. Tuition Partners always work closely

with the teachers and the tutoring complements classroom learning already happening.

## TUITION IS A PARTNERSHIP

The success of tutoring is based on clear, two-way communication between the Tuition Partner and the school. I would advise teachers to take any opportunities offered to communicate with their students’ tutors, especially early on, and to reach out if they ever have questions or concerns.

Mutually agreed targets – ideally, quantifiable attainment goals which are ambitious but realistic – are a time-tested way of ensuring students benefit from tutoring. Many schools choose to track student progress using their existing data capture and monitoring systems, to ensure the data doesn’t fall through the administrative cracks. Alternatively, some tutoring providers have their own systems which integrate with a school’s existing approach. In either case, it is essential to ensure both parties understand the metrics that will be recorded and where they will be stored, before the first session.

Just as schools brief the tutor at the beginning of the process, tutors should provide feedback to schools after the block of 15 NTP-subsidised sessions is over. Teachers should inquire about areas where the student still needs support, especially any new knowledge gaps that the tutor has discovered.

## THE RIGHT PLACE AND THE RIGHT TIME

Consistent attendance is crucial if students are to benefit from tutoring, but understandably, some students might be resistant to additional academic work.

Fortunately, tutors can offer greater flexibility than schools when it comes to scheduling. Tuition Partners are willing to arrange different times and dates to suit student needs, and even change tutors if necessary, to ensure that the student feels as comfortable as possible.

At TLC LIVE, we have found that students engage best with tutors during the school day, especially before lunch. Given that schools are already moving to remote learning, it should be possible for students to switch between teachers and tutors while learning from home. It’s up to teachers whether they

## GET THE MOST OUT OF SESSIONS

- **Understand how your provider delivers sessions. Every provider is different, so consider a trial session to see if their style is right for your students.**
- **Communication is key. Regular, two-way communication between teacher and tutor ensures the sessions cover only the relevant material and avoid repetition. To maximise tutoring time, teachers should offer guidance on what each student needs to cover.**
- **Know what you want – and how to measure it. The school and the tutor should agree on the desired outcome of the sessions, and they should set out a way to quantify improvements in each student’s attainment.**
- **Students need to attend to benefit. Tutoring works best when delivered in a sustained block at a regular time each week. Use the tutoring provider’s flexibility to find a time that works for each student to ensure that they’re focused and getting the most out of the sessions.**

would like the tutors to support the current topic they are studying or reinforce previous subjects.

One downside to students working remotely is that it is harder for schools to monitor attendance. School administrators will need to create a system to ensure that students attend, potentially involving drop-ins by teachers or follow-ups with tutors after each session.

## THE RIGHT SOLUTION FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Every school is unique and the advantage of the NTP is that the school can decide for itself how best to utilise the support it offers to address their students’ needs. For instance, we have noticed that primary schools are sending students with very specific requirements, such as support for Year 1 phonics. The group of 33 NTP providers offers a broad range of options, and I’m confident that there’s something on offer which will suit every school’s need.



**Simon Barnes, CEO & founder of online tuition firm and NTP Tuition Partner TLC LIVE**

# BOOKING AND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM

## for Before & After School Clubs

- GDPR compliant
- Online booking
- Automated invoicing & reminders
- Up to date registers
- Free setup and trial period

Schools like yours are saving hours each week with Kids Club HQ. Find out how you could too, visit:

[www.kidsclubhq.com/psm](http://www.kidsclubhq.com/psm)



## HOW TO CUT THE ADMIN for your After School or Breakfast Club

Running an after school or breakfast club is a great source of income for the school and provides an essential service for working parents. But it's easy to underestimate the amount of admin that's required to keep things running smoothly and to comply with Ofsted requirements.



There's a lot of information to be collected and stored about the children and when they will be attending. Double or triple keying information from paper forms or emails to produce registers then creating and sending invoices to parents is incredibly time consuming. That's before you start to deal with the inevitable last-minute changes.

Things could be much easier for everyone. Collecting the required information using online forms and a central database means parents don't need to submit repeated information and you have easy access to what you need all in one place.

When using Kids Club HQ, registers are automatically up to date

(including last-minute changes!) and can be viewed online in an instant or exported to Excel for offline use.

Instead of manually creating invoices for parents, these can be generated and sent by email automatically. Automated reminders for outstanding payments help to keep accounts up to date and reduce time spent chasing parents.

Kids Club HQ is an easy to use cloud-based platform built from the ground up for breakfast, after school and holiday clubs with an online booking system for parents and an administration system for you and the club staff.

Schools like yours rely on Kids Club HQ to keep on top of the admin for their clubs.





# GET TO GRIPS WITH THE BEST PRACTICE FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Emma Hammett looks at Covid-19 infection prevention and what to do in an emergency

**S**chools have been working tirelessly to provide the best possible education for children despite the major challenges of Covid-19.

It is not easy to try and socially distance within a school environment, particularly with younger children, and the Government has published detailed guidance on actions for schools during the Covid-19 outbreak and is regularly updated.

## EFFECTIVE INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES

In all education, childcare and social care settings, it is vital to reduce the possibility of direct transmission (from being in close contact with an infected person) and indirect transmission (via touching contaminated surfaces). Schools are already undertaking most of the following recommendations to try and reduce the likelihood of further viral spread:

- Minimising contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who should be quarantining, do not attend childcare settings, schools or colleges. This should apply to parents, students and siblings.
- Cleaning hands more often than usual and continually reinforcing the importance of hand and respiratory hygiene. Facilitating times for handwashing throughout the day.
- Regularly cleaning frequently touched surfaces such as light switches, computer screens and mice, door knobs, lift buttons, bannisters, taps, loo flushes.
- Avoid sharing equipment wherever possible. If it is essential that equipment is shared and cannot easily be cleaned, it should be appropriately quarantined.
- Minimising contact and mixing by altering, as much as possible, the environment (such as classroom layout) and timetables (such as

staggered break times)

- Classrooms should be well-ventilated and schools should use outdoor space whenever possible.

## CPR

What if a child is unconscious and not breathing and needs CPR? This is temporary CPR advice specifically for Covid-19:

- It is no longer advised to look, listen and feel with your head above the casualty's mouth and nose, to check for normal breathing. Instead, recognise cardiac arrest by looking for the absence of signs of life and absence of normal breathing. If you are in any doubt whether or not they are breathing normally, start chest compressions until help arrives.
- Call 999 for an ambulance and advise the emergency service if Covid-19 is suspected.
- If there is a perceived risk of infection, lightly place a cloth/towel over the victim's mouth and nose and start compression only CPR and early defibrillation until the ambulance arrives. Place hands on the centre of the chest and push hard and fast.
- Early use of a defibrillator (AED) significantly increases the person's chances of survival and does not increase risk of infection.
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves and face mask, if possible.
- After performing compression-only CPR, all rescuers should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand gel. They should also seek advice from the NHS 111 coronavirus advice service or medical adviser.

**Emma Hammett, CEO First Aid for Life**  
[www.firstaidforlife.org.uk](http://www.firstaidforlife.org.uk) and [www.onlinefirstaid.com](http://www.onlinefirstaid.com)

# THE POWER OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Dr Sarah Taylor explains why we should be teaching happiness and contentment alongside history and counting

**H**ave you ever had a day where you've felt demotivated, struggled to concentrate, and got very little done as a consequence? That's a rhetorical question, because the overwhelming chance is that you have. And most of us will have looked back with the benefit of hindsight and been able to identify why – perhaps we were upset, stressed or anxious and that was feeding in to our inability to have a productive day.

Most emotionally-aware adults will be able to recognise when there's something impacting their ability to focus on a task, learn something new, or to engage fully with the people around them. We can link the emotion with the resulting behaviour. This doesn't just apply when we experience major, life-changing events which are likely to impact us in the long-term – it applies to all of the fleeting emotional states we regularly find ourselves in too.

A huge traumatic event can completely derail every aspect of your life, but equally something as simple as being tired or anxious will decrease your capacity for concentration, motivation or full immersion in a specific activity. Conversely, feeling positive emotions will help us in all aspects of life from concentration to creativity.

## NEGLECT

Research tells us that positive emotions don't just have momentary impact either. Experiencing inspiration, social connection and acts of kindness can actually enhance physical and mental health, relationships, family unity and future prospects – alongside significantly enhancing our ability to emotionally regulate.

With that in mind, why is it that we often neglect to make the link between underlying emotions and a child's ability to play a full and active role in classroom life? Far too many of us will have heard a child described as 'naughty' because of the behaviours they may display – and often it's only in the rare cases where this behaviour necessitates professional

support that the link between the underlying emotion and the resulting action is uncovered.

Where a child may be progressing at a slower rate than their peers, or they find it tough to concentrate fully on the activity they're doing at the time, how often do we stop and consider why? It's totally understandable as a teacher when you have up to 30 pupils in your care that it's difficult to take a metaphorical step back

“Conversely, feeling positive emotions will help us in all aspects of life from concentration to creativity”

and identify the emotions which may be contributing to this behaviour.

Finding the time to encourage the emotions which can positively impact classroom life might also be challenging – and yet there's a school of thought known as Positive Psychology which demonstrates just how impactful this would be.

Positive Psychology is founded in the knowledge that experiencing emotions with favourable connotations can impact our creative thinking, cognition, and processing and allow us to more easily exhibit all those ideal behaviours. Dr Barbara Frederickson coined the term 'micro moments of positivity' which could be something as simple as sharing a smile or laugh with a friend. Children need a rich diet of these micro moments in order to broaden the scope of their thoughts and actions (which increases their ability to be creative and abstract), and build personal resources (intellectual, physical, social, and psychological).

There are many potential benefits of positive psychology for children, including

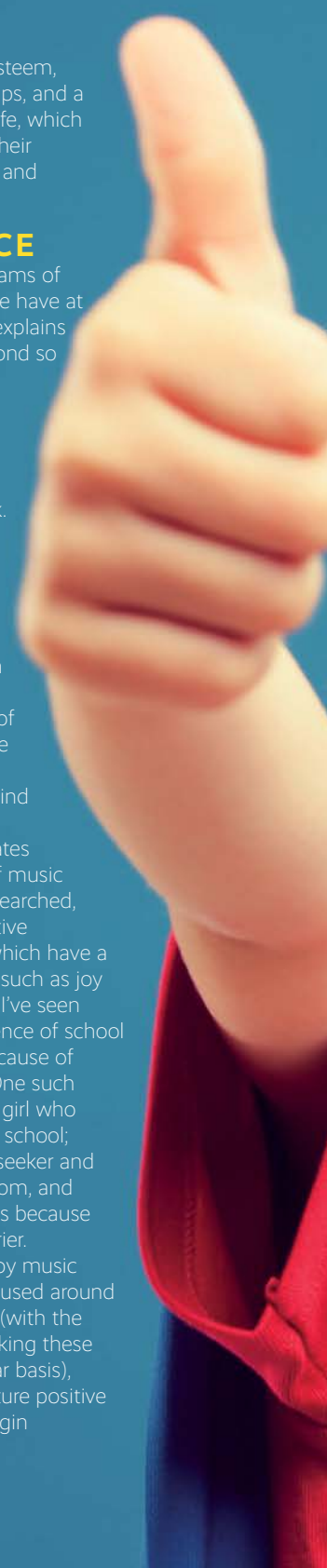
an increase in self-esteem, improved relationships, and a greater outlook on life, which ultimately impacts their resilience, optimism and mental health.

## EXPERIENCE

In addition to the reams of scientific research we have at our disposal which explains why our brains respond so well to Positive Psychology, we also have plenty of anecdotal evidence showing how well the techniques work.

I've personally seen this happen when working with children to implement my CalmBrain approach in their school; the founding principles of the approach include Positive Psychology and the science behind brain development. CalmBrain incorporates different modules of music and scientifically-researched, neurologically-sensitive movements, all of which have a very specific focus - such as joy or connection - and I've seen pupils' entire experience of school life turned round because of it countless times. One such example was a little girl who was being bullied at school; she was an asylum seeker and had been isolated from, and rejected by, her peers because of the language barrier.

By starting to enjoy music and movements focused around the emotion of 'joy' (with the whole class undertaking these activities on a regular basis), she was able to nurture positive relationships and begin





connecting with the other children in her class. It sounds almost too simple to be true, but by focusing on 'joy' and experiencing that positive emotion together regularly, they reaped the individual and collective benefits. It was beneficial not just for the little girl I was directly working with, but the whole class too.

## HEALING

In another school, I worked with a ten-year-old whose mother had passed away – she was sad, lonely, showing little interest in school work, and isolating herself from the class. She wasn't benefitting from bereavement counselling because she wasn't emotionally stable enough for it to have an impact. It was important that school was a safe haven for her, as there were many positive adults dedicated to helping her. I introduced movements concentrated on the emotion of 'amusement' based upon being silly. Moving around like a penguin evoked the natural laughter response from her, and her peers were subsequently able to join together with her in a collective sense of healing. Through this, she started releasing the tension and grief held in her body as it allowed her to experience emotional balance.

The body relies on the expression of positive emotions to find balance after a trauma and bring about harmony with the mind – and using the movements to unlock this allowed this young girl to start receiving support from her friends, school and counsellor. By evoking intense experiences of positive emotions repeatedly through the day in the classroom setting, children are able to significantly reduce stress and anxiety levels as part of a programme which ultimately challenges negative mental health and champions emotional wellbeing – enabling them to flourish within a hugely positive learning space.

A teacher's remit is very much about helping children understand the world around them – whether that's through introducing science, reading, history or maths.

## A WORD OF ADVICE

**Spending just two to three minutes evoking positive emotions at key transition times during the day (before or after break or lunch, and/or before home-time) has a real impact on pupils. And, to get the very best response from the children, staff need to be fully engaged too and create a nurturing environment. Staff joining in, particularly when concentrating on moods such as 'joy' and 'amusement', which are working the area of the brain responsible for attachment, can help develop positive relationships between the whole class.**

### MOVEMENT

**Children should be challenged by the movements linked to these emotions as this will develop and reorganise their brain – the results of which will be clear through improved coordination and movement. Individual programmes of music and movement can be introduced to help children who are particularly finding the classroom environment difficult.**

### DEVELOP

**Improvements don't happen immediately, but repeated practise will see motor, emotional, social and cognitive functioning develop over time.**

An integral part of this is linking the behaviours they exhibit with the emotions underlying them, and introducing them to (and then reinforcing) all those positive emotions which are going to enhance their lives and their ability to fully take part in classroom activities.

Overlooking the developmental benefits of experiencing positive emotions means we're disadvantaging our children in the classroom and into their adult lives too.



**Dr Sarah Taylor is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, and the creator of CalmBrain.**



# HOW TO BUILD YOUR PUPILS' CONFIDENCE

Dr James Mannion explains how to teach children to get better at learning independently

**W**hat's the one thing you would change about your pupils? I have asked teachers this question many times. By far the most common response I hear is a variation on the following theme:

- 'I want my pupils to be more independent.'
- 'I want them to be less apathetic/needy/helpless.'
- 'I wish I didn't have to spoon-feed them all the time.'

To explore the scale of the problem, I recently asked Twitter: 'What's the most helpless question a child has asked you?' I was inundated with replies:

- 'Should I sharpen my (very blunt) pencil?'
- 'I've done question one, what should I do now?'
- 'Where shall I put the rubbish?'

At this point, a number of questions arise. Is it possible to teach children in such a way that they are less likely to weigh down their teachers with such helpless utterances? Is it possible to teach children to become more confident, proactive, self-regulated learners? Put simply: is it possible to teach children how to get better at learning independently?

## RAISING THE BAR, CLOSING THE GAP

Ten years ago, a small team of teachers set out to create a curriculum to achieve just this. I know because I was one of them. We developed something called the Learning Skills curriculum, and I evaluated it over eight years as the focus of my PhD with the University of Cambridge. That evaluation found that Learning Skills led to significant gains in subject learning across the curriculum, with accelerated gains among children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mannion & Mercer, 2016; Mannion, McAllister & Mercer, 2018).

Learning Skills was developed in a secondary school, but it is really a universal set of ideas and practices that can help anyone – adult, teen or toddler – become a more effective learner. The approach is already taking root and bearing fruit across a range of contexts: from reception classes to universities, from schools in deprived areas to elite international colleges, from workplaces to refugee camps. Although we adapt the methods we use when working with different age groups

and in different settings, the underlying approach is fundamentally the same.

## LEARNING TO LEARN IN THE PRIMARY SETTING

Teaching children how to get better at learning independently is a complex problem – it is simultaneously cognitive, social/emotional and behavioural. We therefore need to approach this complex problem with what I refer to as a 'complex intervention' – an intervention with many moving parts.

Research suggests that three key concepts are particularly important when teaching children how to get better at learning.

- Metacognition – monitoring and controlling thought processes (their internal environment).

"The key to learning to learn is to focus on the 'how' as well as the 'what' of learning."





- Self-regulation – monitoring and controlling feelings (physical and emotional) and behaviours (how they interact with the external environment).
- Oracy – speaking and listening effectively in a range of contexts.

Separately, these are really effective things to focus on. Taken together, the ‘marginal gains’ to arise from each element stack up and interact to become a powerful, self-actualising force that is greater than the sum of its parts.

I recently co-authored a book, *Fear is the Mind Killer: Why Learning to Learn deserves lesson time – and how to make it work for your pupils*, with my amazing colleague Kate McAllister, who is currently setting up a school in the Dominican Republic to put these ideas into action for children aged four to 14. The

book contains lots of practical guidance on how schools can implement these ideas. In the remainder of this article, I will share a few examples of powerful practices that we used to help our students become more confident, proactive, self-regulated learners.

## METACOGNITION

- **The how of learning.** The key to learning to learn is to focus on the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’ of learning. Find ways to make the invisible, tacit, implicit processes of learning visible, tangible, explicit – and therefore learnable.
- **Learning Journals.** Once a week, ask your pupils to write a few lines. Look back at the previous week: what went well? What challenges did you encounter? What could you have done differently? And look forward: set some goals for the coming week, to review next time.

## SELF-REGULATION

- **Project-based learning.** It needs to be planned very carefully, but project-based learning is really important in developing self-regulated learners. It allows the teacher to step back and the child to discover what they can and cannot do by themselves, in the absence of supervision. At first, some will struggle, but they need the time and space to develop the ability to stand on their own two feet.
- **Curated autonomy.** Find ways to allow the children to exercise choice over their learning. This should be curated, rather than a free-for-all. Allow them to set their own homework, or to choose how to present their work, or what aspect of a topic they want to explore in more depth as the focus of a project.

## ORACY

- **Talk rules.** This is the most powerful thing I ever did as a teacher. There isn’t space to explain it fully here. Visit the University of Cambridge Thinking Together website for some excellent resources to help you get started.
- **Presentation talk.** Even very young children can learn

## HERE'S WHAT TO DO

- Put together a ‘vertical slice team’ to decide how to move forward with this agenda. A cross-section of the organisation: a senior leader, a middle leader, teachers from each key stage, teaching assistant, a learning support assistant, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator.
- Make sure all teachers understand the theory, once they know this, they can apply these ideas from first principles:
  - Metacognition: monitoring and controlling thought processes.
  - Self-regulation: monitoring and controlling feelings and behaviours.
  - Oracy: speaking and listening effectively in a range of contexts.
- As a rule of thumb, find ways to make the invisible, tacit, implicit processes of learning visible, tangible, explicit – and therefore learnable.
- Start small and build a ‘complex intervention’ that works for your teachers and your children, at this particular point in time.

how to stand at the front of a room and deliver a knockout speech with no notes. When they do, they walk an inch taller. They find their voice physically and metaphorically. They start to see themselves differently. It makes them confident and this is perhaps the most valuable gift of them all.

I do not want schools to take our ideas off the peg and implement them in a top-down way: this approach is almost certainly destined to fail. Instead, we work with schools to help them develop their own complex intervention, one that is suited to your particular teachers and your particular children, at this particular point in time. If you would like to find out more, drop me a line at [rethinking-ed.org/contact](mailto:rethinking-ed.org/contact). I look forward to hearing from you.



**Dr James Mannion**, worked as a science teacher for 12 years, and spent eight years in school leadership roles.

To learn more or order a copy of *Fear is the Mind Killer* by Dr James Mannion and Kate McAllister (priced at £13), go to <https://amzn.to/3qPynKO>

# HOW TO SUPPORT EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

Ros Wilson explains why it takes five years to become a teacher

**S**hortly before the outbreak of Covid-19, I was privileged to speak at two events specifically for Early Career Teachers, generally defined by the government as teachers in the first two years of their career.

My brief was to make the delegates laugh – and stories of my early career did that. However, I did include the ‘throw-away’ fact (or that was how I thought about it at the time) that I was often petrified, in a panic and feeling abandoned and unsupported. I closed by talking about how everything gradually fell into place over the weeks and terms, and how I was now (Spring 2020) in the 56th year of a rich and joyous career in education.

At the end of the session a young woman approached me in tears and told me that she was in her second year and experiencing all the stresses I had described. She advised me that she was intending to leave the profession at the end of that term and already had her resignation written, although not yet submitted. She hadn’t felt she could talk to anyone in school about her true feelings. Now she had listened to me, she was reassured and intending to stay in the profession. So many other young teachers have shared similar feelings with us since that day.

## FRIGHTENING

The current drop-out rate for teachers in the first few years of their career is frightening and an expensive waste that the profession cannot afford. Although the overall proportion of teachers who leave the teaching profession before retirement age has fallen slightly from 9.6 per cent in 2018 to 9.2 per cent in 2019, the five-year retention rate for teachers at the start of their careers dropped to 67.4 per cent, compared with 68 per cent in the previous year. A distressing and somewhat puzzling fact.

In July 2020, I was reminiscing with a friend about our time together ‘on the road’ when she was my front-of-house. As we chatted over our stir-fry Kirstie remarked that she had just completed her fifth year as a qualified teacher, and added: ‘Do you remember that you used to tell colleagues

that it takes five years to become a teacher? Well, now I know what you mean. After three years I thought I was there, but now – at five years – everything just comes so naturally. Nothing surprises me or throws me off balance – I love every day in the classroom!’

‘So, imagine how young teachers will be feeling in the Autumn Term,’ I replied. We speculated about how stressful it must be for those who have had their year of qualifying as a teacher so disrupted and for those in the first years of qualified teaching thrown into the professional confusion and sometimes chaos of the pandemic.

That was when the idea of writing *‘It Takes Five Years to Become a Teacher’* was suddenly born and the writing began.

This book was conceived 11 weeks before the day it first went on sale. We were so lucky to be supported by a team of seven highly regarded co-authors, and more latterly by a further 17 contributors from all stages and spheres of the world of education. And the words of all these generous and talented people blew me away, because over and over again I was reading about similar experiences from the start of their careers – the stresses, the fears, the doubts and the disasters! This book made clear that rigorous academic education may give you the theory for teaching, but it does not give you the competency to run a classroom single handed, to expect the unexpected, to deal with irate parents, invading dogs, fracas on stairways, leeches on the back of the neck or just feeling you belong and you know what you are doing!

## SUPPORT

Times have changed. The mentor system for NQTs is well established; most NQTs report having felt well supported and advised. In their second year, however, many say they suddenly felt adrift – the abandonment had only been delayed a year. Now there is hope! We have the Early Career Framework to support the NQT onwards through their second year as a qualified professional.

The Framework is currently on trial in selected areas across the country and initial feedback is good. Next academic year (from September 2021) it will be rolled out to all

state schools everywhere in England. Every Early Career Teacher will have their own mentor for two years, plus they will attend half a day every week for relevant and thorough further learning and support. The modules for the Framework are available on the DfE site, they are well worth a look.

**There are currently four providers, and the modules cover the five aspects of teaching deemed to be most relevant for inexperienced teachers:**

- behaviour management
- pedagogy
- curriculum
- assessment
- professional behaviours

**The government’s offer for early career teachers includes:**

- two years of new, funded, high-quality training
- freely available high-quality development materials based on the early career framework
- additional funding for five per cent time away from the classroom for teachers in their second year
- a dedicated mentor and support for these mentors
- funding to cover mentors’ time with the mentee in the second year of teaching

This is an amazing investment in our profession, and one that will, I am sure, enrich and reinforce the pedagogy and practice of so many teachers new to the profession, however – I don’t think it will replace the need for a hug!

Now, I don’t want the rapid expulsion of many of our talented headteachers for inappropriate behaviour initiated by me. I do not mean real hugs. I mean virtual hugs, words of encouragement, praise and support. I fully realise that this is the role of the mentor, and also a role many of you and your Leadership Teams fulfil on the side, but what the writing of the book showed us is that so many young teachers assume that they are the only ones who are struggling. They conceal their struggles, they answer your queries with a smile and the assurance that



“Why did no lecturer ever tell us about their struggles at the start of their careers?”

## HOW TO SUPPORT EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

- Don't assume they are alright because they smile at you and say they are.
- Do provide model lesson plans written by teachers who taught the same planning in previous years, to be used as a framework if required.
- Do drop into their classrooms informally, wander round and chat with children if appropriate, rather than formally observing. Follow up with informal chats to celebrate the good things seen and give friendly advice when appropriate.
- Do share with them stories of your own early experiences in the classroom, and those of other experienced teachers.
- Do encourage your existing staff to share in the staffroom when something has proved hard or gone wrong – we all have bad days!
- Do forbid all staff to do paperwork for more than two hours a day. Ask what is taking up their time and sort it!
- Do ensure the novice teacher feels confident to share feelings and emotions.
- Do celebrate the golden moments you see for your early career teachers.
- Do build 'two golden moments and a worry' sections into staff meetings but people only contribute if happy to. Less experienced teachers will be reassured by the worries of others.
- Do examine some of the modules on the Early Careers Framework providers sections of the DfE website. Look for good ideas you can implement in school or raise for discussion.
- Do continue to create a collegiate atmosphere of nurturing, learning and growing together year on year across all staff.

all is fine, and they go home and shed a tear – and spend another five hours on preparation before a sleepless night.

### INSECURE

Why did no lecturer ever tell us about their struggles at the start of their careers? Why did no head or experienced teacher share their horror stories from the start? Why do young teachers feel so alone, insecure and – sometimes – inadequate.

In chatting with Professor Sam Twistleton OBE, Director SHU School of Education, I was delighted to hear she is currently working with the DfE on revision of Initial Teacher Training. I suggested that the content of the Early Career Framework would be better placed in an academic setting with more pastoral and wellbeing support in schools. Sam and I agreed that ITT is too short and

too far from the reality for these young and inexperienced teachers and that five years of thorough academic study and practical experience would far better prepare them to cope with the future to come.



**Ros Wilson has been fully active in education for 56 years and has worked in all phases within schools. She has held posts as Head of Primary overseas, LA Advisor, Ofsted Inspector, AST Assessor, Primary Strategy Manager, Curriculum Designer and published writer, and has worked as an independent consultant for the last 21 years.**



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# There's always room for improvement

We talk to school leaders and pass on their knowledge and advice on how you can do things differently now and post Covid-19



## Community cohesion

**John Morris OBE, headteacher  
Ardleigh Green Junior,  
Hornchurch, East London**

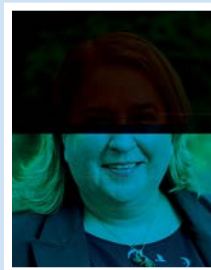
An important element of Ardleigh Green's offering is its family centre. Tragically, in 2006 a parent of a pupil at the school was murdered. I

obviously knew the family and what was interesting was that they came here, to school, for help.

I thought, 'My goodness, how can we support this?' Increasingly, the role of headteacher is not just about teaching, it's about community, so I thought it would be good if we had our own family centre so that we could provide support and advice when needed.

The school managed to come to a deal to renovate an old Baptist church and use it for five years. By the end of this period, 200 people were using the centre on a weekly basis. I spoke to the council and said, 'We're running services that you should be providing. What are you going to do?' Long story short, I persuaded the council to sell our schoolkeeper's house and use the money to buy the church.

The family centre is run as an independent charity, overseen by the school's governors, and now helps 400 people a week. We have prenatal and postnatal sessions, a bereavement service, a community choir, mental health support, a food bank, a toy library. We've joined with the Lighthouse Furniture Project so that we can furnish a house for families in need. Working with Moses Basket we can equip new parents with a cot, nappies and food. Anyone, with any problem, can come in and get support. Because it's off the school premises there's no embarrassment. Sadly, we receive no government funding to provide what many believe to be an essential service for our local community.



## Happiness

**Natalie Cummings, headteacher,  
Hook Lane Primary School,  
Bexley, Kent**

One of the major factors in maintaining happiness in staff was looking at workload and making sure teachers didn't have to stay squirrelled away in their classrooms. They've got time to

talk. And that's not just about downtime and sitting around and having a chat. It means they've got time to share ideas. That's where the good stuff happens, through professional dialogue. Sometimes you can't do that from meetings or sitting around a table. Sometimes it's being able to talk about your problems, what went well, what didn't, and so on.

So how does Hook Lane keep a check on workload? If staff are listened to and SLT try their best to make workload reasonable, then staff don't mind going the extra mile when it's needed. It's a very supportive environment.

I take pride in the fact that pupil behaviour is one of the school's strengths – as was the case when I first arrived. That gives you a good grounding to push learning on. I had a different style of leadership to the previous head. I'm a great believer in having regular walk-rounds, for example, popping into classes. But because the previous head didn't do it, the staff wanted to know why I was doing it. So they came and spoke to me and I explained, and the more I did it, and got them to do it too, the more they got used to it. A prime example of the collaborative culture at Hook Lane is the system of peer mentoring, where staff get together in threes and twos and talk about what they'd like to develop in their practice. They get good experiences from each other and find out what works well.



## Opinions

**Gemma Andrews, headteacher, Castle Hill Infant and Junior Schools, Ipswich, Suffolk**

We bring children on board by asking their opinion. We've got a form that says 'When things go wrong', so that they can write down their thoughts and we can use that as a basis for our

restorative conversations. We also encourage collaboration among pupils logistically by putting year groups together rather than having them spread out, so they could work as a team and children could move between the classrooms.

It is important that we recognise the difference between sympathy and empathy. We need to understand that feeling sorry for the children is not going to help them move forward. It's about saying we understand what they're going through and we're going to give them support to be successful.



## Trust

**Paul Harris, executive headteacher, Curwen Primary School, Newham, East London**

One of our aims is to involve parents and build community links with specially-themed weeks. We have family week, international week and world of work week, where parents and outsiders come

in to engage with the children. It's important to build trust by actively engaging with the local area. You have to be out there talking to them every day but also walking around the community. I can walk around here now and most people will know me.

But it's not just the local community you have to build trust with, it's also the staff and the children. Pupils at Curwen receive team tokens for good work and behaviour and are trusted to count the tokens themselves each week to find out the winner.

We treat all teaching staff as leaders. They are leading that classroom. It's not me. They're in charge of that learning as an essential cog. One thing, as well, is to use support staff effectively. We don't use them just for washing out pots. We have 15 members who have all been trained in Elklan, which is a speech and language programme, up to level three. They are an essential tool in working with a range of children.



## Wellbeing

**Ceri Jones, head of school, Chipping Hill Primary School, Witham, Essex**

I don't overload staff with feedback. After my daily walkarounds, I offer teachers one thing that I like and one thing that's a development. I never say more than one thing because I

don't want them to feel overloaded. But also, if I give them more than one thing, they might not address the most important point. We also don't dumb down vocabulary for pupils and talk to them like adults to prepare them for the adult world. It's also good to display children's original work with your markings instead of asking them to copy it out again. Otherwise, you send the message that it's not their best work. We also aim to look after our staff's wellbeing. They now have an app on their phone that they can click if they want six sessions of counselling with the company we've gone with. It gives them privacy and they don't have to let me know.







## Learning

**Jeremy Hannay, headteacher, Three Bridges Primary School, Southall, London**

Move towards self-directed CPD and teacher-led learning. Three Bridges believes in staff taking ownership of their professional environment and giving them the agency to make professional

decisions. We also learn from the way others are doing things better as we have established an “outreach culture” where visits are arranged to share best practice with other schools.

We also attempt to balance our teaching staff and aim for a 50-50 mix of men and women among our teachers. This especially helps with a challenging intake where pupils benefit from both male and female role models.

The focus at the school is on learning within the classroom and celebrating it outside. The displays in classrooms serve the purpose of teaching, while artwork in the corridors shows off the children’s work.

Teachers here plan series of lessons collaboratively to deter a blame culture or finger-pointing when things don’t work. They can then work together to find a solution.



## Thinking School

**Elizabeth Page, headteacher, East Sheen Primary School, Richmond, London**

At East Sheen Primary we are a thinking school. It’s a whole-school approach to how we deliver teaching and learning. The

teaching methods of thinking schools involve a range of tools. East Sheen uses three: thinking maps, thinking hats, and habits of mind.

The maps are used to help children organise how they’re thinking and come in various forms – in fact, there are eight in total. For example, we start with a circle map. It’s literally just a circle and all the children’s ideas, everything they can think of that’s connected to the topic, gets put into it. Then they have to think about how they know that information.

The thinking hats follow the well-known method devised by Edward de Bono, whereby six different-coloured hats each represent a specific thinking role (white for facts, yellow for optimism, black for judgment, red for feelings, green for creativity and blue to manage the thinking process). The children take turns wearing each hat and representing the discussion from a different point of view. The method’s depersonalising effect helps children express themselves. A child can put on, say, the black hat and give an opposite view to somebody and it doesn’t make them feel as though they’re having an argument. It makes them realise they have to think about the other side.

Habits of mind is a tool that’s really about attitudes and disposition towards learning, but also about analysing your own thinking. There are 16 different habits of mind, such as ‘keep going’, ‘be persistent’, ‘thinking flexibly’ and ‘striving for accuracy’. My favourite is ‘awe and wonder’ because if the children are not really loving coming to school and finding learning exciting and feeling valued, then school is, well, just school, and we want it to be more than that. We try really hard to give them those experiences that make them think, ‘Wow, that’s incredible.’

The three tools are introduced in reception and run through to Year 6, creating a common language for the whole school. It also provides a structure so you’re not wasting time. Not every single lesson has a hat or a map and it’s not prescriptive, but it’s a way of thinking and when people are planning their lessons, they have a context and the methods available to help.





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## NEED TO KNOW- Q&amp;A

# “We believe it will become the norm”

Tony Foote, director of ClearFog Ltd, explains the benefits of cleaning with hypochlorous acid fogging



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Clearfog provides hypochlorous acid and fogging machines to schools, colleges, day centres and businesses as a potent yet totally natural weapon in the fight against covid-19 and viruses generally. This combination not only sanitises, it protects cleaning staff and significantly reduces cleaning time.

### What is hypochlorous acid?

Hypochlorous acid may sound a little ominous. It is produced in our white blood cells to fight infection and promote healing.

We recreate it by electrolysing a light saline solution. It is benign to humans, a non-irritant to eyes, lungs and skin yet it's lethal to coronavirus. It is in use across the world but in the UK we are only recently realising its potency in the fight against Covid-19.

### How effective is fogging?

One of the battles in the fight against Covid-19 is time – cleaning of toilets etc is currently a continuous cycle in schools. By using a fogging machine, you can safely sanitise a six-cubicle toilet inside of two minutes at far less risk to cleaning staff.

The fogging device is very powerful and creates a rolling fog which settles on all surfaces, under desks, chairs and toilet seats sanitising areas that are sometimes missed.

### Sounds expensive?

At £500 per fogger, it can seem expensive at first glance. All but one school that has purchased a fogger have bought a second machine within two weeks. That's how long it takes to realise the time savings fogging creates compared to traditional methods. All of our school clients recognise fogging with hypochlorous acid as the leading element in their



fight against Covid-19. The liquid itself costs £9.95 for five litres which gives 90 minutes of fogging. As our clients realise – that's a lot of fogging

### Apart from Covid-19 what else can foggers battle ?

Hypochlorous acid is also lethal to e-coli, norovirus and 99.9999 per cent of viruses. I think it's fair to say that all of our clients are looking to continue fogging post



**TONY FOOTE:**  
Director of  
ClearFog  
Limited



### Contact:

0203 535 875  
[sales@clearfog.co.uk](mailto:sales@clearfog.co.uk)  
<https://clearfog.co.uk>

Covid-19, as part of their cleaning regime. There seems to be an understanding that we will have pockets of variants for many years to come.

Hypochlorous acid can and should be a potent weapon going forwards.

### What else can hypochlorous acid be used for?

It was used as far back as the first world war to clean wounds. It is used in ophthalmic surgery, to clean implants, and is widely used in dentistry, where the danger of airborne particulates has been acknowledged for years. It is also used as a mouth rinse.

It is used globally to clean soft fruits and vegetables and to prolong the life of cut flowers. Nature has given us a powerful tool to fight covid with and we believe it will become the norm.

## What's the difference?

- + Fogging with hypochlorous acid sanitises a 6 cubicle toilet in under 2 minutes
- + Most of our customers see a return on investment within 2 weeks
- + In these uncertain times, fogging is creating confidence in staff and service users.

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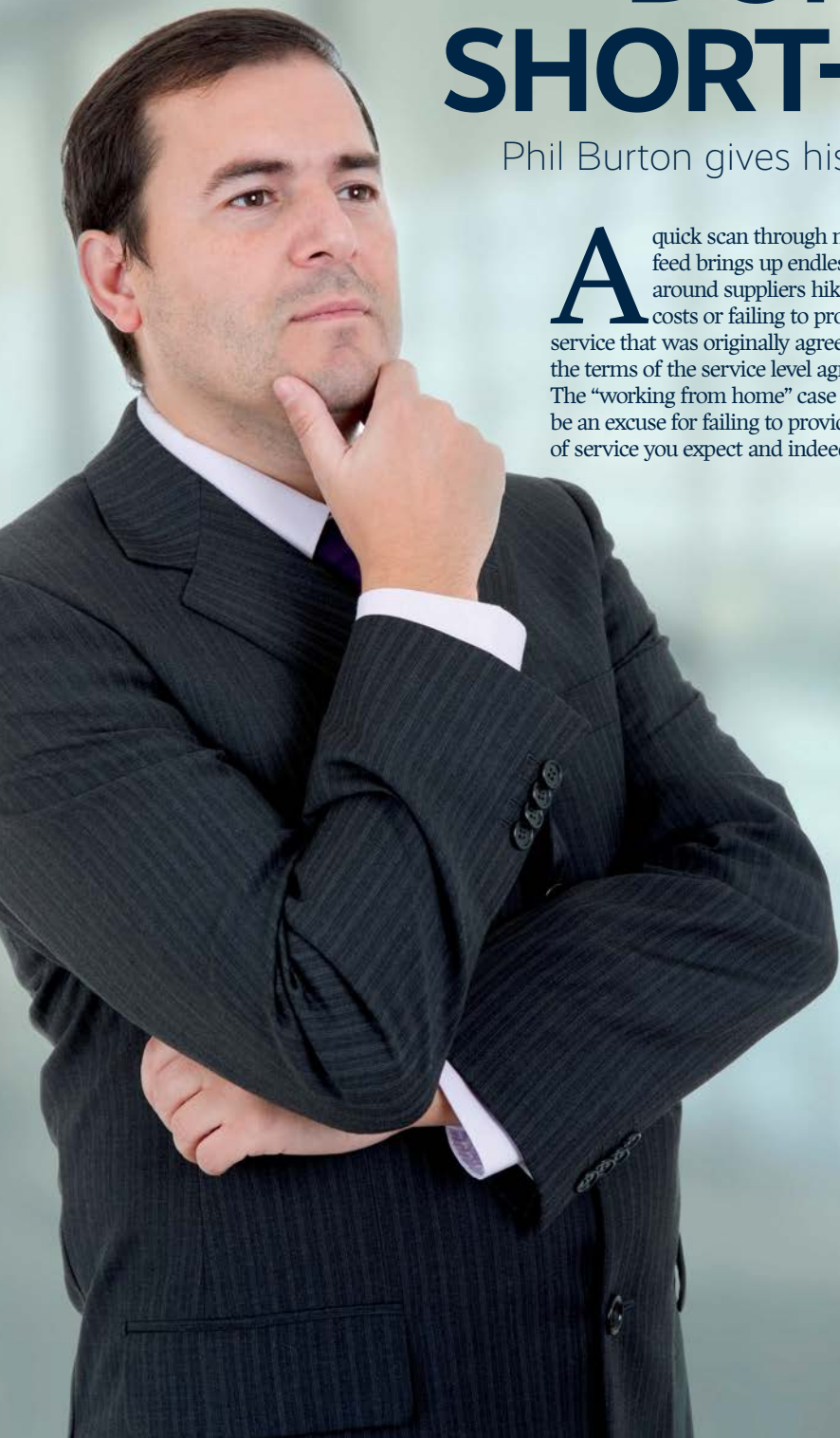
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# Buildings & procurement

## DON'T GET SHORT-CHANGED

Phil Burton gives his advice on changing suppliers



**A** quick scan through my twitter feed brings up endless tweets around suppliers hiking up the costs or failing to provide the service that was originally agreed under the terms of the service level agreements. The “working from home” case seems to be an excuse for failing to provide the level of service you expect and indeed pay for.

In the first instance you must talk to your supplier and express your concerns using the agreed method in the SLA. Give them the opportunity to resolve your concerns. Be clear about what it is that you expect and ask them how they plan on resolving your issues within a given time frame. I would also keep this documented. If the issues cannot be resolved look at how you can exit the agreement but ensure you get proper legal advice.

### DEADLINES

If you do decide that it is time to change I believe knowledge is the key to procurement, so the first thing to do is make sure that you know what items you need procured and the deadlines for each. Depending on what service is required will determine what length of time you need to give it. A simple spreadsheet for the next two years which lists everything to be procured would be the easiest way of doing this. I would suggest highlighting the more significant services in red and give them a longer period of time to work through.

I would then review your current provider. Create a simple positive/negative chart and list everything that you feel about the provider. Think about cost, performance, ability to resolve issues and for me how they have supported you during the pandemic. It is when a business is at its most stretched that you can get a real feel for how they value you as the customer. I would also throw in at this point if you are not happy with them have you actually told them about this. It

would be unfair to not allow them the opportunity to rectify any issues.

## DETAIL

So now the legal bit – check the current legislation in terms of what you must do. Do you meet various legal amounts which require EU tendering or can you get three quotes to present to your governors. The detail is important and at a lower level varies from school to school so do your homework.

Know what you want! Be clear and specific about what you require. If you are not the specialist in the area seek one out to make sure you have the right information. I am not an ICT specialist but will get advice on this area to ensure we get the right information to go to suppliers

## REFERENCES

Test the market – shop around! While there are some benefits to being loyal to a service provider you must do your homework. Check that they are still competitive within the area they offer. I have seen time and time again where a provider “feels comfortable” with you and therefore pushes the limit on what they can charge as they know you won’t move. Once you have a few you feel are right, ask colleagues if they have used them before, get references for people you know rather than letting them send you their references.

Check the small print – get someone to check this for you. Unless you are a specialist we don’t really know what it all means so have it checked out. Once you have done all this then it is time to sign on the line!

*Phil Burton, business manager, Hallbrook Primary School and Cosby Primary School*



## STAY SAFE WITH CLEAN AIR

### Matthew Alexander explains the benefits of air purification systems in the classroom

A study undertaken by The University of Lincoln has revealed that airborne pathogens in a classroom environment can be significantly reduced by the use of effective air purification systems.

The report was commissioned by Intratek, providers of some of the world leading air purification systems, and shows that the levels of airborne micro-organisms can be reduced by around 50 per cent with an effective air purification system. This project was fully funded by The Productivity Programme for Greater Lincolnshire, which is a European Regional Development Fund Programme.

The independent investigation by the University of Lincoln into the efficacy of Intratek's biocidal air handling unit looked at differences in the levels of microbial growth between treated and untreated air. The University's scientific team found statistically-significant differences when the air handling unit was operational and concluded that, on average, bacterial counts dropped by half and fungal counts reduced by around two thirds when the unit was in a closed room environment.

The report is of particular significance considering the threat posed in schools by airborne pathogens, including respiratory viruses such as Covid-19 (reductions in viral particles were not tested as part of the University of Lincoln's study). The law requires schools to ensure an adequate supply of fresh air as well as good ventilation. This, coupled with social distancing and frequent handwashing, are some of the key measures schools need to introduce if they are to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus.

Good ventilation reduces the concentration of pathogens in the air and therefore reduces the risks from airborne transmission. This happens when people breathe in small

particles (aerosols) that can be present in the air after someone with a virus has occupied an enclosed area. During the cold winter months, providing adequate ventilation can pose challenges in keeping pupils and staff warm. Using an effective air purification system can help provide clean air without the cold.

The Tiokraft products, sold by Intratek Ltd, use a patented photocatalytic filtration system that is designed to service the maximum amount of contaminated air. The systems eliminate pathogens and microflora by the photocatalytic process of oxidation. Unlike most purification machines, Tiokraft therefore do not use replaceable particulate absorbing filters which can clog up and need changing on average every month. Tiokraft products need no maintenance so the overall lifetime cost is reduced significantly.

This research should be a welcome boost for schools looking to provide a safer environment for pupils and teachers. The government's advice on ensuring clean air helps reduce the risk of pathogens spreading and our air purification systems are now proven to remove microorganisms from air.

In the study, air treated by Intratek's biocidal air handling unit was tested twice daily over a 22 day period. The report concluded that there was an “overall reduction seen in bacterial and fungal counts as a function of air handling. This has led to an overall reduction seen in bacterial/fungal counts taken from an environment.”

Intratek are leaders in fresh ideas and new, affordable technology. The company works across the business, education and manufacturing sectors offering a range of products to suit budgets and business requirements..

**Matthew Alexander, director at Intratek,**  
**[www.intratekltd.com](http://www.intratekltd.com)**



# The right environment naturally helps to nurture

Ellie Ballinger explains why a dedicated Nurture Room has helped to support pupils through emotionally difficult times

Our staff had been noticing a steady decline in our pupils' mental health, which appeared to be worsening year on year.

While we pride ourselves on good relationships with parents (we are usually informed of any family issues that could affect a pupil) and we are heavily engaged in raising awareness among our students around issues such as social media usage and cyber-bullying, we felt that there was still more that we could do to help support all of our children, especially those with specific emotional needs.

Following discussions within the school and ascertaining the extent of the issue, we decided to create our Nurture Room. We felt that the investment would yield great results in the form of more resilient, well-balanced children who would be more ably equipped to deal with their emotional issues. A dedicated Nurture Room, distinct in design from classrooms, would provide a welcoming and relaxed space within the school for us to work with our pupils in a productive and structured way.

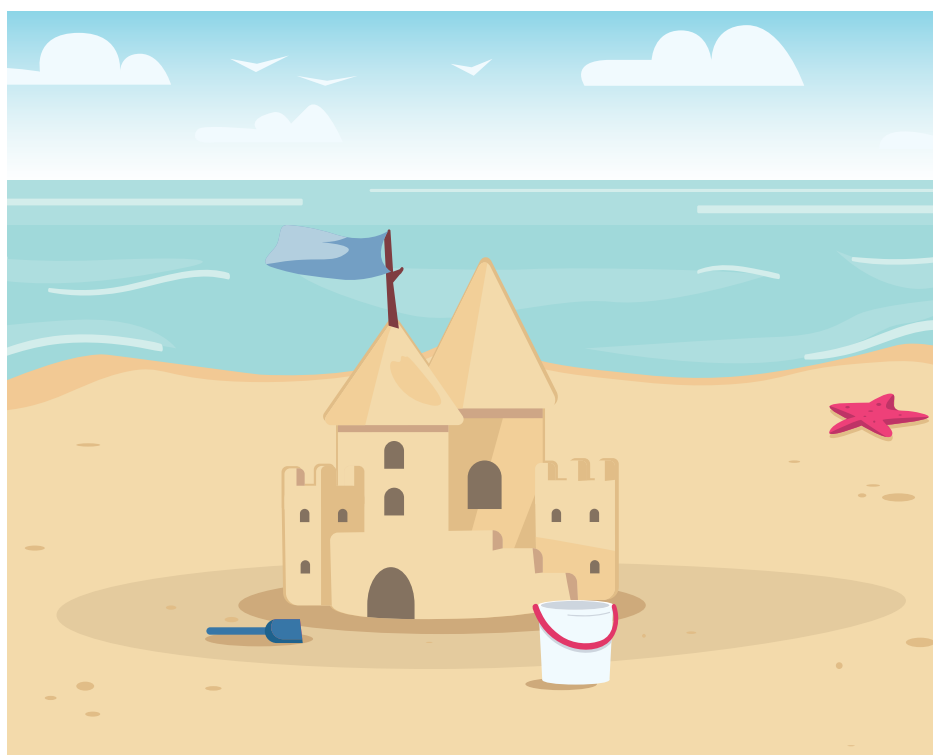
## *Life's a Beach*

We worked closely with Two Thirds Design, a company that has extensive experience working with educational establishments, on how our Nurture Room should look and feel. From the start, they understood exactly what we were trying to achieve, and having discussed our objectives, helped to bring our ideas to life.

Themed around a Beach Hut, the Nurture Room featured a realistic beach-side scene, flanked by colourful bunting, sunny postcards and holiday photographs, all aimed at transporting the children away from the classroom environment.

There is not a desk in sight – just child-friendly furnishings. Blue beanbags, relaxed-style chairs, soft seaside-themed cushions and small tables for carrying out activities or simply for biscuits and juice (which can't be underestimated for helping a child to feel special and listened to) help to deliver the relaxed 'Beach Hut' feel we were after.

We are fortunate enough to have Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) trained teachers, who support the emotional needs of their pupils within school.



These specialist skills help allow for one-to-one sessions with a child, where specific and measurable targets are discussed. This process can be difficult, but the Nurture Room, with its calm and secure environment, really helps children to feel safe and able to talk more freely allowing us, as teachers, to substantially build on our nurturing ethos. Only once this first critical stage is complete can we decide upon the right course of action for each individual child.

## *Calm and positive*

Strategies might include Lego-based therapy – a collaborative, play-based social skills intervention designed to improve social competence in children with social difficulties.

Likewise, art therapy is a strategy used within the Nurture Room, with the opportunity for children to produce work that is both meaningful and personal while encouraging them to think about the message of the session – the 'nurture focus' – such as 'developing positive self-talk'.

Our ELSA-trained staff have noted that, as a result of these types of sessions,

children become much more aware of how to communicate with each other and what behaviour is acceptable within the session. Confidence has increased and behaviour is far calmer with the children having grown and developed in a positive manner. The Nurture Room environment, being both calm and positive, helps children to relax and feel special while focussing on their tasks.

Our Nurture Room has been a great success. During its first year, 47 children received some form of nurture session/support – that's 23 per cent of the whole school who have been impacted in a positive way.

My teaching colleagues have seen an increased love of school, confidence, attainment and self-esteem and talk of the pupils' excitement and desire to work in the Nurture Room. In addition, several parents have approached me asking whether their child might benefit from nurture provision, such is the need for this kind of support.

**Ellie Ballinger, headteacher at Greysbrooke Primary, based in Staffordshire.**



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# Clean the NHS way

Edwin Squire explains why investing in your cleaning staff is vital in the fight against Covid-19

**C**ovid-19 has undoubtedly been one of the biggest challenges faced by the education sector in decades. Children have had to adapt to learning at home instead of in the classroom, teachers have had to reinvent lesson plans and traditional parents' evenings have been replaced by Zoom meetings.

However, it's important to remember that not everything can be done virtually. Classrooms are not closed.

As schools remain open to vulnerable children and those of key workers, it is crucial that the education sector continues to enhance and invest in its cleaning procedures to ensure the classroom is a safe environment for both staff and students.

After all, cleaners are a vital workforce in fighting this pandemic. If schools did not make cleaning a priority, then infection outbreaks would inevitably increase and schools would not be able to stay open to provide vital childcare to key workers.

Government guidance around cleaning standards in schools has changed significantly since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic; schools must implement more regular and enhanced cleaning and ensure that frequently touched surfaces are cleaned more regularly.

Nevertheless, it is not good enough to simply bombard cleaning staff with this new information. Cleaning staff are very much at the forefront of this pandemic and it is important they understand exactly how to carry out these new processes, in addition to the science behind how such procedures reduce the spread of infection.

## Improvement

Although the cleaning team at Billingham South have helped to keep our school a clean and safe environment throughout the pandemic, we believe in constant improvement. That is why we partnered with the NHS Deep Cleaning and Advisory Service; a reputable cleaning service that is working with schools across the UK to extend the NHS standard of cleanliness. Delivered by Tony Sullivan, the Environmental and Decontamination Services Manager based at the University Hospital of North Tees and board member for the Institute of Decontamination Sciences, the training programme gave valuable insight to our cleaning team about how to clean 'the NHS way'.

From how to minimise transference



with touchpoint cleaning and applying the 'figure of eight' method to conducting ATP swab tests and donning and doffing PPE, our cleaning team have taken away invaluable information from the training session. It has helped us to adapt and introduce new methods to our cleaning regime, while also reassuring our staff about the efficacy of many of our existing techniques.

## Advice

To provide extra reassurance to our cleaning team, the NHS Deep Cleaning and Advisory Service complete an official NHS

audit 30 days after the training took place to ensure cleaning is being carried out in line with the NHS standard, offering advice on areas for improvement where necessary.

By following the NHS standard of cleanliness we are helping to reduce the spread of infection and consequently easing pressure on local hospital trusts. And, even better, the income generated by the cleaning service is reinvested back into the NHS to support frontline patient care.

**Edwin Squire, headteacher of Billingham South Community Primary School, Stockton-on-Tees.**

# COURAGE AND CONSERVATIVE PLANNING NEEDED

Sue Birchall looks at how to budget for the year ahead during a time of Covid-19

It is that time of year when maintained schools start to think about closedown and the new financial year with academies six months in and looking with an eye to the coming year.

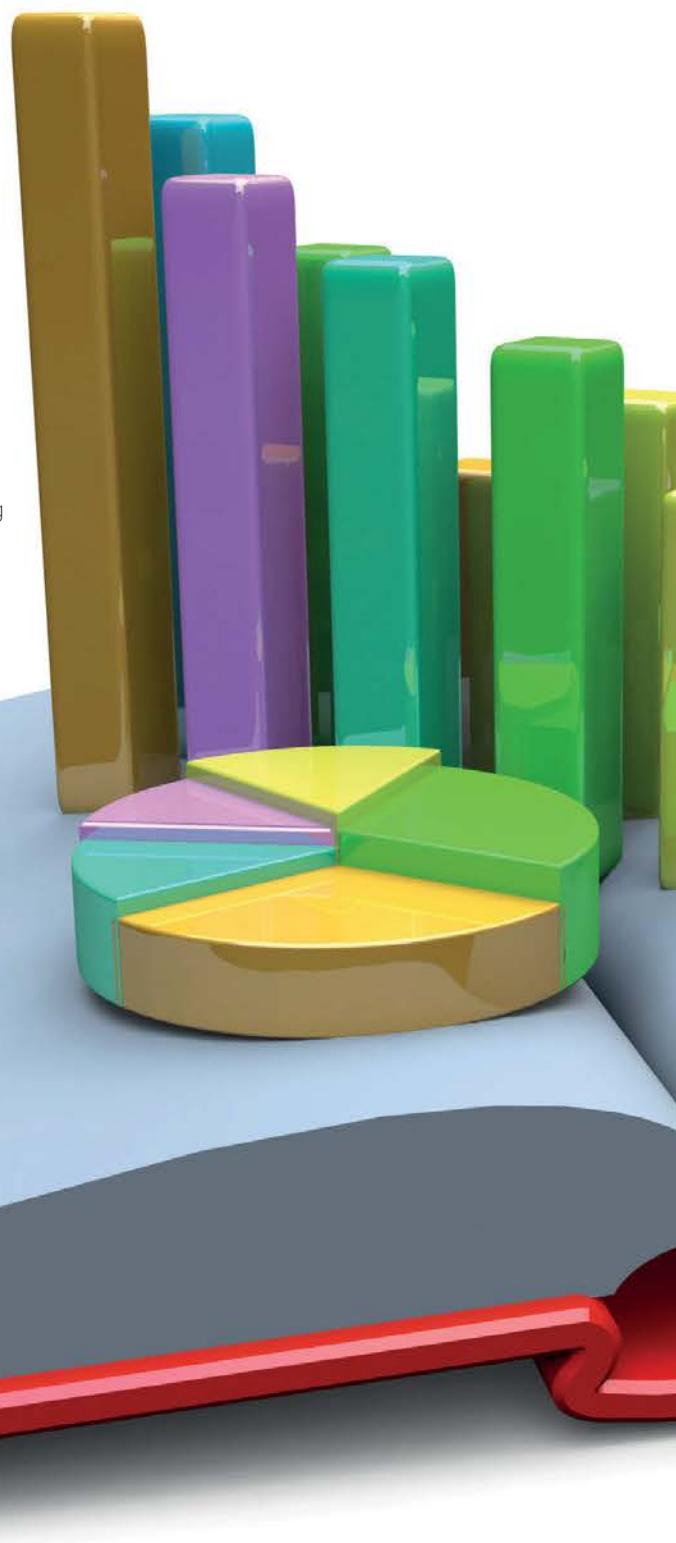
It is true to say that 20-21 was not the year that we expected, planned and budgeted for! We have been faced with additional costs, uncertain budgets and at times, conflicting advice. All of which has made the last year the hardest that I can remember while being in charge of a school budget. The pressures on our operational spend created by staff absence throughout covid has caused many of us a headache and sleepless nights and who wants to talk about the additional costs (which we weren't all able to reclaim), I certainly don't.

But, as in all situations, there have been some positives. The upheaval has meant that staff movement reduced for many and main staffing budgets remained fairly stable (excluding supply costs). Depending on your financial situation, there has been the ability to apply for funding for these as well. Although we had the pressures of the additional teacher pay and pension increases, these were in most part covered by additional income, so the largest part of our budget spend was fairly secure. We now have all of the operational needs in place having been through three cycles of lockdown,

our 'new norm'. One would hope that, aside from replacements, we would have all the needs outlined in our various risk assessments and protocols for being in school in place so no large new surprises, although never say never.

## PRUDENT

With that in mind, how do we budget for the year ahead? I would suggest that most of us will be setting a conservative budget which reflects the uncertainties in receiving any additional income such as lettings, fundraising and other external sources of income. As a School Business Leader of many years, I know that we all tend to be prudent. It is easy to be caught out by the myriad of





changes that ordinarily happen in a school year without the possibilities that further Covid-19 changes may make. The question is, will we be tempted to be even more prudent than normal? As stated by the author Charles Caleb Colton 'There is nothing more imprudent than excessive prudence.'

To set our budgets then will take an element of courage but we should be reassured by the controls that we do have and the fact that we all have the majority of our income guaranteed. The fact that maintained schools are limited by the Balance Control Mechanism which restricts the level of funds carried forward at year end tempers our prudence to a degree. While this does not apply to academies, the principle on which it is based recognises that each child is individually funded and as such the monies should be spent for them is an inherent part of our ethos. The need to have reserves to address the unforeseen is part of risk management during the budget setting process.

## CERTAINTIES

As with all budget setting, we can start with the certainties. For maintained schools, budgets will start to be shared from the end of February onwards and all of the teacher's pension and pay calculations will hopefully be tied up in the school budget share this year. Academies will hear about their budgets in time for their preparations

for the new budget year from September.

Most of us will have a good idea of what our staffing structure will look like for the year ahead. With this representing the majority of our budget spend, we have a firm grasp of the balance remaining for the rest of our overheads and costs. Our operating costs over the past year have shifted focus, the move to online learning will have had an impact on the amount that we have spent on resources. The provision of ICT equipment by the government for our poorest and most vulnerable families, as well as the negotiated increased WIFI provision, has meant that the high level of spend, which I certainly predicted with my schools at the start of Covid-19, has not been as great for ICT. With another £300,000 pledged to support primary schools as well, we will realise some of the savings that we have made on not purchasing classroom-based resources.

## ICFP

For this coming year, the use of tools such as the ICFP will be useful to help us to benchmark our spends and look at historical data on percentage spends and where we have capacity for savings within our budgets. The value of this tool is down to the understanding of the context and knowing how it can support your school's budgeting and spend, certainly worth attending training before you start. There are free DfE training courses available, not just for finance staff but for senior leadership at <https://educationspace.co.uk/SRM/>

In the coming year we may have to shift the focus for some of our spending towards support for our school community's mental health.

## HERE'S WHAT TO DO

- **Treat 20-21 as a standalone year when budget setting.**
- **Recognise the initiatives and changes that will endure.**
- **Have a risk management approach to all financial decisions.**
- **Take a moment to look at staff retention and wellbeing, an investment here could pay dividends later on.**
- **Inform your spending - spend in haste, repent at leisure!**

Lockdown has affected all of us to some degree and the impact on our staff and students has yet to be fully realised. The need to have a product such as a sufficient Employee Assistant package as well as a wellbeing programme in place will be greater. It will take a while to realise the effect the current situation will have on staff attendance, recruitment and retention. How we have managed all of the above will have a significant bearing on this. Using tools such as staff surveys can be invaluable in guiding an appropriate wellbeing offer for your staff. Money well spent!

Our students, who are always our focus, have had a lot of additional support from our schools during lockdown but this will have to continue afterwards for both education catch up and wellbeing. We are being offered some funding and I would hope this will continue. Lots of new variables.

All in all, I think it is fair to say that I, and I am sure many others, will not be using 20/21 when looking at our income and expenditure trends for future budget setting!



**Sue Birchall is a consultant, speaker, writer, trainer and business manager at The Malling School, Kent.**

# ARE YOU FIRE SAFETY PLANS EFFECTIVE?

Claire Wright explains why competency in fire safety is critical to good primary school management

**A**s we saw with the recent fire at St Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy in Derby, the impact of fire within a school can be devastating. While thankfully no-one was injured during the incident, the long-term effects of building loss for staff, pupils, parents and the wider community is significant. Consequences include a risk to livelihoods, disruption to learning and an increase in financial strain for families, not to mention the ongoing emotional distress caused.

Schools are considered high risk premises when it comes to fire safety. This is due to several factors, such as the size of the building, the number of people occupying it at any one time, the vulnerability of young school children and the potential presence of hazardous materials. There is also an increased risk of arson due to the fact that buildings are often left unoccupied during the school holidays.

Senior management, and those responsible for fire safety within a primary school, must therefore ensure they have the skills and competency required to minimise the risk of fire – whether it applies to their own staff or individuals employed to carry out work on behalf of the school. So, what are the key considerations for primary leaders when it comes to ensuring fire safety best practice?

## SCHOOLS ARE MUCH MORE VULNERABLE

A study last year by Zurich found that English schools were 'twice as likely' to suffer fires than other buildings, with the study including personal inspections of over 1,000 primary and secondary schools. According to its findings, there is a 'perfect storm' of risky buildings and 'poor fire detection and prevention measures' at play in the UK, with the average fire risk 'almost double that of non-residential buildings'.

Despite there being a 'greater risk of a fire starting', however, inspections by the insurer found that two thirds of schools lack adequate fixed fire protection measures such as sprinklers, while just under a quarter (24 per cent) were rated 'poor' for fire detection.

While there is an obvious risk to life in the event of a fire, the same research found that larger school fires cost an average of £2.8m to repair. This means that, although life preservation rightly remains the primary focus, senior management teams must

also consider the longer-term financial impact a fire can have and the possibility that the school may not be able to recover following extreme fire damage.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SPRINKLER SYSTEMS

The Government's Building Bulletin 100 document outlines how school buildings should be designed safely. When it comes to sprinklers, official guidance currently states that "all new schools will have sprinklers fitted. Any exceptions to this will have to be justified by demonstrating that a school is low risk and that the use of sprinklers would not be good value for money".

The Zurich study also found that only two per cent of the UK schools hit by fires in 2019 had sprinklers, and only 15 per cent of all new-build schools constructed and opened in the UK since 2011 have had them fitted. This is a shocking statistic, especially as the installation of sprinklers can automatically reduce the risk of fire spread from the outset. The FPA advises all primary schools to have adequate fire safety systems in place,

including sprinkler systems where possible. However, it is also understood that school staff will not always understand their legal obligations or have the skills required in the operation, maintenance and testing of systems.

By seeking support from an accredited third party, headteachers, governors and those responsible for fire safety within a school building can understand the importance of sprinkler systems, how they operate and why they must be maintained for them to work effectively should they be needed.

## BUILDING A FOUNDATION IN FIRE SAFETY

Legislation requires every school to carry out a fire risk assessment, which must identify hazards and people at risk and put general fire safety precautions in place to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors. Fire hazards, once identified, should be removed or reduced. All staff can help with identifying and eliminating fire hazards and in ensuring that effective fire safety measures are maintained.





Those carrying out fire risk assessments must also have highly-specialised knowledge of the specific risks posed in schools to ensure adequate mitigation through management processes and fire protection and prevention systems. Whether they appoint someone within the school as a fire risk assessor or use an external contractor, third party accreditation is the best way to ensure that individuals have the right level of knowledge, experience and skills to act within best practice and ensure the school building, staff and pupils are not put at unnecessary risk. One of the FPA's competency pillars is to be 'self-aware', which means knowing your limits and when to seek extra support from someone more knowledgeable.

A competent fire risk assessor will also need to identify potentially combustible and flammable materials within the school. This may include the oil used in canteens or kitchens, chemicals for science lessons, workshops or even large volumes of paper. A DSEAR (Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmosphere Regulations 2002) assessment may be necessary where there are risks posed by the storage and use of dangerous substances and may also be a legal requirement.

The fire risk assessment recommendations should be used for schools to build and implement a thorough fire strategy. Fire strategies are a fundamental part of any business' continuity plan for protecting life and essential property. The British Standards Institution document, PAS 911, refers to a fire

strategy as providing 'a clear set of measures encompassing fire precautions, management of fire safety and fire protection'. It involves the development and implementation of policies that address relevant risks and procedures in line with objectives specific to the business, with an aim to reduce life risk while also protecting business procedures and assets. Although usually developed during the design and construction phase of a new building, this is not always the case and as such can be developed retrospectively.

## PLANNING FOR EVACUATION

The fire strategy and fire risk assessment will also require the development and implementation of an effective fire evacuation plan. This should consider, by way of a person-centred assessment, the people at risk, where they are in the building, the risks that cannot be removed or reduced any further and the size/layout and use of the building.

It may be that the person responsible for evacuation is different to the school's fire risk assessor. Either way, ensuring the safe and timely evacuation of staff, pupils and visitors is an important job, made more difficult by the volume of people that may be occupying the building at any one time. As such they must understand what is expected of them and the implications of not following evacuation plans thoroughly. At its simplest, fire evacuation officers must know where the fire alarm call-points are, as well as the escape routes from the building, designated assembly points and the location of any refuges in which disabled pupils, staff or visitors can wait for further assistance.

Some of the special actions the designated evacuation officer may need to carry out also include:

- Directing pupils in your control to the nearest exit and assembly point.
- Sweeping your area to ensure it is clear before leaving.
- Assisting disabled pupils or staff to the nearest refuge point or out of the building
- Conducting a roll call or count at the assembly point.
- Switching off electrical equipment.
- Isolating laboratory or kitchen gas or power supplies.
- Ensuring you have received training for any additional duties you are required to perform.
- Participating in regular drills to ensure emergency plans can be put into action when needed.

Schools are one of the most vulnerable building types when it comes to fire, with lives put at risk and the continued and vital

**"Schools are considered high risk premises when it comes to fire safety."**



### WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

**Here are the FPA's essential first steps for when an incident occurs:**

- **Raise the alarm** – if you discover a fire, raise the alarm by shouting 'FIRE!' and triggering the nearest fire alarm call point. These will normally be situated on escape routes adjacent to final exits and doors to stairs.
- **Call the fire and rescue service** – this task will usually be a designated responsibility of, for example, the school secretary or a senior staff member with ready access to a telephone. Some schools may have a monitored alarm and will need to call their alarm receiving centre to confirm there is a fire. What to tell the operator: the location and severity of the fire; whether people are trapped on the premises and whether highly flammable, compressed gases or hazardous substances may be involved.
- **Evacuate the building** – on hearing the fire alarm, all staff, pupils and visitors should leave the building using the nearest fire escape route and go directly to the nearest assembly point. This should be located outside and away from the building.
- **Account for everyone** – once classes have assembled, staff must account for all pupils in their care. This is usually done through a roll call or count. The roll call must include any visitors or contractors. Never re-enter the building until advised by the fire and rescue service or other authorised person that it is safe to do so.

education of children jeopardised. As such, it is critical that headteachers and decision makers within schools take the necessary steps to ensure they are operating within fire safety best practice and seeking the appropriate, expert support that can help them minimise the very real risk of fire.

For more information, download the FPA's free Guide to Fire Safety in Schools, (<https://bit.ly/3qE1u3P>) which provides school leaders, governors, building managers and all those responsible for fire safety, with the basic steps that need to be taken to help maintain fire safety standards within a primary school.



**Claire Wright, Head of Training at the Fire Protection Association (FPA)**

# THE BEST WAYS TO BOOST YOUR BUDGET

Justin Smith looks at ways to increase your fundraising in a post Covid-19 world

It's become clear Covid-19 represents more than an inconvenient bump in the road and we've probably now come to terms with the fact that the effects of the pandemic are likely to stay with us for some time yet.

Thoughts of finance and budget never stray too far from the minds of our school business managers and sadly the financial outlook for our schools looks as uncertain and volatile as ever. Whether we like it or not, we have to accept that income generation has to become a core strategic function for schools; central funding for improving campus infrastructure and the added-value experiences we can offer our children is increasingly under threat. Some enterprising schools and trusts are collaborating like never before to develop commercial partnerships and establish trading services, driving in new revenue and building skills sets. Nevertheless, the vast majority of schools lack the enterprising culture, capacity and resource needed for ventures of this scale. So, what can we all do to bring about a sustainable income generation culture in our organisation and, just as importantly, what have we learnt from Covid-19?

## THE SOFT UNDERBELLY OF SCHOOL FUNDRAISING

Research carried out by Dr Tim Brown of the University of Chester highlighted a £4bn loss of income for charities in the first few months of the crisis (Charities facing a fundraising crisis - an update (<https://bit.ly/3aULbJI>)). Most small charities generate at least 50 per cent of their annual income from public events, much like our PTAs and Friends Associations do with their summer fetes, BBQs and other traditional fundraisers. Grant funding is not immune, many national grant providers such as Sport England and The National Lottery have paused their traditional programmes to focus, quite understandably, on emergency Covid-19-related initiatives.

Those schools without a developed and integrated plan will rely heavily on occasional grant funding and regular donations to the PTA, driven predominantly by face-to-face activities. Covid-19 has brought home the stark reality that many have known for some time; an over reliance on grants and low level,

ad-hoc attempts at generating much needed cash leaves us fragile and vulnerable. It is time to reset this outdated mindset. It was Einstein who said "In the midst of every crisis lies great opportunity". Now is our time to learn, adapt and innovate.

## LEARNING FROM OTHERS

It's extraordinary to think that over £1.8bn is collectively generated by schools in England each year through income-generation activities. Much of this will be through the hard work of volunteers and supportive parents, making a tangible difference to the experiences we can offer our children. Equally an incredible £46bn per annum is generated by the charity

*"Communication is king, it supports our brand, our values and our reputation."*

sector, 30 per cent of which supports initiatives that improve the lives of children. In all, 60 per cent of us gave to charitable causes last year. While we cannot, and should not, compare education to the charity sector, there are lessons we can learn here.

The ability to engage with people on an emotional level is key. Identifying the triggers that motivate others to give their time or their hard-earned money, sits at the heart of all successful campaigns. Good fundraisers are, first and foremost, good storytellers. The ability to communicate a core fundraising story to key audiences is very effective at eliciting a positive response from potential supporters.

Successful charities do the following:

1. Communicate the challenge – emotive storytelling with complementary images/video – this promotes the need and evidence.
2. Demonstrate how a donor can help –

this highlights the impact.

3. Facilitate those donations – mechanisms to help people to give – this removes the barriers to support and makes giving simple.

4. Acknowledge their involvement – recognising and thanking a donor – this also helps develop long-term relationships.

5. Celebrate and share success – again recognising the efforts of all involved – this encourages on-going support.

These essential elements should be considered by all schools and form the cornerstones to any fundraising plan. Grant holders will want to know explicitly why you're approaching them for support; what you've done to fund your project and clear evidence of its need in the first place. Giving consideration to the steps outlined above reminds us to keep coming back to our core need and evidence backing that up.

Gilly Green, head of grants at Comic Relief, makes the point: "Funders want a cohesive story, including evidence of demand...and the outcomes it will create. Very often the latter parts just fall away."

## DIGITISING OUR OFFER

Communication is king, it supports our brand, our values and our reputation.

The school website continues to be the primary source for information but many have been found wanting over recent months. An agile and responsive website, where content can be updated quickly, not only reassures anxious parents during a crisis but in the longer-term it provides a platform to promote and manage our fundraising campaigns. Digitising our offering should never replace traditional public facing events but it does offer a stable, more agile and accessible way of broadcasting our message and attracting support.

The most recent national research, surveying charities' responses since lockdown, found that 67 per cent had changed the way they communicate with supporters, with 71 per cent increasing their use of social media (Rapidata; Navigating times of crisis to protect regular giving). "The coronavirus crisis has prompted a renewed recognition of the importance of regular giving as a sustainable and reliable income stream..." the report says. Remember too that 92 per cent of 25-34 year olds and 87 per cent of 35-44 year olds have social



media profiles (Statista; UK Social Media Use) so this has to be integral to your thinking. Introducing a web-based platform, supported by your social media feeds is not only efficient and effective today but also helps mitigate against future risk.

## PRACTICAL STEPS

Readers may be familiar with the term “marketing mix” and in many ways there are similarities with how we should consider our fundraising. Developing a plan that considers the whole portfolio of approaches and facilitating the delivery of these via your website, is very effective and a far more efficient use of your time and resources.

We’ve ascertained that many of us place too much emphasis on event fundraising topped up with occasional grant applications. However, some may feel that their school isn’t in a position to generate great sums from lettings or from commercial services, but that’s not really the point here. We’re pivoting away from the comfortable norm and looking towards an edgier, braver perspective. This takes time, commitment and belief but these unprecedented times may just give us the little bounce we need to get started. It takes time, it’s a cultural shift as much as anything. I’m reminded of the book *Jolt*, by Richard Tyler, and his analogy with two train tracks. If you take two parallel tracks and shift one by just one degree, 50 miles down the line the two tracks will be around one mile apart! Imagine

that, just a tiny tweak can create such a reaction. Small incremental change, driven by a fundamental shift in how we think about income generation, can have a profound and long-term effect.

A really good example of a school who have taken the time to engage with their communities and exploit all potential opportunities for fundraising is the John Madejski Academy, in Berkshire.

The school encouraged volunteers and donors with a community page (a marketing and fundraising platform) driven from their website and removed all barriers to support, making giving easy. Supporters can choose which project appeals to them, businesses can provide sponsorship, while regular blogs, newsletters, emails and tweets keep campaigners up to date and informed. This may seem like an awful lot of effort but technology can do the hard work. You need to articulate your offer, the benefits and impact – but the platform can automate your communications and handle donations processing etc. Anyway, we all accept we have to put a little effort in to get anything of value out, right?!



**Justin Smith is an ISBL fellow and founder of Chameleon Training & Consultancy.**

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **Diversification can help build resilience when it comes to generating sustainable fundraising strategies. Over-reliance on traditional income streams such as events, grants and lettings can be restrictive and vulnerable to external influences. The pandemic has taught us to use our imagination, adopt new alliances with partners and broaden our approach.**
- **Storytelling underpins all good fundraising initiatives. The ability to emotionally engage with potential donors is key. Donor motivation broadly fall into two camps - emotional and rational. Some donors may experience a sense of duty or feel nostalgic towards their former school. Others may seek self-advancement or donate out of moral or issue-based beliefs. It’s a complex subject but ultimately whatever the motivation there is only one way to attract a donation – you have to ask for it. Remember, as author Paul Molloy (Fundraising: The Compton Way) always says, “Don’t get hung up on the academic side, fundraising is mostly organised commonsense”.**
- **Simplicity enables people to help you without having to overcome unnecessary hurdles. Remove the barriers of support by digitising your offering and enabling “click here” donations via your school website. It’s easier now than ever with a plethora of “Just Giving” style platforms to link to your website and social media feeds. They’ll take care of your GDPR and gift aid requirements leaving you to concentrate on the important stuff..... telling the story.**



# CENTRALISATION IS THE FUTURE

Will Jordan believes that centralisation is a strategic and cultural philosophy for growth

Last year, on Primary Leaders (<https://bit.ly/2LMQvX6>), I wrote about the growing number of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) that have started their financial centralisation journey, but that for many Trusts there were factors still holding them back.

Subsequent findings published in Pooling Reserves and Budget Centralisation in Multi-Academy Trusts (<https://bit.ly/3o9K3pU>), and follow-on discussions with MAT leaders, identified that the question is not so much about whether to centralise or not, but actually 'how' and 'to what extent'. A gap was identified by trust chief executives, chief operating officers and chief financial officers around good practice and knowledge-sharing. There was a clear appetite for better, more in-depth, insight on centralisation journeys among this community.

We therefore commissioned further research with a small number of MAT leaders in autumn 2020 to explore how Trusts have developed their operating models in light of academy freedoms – specifically around GAG pooling, where a Trust receives its funding centrally and then allocates budgets to the individual schools, and other forms of centralisation (financial and non-financial) to provide more efficiencies. We asked them about the operating model they had chosen to take (and the strategic drivers behind it), their views and experiences of implementation (what worked and what they would do differently), and the benefits and impact this has had on their systems and the Trust as a whole.

## STRATEGIC

A Growing Philosophy: How are Multi-Academy Trusts developing their operating models through centralisation? (<https://bit.ly/39YIOpA>) provides compelling insight on how Trusts in different UK regions, and of different sizes, are approaching this question, and with what effect. Significantly, this report also identifies the importance of centralisation as a strategic choice, linked to the ethos and culture of any one MAT, and that it should be viewed as part of a bigger discussion than simply one about financial management and related processes.

While practices and procedures stood out in a number of the interviews and, as a

systems provider ourselves, we would, of course, suggest that systems are a key component of the journey – systems cannot be used in isolation and should not lead the strategy. With all of the interviews that referenced systems, these were clearly used to help implement the vision, which was already established and communicated to all stakeholders, not the other way around. Therefore a MAT's systems strategy needs to ensure that core technologies are able to evolve with it throughout the Trust's journey to support the implementation. If systems cannot cope with the transition or the end goal, a systems review becomes very much part of the process after the vision has been set.

## OPPORTUNITY

As Trusts grow they often look at centralising the finance function first – but as Leora Cruddas, Confederation of School Trusts CEO, says in the report, centralisation more widely remains less developed in the sector: "Strategic HR is rarely used to drive conversations at Board level about talent management and building professional pathways but this is particularly important as the Trust grows. Even less likely is centralisation of educational approaches. It is less common for Trusts to have one approach to the curriculum. However, the philosophy underlying the curriculum and pedagogy, is core."

What I take from this is the gap – and opportunity – around the discussion of education at a much earlier stage within the initial 'to centralise or not to centralise' debate. While centralisation can still be a controversial topic, schools within the Trusts interviewed for our report appear to be generally supportive of the process. This is due to their involvement from the beginning and their belief in the wider purpose of the strategy, which is further supported by the benefits being felt at school level as they are pushed back to the frontline to benefit teaching and learning (with supporting resources).

There are some really good examples of all this happening within primary MATs: from the four-school Cornerstone Academy Trust to the 60-school Reach2; and in all-through MATs such as the 16-school Dartmoor Multi-Academy Trust and the 22-school

"A gap was identified by trust chief executives, chief operating officers and chief financial officers around good practice and knowledge-sharing."

Academy Transformation Trust (ATT). ATT is also one of the most vocal advocates of GAG pooling, often interpreted as one of the more explicit outcomes of centralisation. In the snapshot of MATs featured in this report, however, GAG pooling is implemented at a representatively high scale, suggesting an increasing move for more Trusts to embark on such a journey.

For some Trust leaders we interviewed, centralisation was decided from the outset or at an early stage in the MAT's journey. For others, it has become a change management programme as the Trust has grown and evolved. But in most cases there is clear evidence of the impact.

## LEARNING

Tim Hooper, Operations Director of the 28-primary Aspire Academy Trust, said: "As a result of our move to centralisation, we have seen some good school performance and Ofsted data improvements, and in the main freeing up heads of school to focus on the children has been successful. We have seen joined-up approaches and intelligence





sharing, which has fed into academy improvement reporting, and during Covid-19 the schools have all benefited from consistent communications and approaches to health and safety which they would not have had if they were not accessing core services.”

Jason Brown, CFO of the 33-primary Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust, agreed: “Generally, centralisation has improved all our schools. Having finance, HR and other functions managed for them takes away a big worry and if there is any problem people can come to us and we will come up with the solutions. They are not working alone, and that counts for a lot, as it also means they can prioritise teaching and learning. In five to ten years’ time I think all MATs will be doing things this way but the journey they are on depends on where they start. There is no route map, and I would question the

extent to which even large Trusts have mastered this yet.”

In my experience, the majority of MATs have centralised to a degree, the challenge being that each Trust has chosen a different path and worked in a different way to achieve things. However, the general direction of travel is towards greater centralisation and I would fully expect this trend to continue over the next few years.



**Will Jordan is Co-Founder of IMP Software. A Growing Philosophy: How are Multi-Academy Trusts developing their operating models through centralisation? can be downloaded at <https://bit.ly/3rzuudm>**

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Centralisation should be a strategic decision, linked to the ethos and culture of any one MAT, and a bigger discussion than finance.
- Schools who are involved from the beginning and have a belief in the wider strategy are generally more supportive of centralisation.
- Systems must be used to help implement the Trust’s vision, which is already established and communicated to all stakeholders, not the other way around.
- Trusts in our report are implementing GAG pooling at a representatively high scale, suggesting an increasing move to do so.
- There is clear evidence of the impact of financial (and wider) approaches to centralisation as they evolve or grow.

# UNPREDICTABLE AND CHALLENGING TIMES

Caroline Collins reflects on the pressures Covid-19 has had on SBMs

One year ago the most pressing concerns for school business managers around the country was that of reduced budgets coupled with higher spend on teaching staff. We would tear our hair out looking at the figures and wondering what learning resource would need to be cut in order to facilitate the teacher pay rises.

Fast forward one year and our concerns are more deeply rooted and much more serious. Back at the end of March 2020, when the Government announced that schools were to close to all but the most vulnerable children, SBMs had to work hard and fast to get things into place. Suddenly the woes of financial pressures were taken over by the woes of health and safety. Almost overnight we found ourselves working flat out getting Covid risk assessments in place, identifying the most suitable sanitisers and anti-bac liquids, organising deep cleans, managing shielding staff and those self-isolating and reorganising school to ensure pupils were safe at all times.

## SOLUTIONS

Then there was the fiasco of the school meals vouchers where it was incredibly difficult to get on to the website with many of us only managing to get them by logging on at 10pm.

The ever-changing guidance from the Government and the DfE was confusing, to say the least, but we had to work with it; we had to find solutions and work to the guidelines, frequently making our own judgment about its meaning. The summer break couldn't come soon enough for a lot of us. SBMs had worked flat out, making the school safe, while juggling their own workload. Twitter

timelines were full of SBMs talking about how exhausting they were finding it and how challenging the year was proving.

When the autumn term started and all children returned to school many of us felt that, at long last, we could return to a sense of normality. The challenges that we had faced earlier in the year were now ones that we were more equipped to deal with. Our supplies were fully stocked, we knew which staff members were most at risk, how to manage a child with symptoms, we had an isolation room and cupboards full to the brim of hand sanitisers, soaps, anti-bac, PPE and the all-important Covid tests. We had laptops in place for children who might need to go into isolation and our remote learning was up and ready to go. The first half term was smooth and we started to, perhaps prematurely, relax.

## UNPREDICTABLE

Then came January 2021, and the pandemic has worsened with the new strain leading to more staff absences. Government told schools they were

to re-open and then, at 8pm the night before spring term was due to start, they did another U-Turn and schools had to

close for all pupils except vulnerable and those of key workers. Once again, we were placed in the forefront of managing unpredictable and serious challenges.

Spring term started with more vulnerable children and key workers than in the previous lockdown. The school phone rang continuously on day one, with parents complaining that they could not access the remote learning. It was a difficult day, but we got through it by assigning remote learning issues to a member of staff. She worked through the list of names throughout the day, calling and talking through the difficulties. We found, quite quickly, that the problems they were facing were, most often, caused by the type of device they were using. While there were simple fixes to these, it would have been good for the parents and





teachers to have been told about device restrictions so that we could plan for these issues and prepare for them. At least we now have an individual who has learned a lot more about Google Classroom and is usually able to answer the queries in case of a prolonged lockdown.

By the end of day one school staff were exhausted and, having dealt with continuous phone calls the previous day, we contacted parents and asked them to avoid calling in unless there was an emergency. We suggested queries were sent in via email or through the school texting service and, on receipt, we could forward them to the dedicated remote learning teacher, minimising disruption.

## SUPPLY

In the school at which I work a high number of families have several siblings, so we have received many calls and emails from parents asking for help with laptops. Having several siblings at home, all trying to access live classroom sessions at the same time, was proving impossible. Although we did not have a perfect solution we decided to record all of the remote lessons so that children could access them at different times and, although it's not ideal because there is no

interaction, at least their learning can continue. Of course the government has reinstated the option of schools to obtain laptops for families, which is great, but there is no endless supply. Our SendCo, who has a fantastic knowledge of the families in our school and their needs, took over the task of laptop ordering. He compiles two priority lists, with list one being for those with no laptop or device and priority two for those who were sharing devices amongst a number of siblings. Since taking over this task at the start of week one he has managed to order, receive, and distribute, 19 laptops for those children.

## COSTS

This does not mean that the issues SBMs had at the start of 2020 have gone away, far from it. It has become apparent just how much this pandemic has, and continues to, cost us. There have been the unplanned costs of covering staff, additional cleaning costs and the ever-growing supply of sanitisers, anti-bacteria, PPE and soap. This is on top of the income schools have lost because they have not been able to rent out schools or organise fundraising initiatives as done in previous years. It paints a dire picture for the year end. In the summer of

“There have been the unplanned costs of covering staff, additional cleaning costs and the ever-growing supply of sanitisers, anti-bacteria, PPE and soap.”

## HOW TO MANAGE COVID-19 IN SCHOOL

- Ensure remote learning is in place and one person is responsible for managing passwords, codes and supporting parents.
- Enlist a dedicated staff member to be responsible for identifying families at need of a device to use at home for remote learning.
- Remind staff about e-safety and data protection when delivering lessons remotely. Ensure they understand that they must make sure no sensitive data is available on the screen and, if working from home, it is done in a suitable environment in which children cannot see the teacher's home.
- Enlist a dedicated member of staff to be responsible for ordering laptops and devices.
- Encourage parents not to telephone school but to make use of email or other forms of communication and ensure admin staff field queries to the appropriate staff member.
- Set up a Covid-19 cost centre to record all expenditure related to Covid costs.
- Ensure a sufficient work-life balance is maintained.

2020 SBMs saw some light at the end of the tunnel when schools were told they could claim for these additional costs.

I had kept a spreadsheet of the incurred costs so I was able to, quite easily, complete the claim form in early July and waited for the reimbursement. This finally came in November but it was half the amount we had claimed for. The Government then opened up a window for schools to put in another claim but we were only able to claim for costs incurred in the summer term and there has been no announcement to say we can claim for further costs incurred since September. It seems their view is that we should all be able to manage these costs from our core budget but I doubt any SBM budgeted for such excessive spend on non-learning resources.

**Caroline Collins, Specialist Leader of Education, Head of School Business Strategy & Resources, Miles Coverdale Primary School, London**





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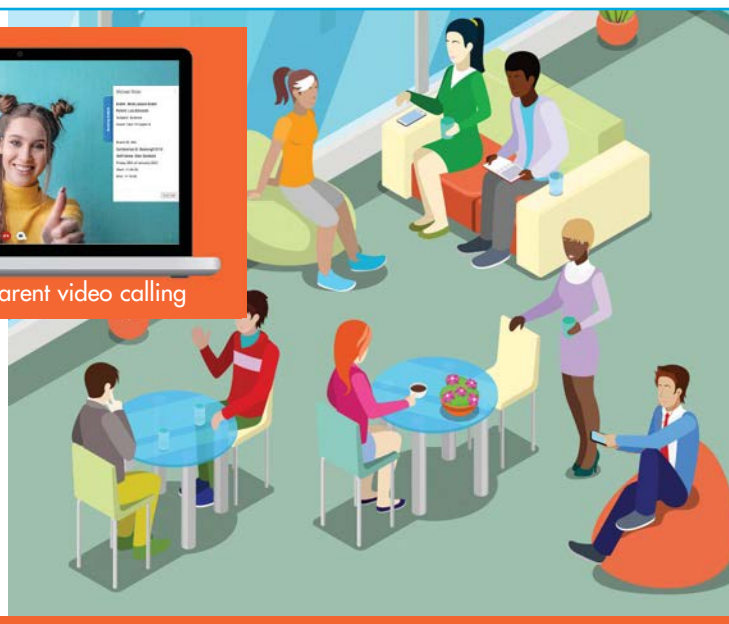
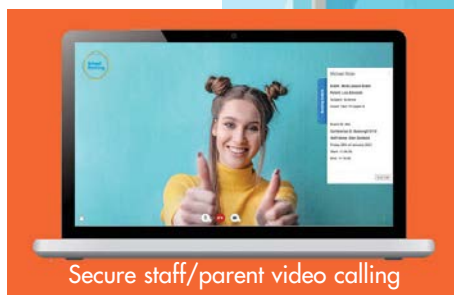
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## A SHAKE-UP IS COMING

Winston Poyton examines the changes that EdTech needs post-Covid-19



**T**echnology hasn't reached its full potential in education – a painful truth that the pandemic has brought into sharp relief. However, with blended learning here to stay, education technology (EdTech) has never been more important.

For blended learning to be successful, there must be a step-change in how EdTech is used and deployed across every single part of education as we move beyond the pandemic.

### A STRONG TECHNOLOGY BACKBONE

While schools have experienced a technological surge over the last few years, its implementation has been fragmented at best. In England, there is no

central technology infrastructure that acts as the backbone for education.

With so many disparate software packages to keep track of, the last year has been incredibly difficult for teachers, students and home-schooling parents. They've been forced to jump between multiple programs every day, remembering several passwords and sign-in processes. This has caused mass disruption to the teaching and learning process.

It's clear that a central Management Information System (MIS) is needed that can join the dots for everyone involved. While Microsoft Teams and Google Workspace are solid foundations, an MIS that can bring together blended learning solutions like Teams with other critical operations software – such as ParentMail for parent engagement and IRIS

Financials for admin staff is no longer a nice-to-have. It's a necessity.

For years, teachers and senior leadership teams (SLTs) have been working in the dark, their hands tied without access to critical intelligence on academics, financials, safeguarding, parent engagement or staff wellbeing. They need a real-time, single source of truth that they can access from anywhere, at any time; without this, school leaders simply aren't able to improve the

life chances of children to the best of their ability.

## AN EDTECH SHAKE-UP IS COMING

Thankfully, an EdTech revolution is underway. In fact, it was set in motion long before Covid-19, but has been rapidly accelerated because of it. It's now possible to give teachers time back to focus on their love of teaching thanks to integrated technology solutions. These are designed to take away the headaches involved in everyday processes.

Free time is a concept rarely associated with SLTs in education. However, the introduction of real-time data, integrated from across the entire school estate and presented in an easily digestible and interpretable way, would enable them to make well-informed decisions that best serve their students and staff.

Over time, software has eroded the impact that a head of department can have on the academic outcomes of pupils or the health and wellbeing of their staff. SLT staff have had more and more of their time eaten up by the need to collect and collate data into useable formats. Instant access to intelligence will finally enable SLTs to intervene at the point of need, maximise their impact and achieve their goals to ensure every student reaches their true potential.

“Free time is a concept rarely associated with SLTs in education.”

Instant intelligence access has been frustratingly absent until now across the education sector. However, following their recent acquisition of iSAMs, IRIS Software is now bringing the next generation of fully integrated, cloud-based online school management systems to the sector. Their cloud-based platform provides live data from across a MAT, enabling teachers and senior leaders to quickly access accurate information in an easy-to-use dashboard. Putting intelligence directly into the hands of educators through a central MIS will give them the headspace and tools they need to focus on teaching, not processes. While Covid-19 has been undeniably disruptive, it's also an opportunity to make lasting positive changes to the education sector.

*Winston Poyton, Senior Product Director at IRIS Software Group*



## AUTOMATION CAN CUT DOWN THE DAILY GRIND

Gary Spracklen looks at ways technology can save you time

A Rube Goldberg machine, named after American cartoonist Rube Goldberg, is a 'chain reaction-type machine intentionally designed to perform a simple task in an indirect and overly complicated way'. Sometimes as a school leader, technology in schools feels like a 'Rube Goldberg Machine'. Simple tasks can become overly complicated. A recent case in point would be the Department for Education's 'Educational Setting Status Form' - this non-statutory daily form asked educational settings for information about pupil or student attendance and setting closures or partial closures during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

For many the form became a daily grind, transporting information that was already available within the school's management information system (MIS). Many were left asking... surely this process could be automated?

In my own role, I have now automated a number of simple tasks through the use of tools like:

**YouCanBook.me** - an online appointment schedule which works directly with Google, iCloud and Microsoft cloud calendars. Connect with your calendar and only share the times you want with your users (staff/parents/governors/guests) - they book straight into your calendar. Users get their own notifications, reminders, calendar invites and more.

**Otter.ai** - Otter turns your voice conversations into smart notes that you can easily search and share. You can use it to take notes at your meetings and interviews, capture your thoughts and ideas while you're driving in the car, and transcribe your existing recordings and podcasts.

**IFTTT.com** - IFTTT derives its name from the programming conditional statement "if this, then that." What the company provides is a software platform that connects apps, devices and services from different developers in order to trigger one or more automations involving those apps, devices and services. This is perfect for capturing records of press coverage of your school or for saving images shared via your school's social media profiles. The possibilities with IFTTT.com really are endless.

My own experiences are developing but already I can see signs of how automation could be used to support me further in my role as a school leader. With this in mind, I was pleased to receive a recent invitation to take part in a pilot to automate the daily

collection of attendance data from the Department for Education.

The Department is currently working with a small number of management information system (MIS) suppliers on a pilot to investigate the potential of automating the flow of attendance data directly from school

management information systems to the Department for Education. The aim of this pilot is to 'reduce the requirement for manual data submission and reduce the burden on schools and is in line with the governments 'Use Cloud First' policy'. This all sounds very intriguing and I look forward to taking part in the trial.

Whatever the outcome, it's clear to me that automation is at the heart of digital transformation for school leaders and I look forward to exploring further examples as new technologies become available.

**Gary Spracklen is headteacher at The Prince of Wales School, Dorchester,**



# TECHNOLOGY IS A VITAL TOOL

Haylie Taylor explains the importance of monitoring and assessment during the pandemic

**C**ovid-19 has certainly caused disruption and turmoil across the sector. While the recent decision to cancel KS1 and KS2 SATs this year provides an element of space for schools to focus on continuing to provide high-quality teaching and learning throughout the pandemic – particularly while pupils are being taught remotely – teachers will still need a way of efficiently and fairly assessing student progress.

With assessment methods being key to helping teachers monitor progress and identify gaps in learning, the current situation poses challenges in achieving this effectively and helping children meet academic objectives to the best of their abilities, regardless of where they are based. With little to no face-to-face support, now more than ever, it is important to utilise additional resources and streamline platforms to take the growing pressures off teachers and help children continue engaging with their studies and making progress.

## IMPORTANT

EdTech has been central in facilitating remote learning, and the government's commitment to work in tandem with schools and organisations to increase access to devices and broadband for as many children as possible to limit disruption is a welcome step.

It's also important that we recognise the value that EdTech plays in helping teachers effectively capture data and assign the right tasks for individual levels and abilities to minimise the increase in attainment disparity.

Schools may want to consider investing in systems which will support better assessment and evaluation practice. This will ensure teachers are supported with a simple yet valuable way of identifying pupils' individual strengths and areas for development without bias. This in turn will help inform teaching, successfully re-engage pupils with their learning and promote a deeper understanding of concepts.

Often, pupil progress is tracked through large digital statement banks which tend to operate independently to the curriculum

and teaching methods. The downside to this is that teachers and leaders may lose sight of pupils' individual performance and instead, receive generic statements.

Instead, an assessment platform which centralises integration, automation, and personalisation of learning will likely not only streamline administrative processes for staff but will provide a 360-degree outlook for individual evaluation, assessment mapping and overall whole school progress.

## RESOURCES

It is more than likely that primary leaders will already have a range of digital tools and traditional paper systems in place to gather and manage student data. However, this can be onerous for staff when it comes to identifying levels remotely, which in turn creates challenges for personalised learning. Having a more 'joined-up' approach to accessing data will be key in effectively carrying out assessments and evaluating pupils' understanding. This is vital while children are learning remotely; with teachers under enough pressure to deliver engaging lesson content and activities, it is crucial for

schools to provide EdTech resources and platforms which help staff streamline workloads and automate tailored learning to every child's needs in a way that doesn't add even more pressure.

With Covid-19 providing a springboard for school leaders to assess infrastructure capabilities and EdTech platforms or resources which will aid teaching and learning over the next academic year, it's important for them to consider those which will provide the most effective and comprehensive functionality. For example, digital tools that provide teachers with a complete 360-degree view of student data. This could include setting up curriculum-aligned assessments and providing automatic marking and feedback features.

Therefore, while exams and formal assessments might be on hold, EdTech holds the key in forming a more cohesive approach to bridging the attainment gap and ensuring no cohort is left behind as a further educational casualty of the global pandemic.



“Schools may want to consider investing in systems which will support better assessment and evaluation practice.”



Haylie Taylor, former teacher and education consultant at EducationCity

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# Effectively engage with parents

Rhoda Pierpoint explains how to transform your communications policy

**O**ne area which has been a challenge for our school, and indeed many, is how do we effectively engage parents and carers in their child's education? Past experiences often form our opinions in life. For many adults, school wasn't a pleasant experience, meaning that they are less likely to engage in their child's education. Also, with the current climate of social distancing, parental engagement has never been more challenging.

Our school ethos at Heronswood is to give children a genuine, emotional connection with their learning because then they will achieve the highest standards. Fundamental to this is useful and meaningful engagement with the parents and carers of our 410 pupils, helping them work together with our teachers to ensure that every child, in every class, reaches their full potential.

## TRANSFORMING HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Nowadays, parent communication is more than comments and marks in a school report and a once a year report evening. A key area of focus at our school this year was improving parental engagement. We wanted every child's parent or carer to be aware of what was happening in the classroom; to understand what the pupils

were learning, why it was necessary and to share in their achievements.

But, with a high percentage of parents with English as an additional language, communications have proved tricky as they had little understanding of what was happening in the classroom and what learning their child was taking part in.

## SUCCESS STEMS FROM HOME

For Heronswood, EdTech has undoubtedly helped. We've gone from communicating to 70 per cent of our families to 100 per cent of parents and carers. We've also received thousands of positive virtual 'high-fives', showing that they are engaged in their child's learning in school.

Parental engagement can have such a positive impact on a child's education, and Heronswood is on a mission to ensure that every child goes home each day to parents or carers who are aware of what

they had been working on in class and their achievements. Parents need messages of reassurance to home if a child is finding something tricky or, perhaps, they would like homework reminders.

We knew the best way to close the engagement gap is to improve parental communications, and here are my top tips to help:

- Break down barriers by using a familiar format such as mobile comms.
- Pick a format which is easily accessible for parents.
- Share positive news, not just the dreaded 'phone call home.'
- Put the onus on teachers to communicate with parents. about daily events and rewards
- Involve parents in the decision process of how you communicate, what do they think of it?
- Ask parents for feedback regularly, know what's working and what isn't.

## REDUCING TEACHER WORKLOAD

As any teacher knows, school life is hectic with minimal hours in the day. Throw in the pandemic and teachers are stretched to their limits. With the EdTech platform, our teachers are benefitting from no more writing 'please remember to read for 20 minutes' in 30 home school diaries. Now, teachers can say, today we read Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, please ask your child about the characters, or your child should read for ten minutes today. They can easily and quickly send through the reward badges to parents and carers, it saves so much time.

Looking ahead, I can't see that we'll ever go back to traditional methods if we want to ensure effective communications with parents and carers, reduce the number of hours that teachers spend on admin and, in turn, ensure that every child reaches their full learning potential.

"We've gone from communicating to 70 per cent of our families to 100 per cent of parents and carers."



Rhoda Pierpoint is head teacher of Heronswood Primary School and pre-School, part of Rivers C of E Academy Trust, in Worcestershire. The school uses <http://www.marvellousme.com/> to improve parental engagement.

# THE SHOW MUST GO ON(LINE)

Chris Rothwell explains how your school can still entertain parents and carers in Covid-19 world

**W**e're all getting used to working, learning and even socialising remotely these days but many of us might find it hard to imagine the school play, jazz band, concert or musical done virtually. Yet with social distancing guidelines still very much in place, the traditional sight of strings being tuned, play lines rehearsed and proud relatives filling school halls and gyms to watch their children perform seems unlikely to happen anytime soon.

But as they say in the West End, the show must go on! So, the good news is there are some simple, easy-to-use tools to make putting on a virtual performance more of an enjoyable experience than a hair-raising horror show.

Choosing the right ones is as important as selecting the right leading lady though – which is where Microsoft Teams comes in. More than just a solution for a video conference or group chat, it also offers loads of practical team-orientated features and functions to make things run as smoothly and collaboratively as possible – from planning and rehearsing to staging the show itself – letting teachers and pupils play a part in pulling together the performance from the ground up.

Here are eight ways Teams and Flipgrid can help you and your pupils put on a memorable performance. Spoiler alert: sadly, it can't guarantee everyone will get their lines right or sing in tune.

## GET EVERYONE 'TOGETHER'

Once you've decided who's involved in the show or concert, use the Create a Team function to set up a team channel. You can choose from a variety of options, such as 'class', 'staff' or 'other'. All everyone needs to do to join is click the Join a Team button. It's a good idea to create different teams for teacher to teacher interactions and teacher to student ones as it will ensure the right messages and information reach the right people.

If you choose Flipgrid, you can simply create a Show topic for your production – the title of the play or the name of the piece. Students can then get involved by creating

and sharing a short video made using the fun, social media style camera. Everyone in the conversation can watch and comment on each other's videos too, with you as the educator in complete control.

## FOCUS YOUR CONVERSATIONS

The navigator bar shows people which team or aspect of the production they're part of, with each team able to feature multiple channels to keep conversations focused and collaborative. In the case of your show, you could consider creating different conversation channels for areas like costumes, music, scripts and rehearsals.

On Flipgrid, it's just as easy: simply follow the thread for each topic.

“All everyone needs to do to join is click the Join a Team button.”

## COLLABORATE SEAMLESSLY

Whether you're 100 per cent remote or hybrid learning, Teams makes it quick and easy for everyone to discuss ideas and share information no matter where they are. As your show, concert or ensemble begins to take shape, this could mean anything from co-writing the script and sending music samples, to updating the running order and even performing live rehearsals.

You can also use OneNote as a digital scrapbook in which people can show off their latest set design and costume concepts, or Flipgrid where they can share content and comments via text, emoji, inking, boards, screen recording and more.

## STAY ON TRACK

The Teams calendar keeps everyone up to date on meetings, rehearsals and, of course, the final show. Meanwhile, the assignments function lets you upload and share tasks with students and provide feedback and support

as they complete them. You can even see who's opened and/or submitted the assignment online, which means there can be no claims the WiFi connection failed at the crucial moment.

A top tip is to create a to-do list to work through using the Task App on Teams. It lets you view and manage all of your individual and team tasks, helping pupils and teachers work through their tasks and track the progress being made. Class Notebook can also be useful here as a place for everyone to chat, ask questions and divvy up what needs to be done

## ADD SOME RED CARPET STYLE

Although the art department might not be as busy as usual when it comes to building and painting theatre sets, with Teams and Flipgrid there's still plenty of scope for creativity.

In both cases, you and your students are able to design your own virtual backgrounds while with Flipgrid, in particular, you can see and hear from every student in class to foster a fun and supportive show environment. You can also use Teams Together mode to bring everyone together into the same virtual space – perfect for that full cast finale!

## FILL YOUR AUDIENCE

Be sure to share information about how parents download and use the Teams platform well in advance of a live show, or provide information on how to access OneDrive or SharePoint if you're doing a pre-recorded one. That way you can deal with any queries ahead of time rather than with the clock ticking.

If you plan to do the show live, a Teams meeting can host up to 300 people at a time, and you can invite parents with a calendar invite featuring a clickable link that lets them join with a laptop, tablet or smartphone. You can also record a show on Teams or Flipgrid, then email it as a link for parents to watch at a time that suits them. The best way to do this safely is to upload and share your recording via OneDrive or SharePoint. This allows you to



control sharing permissions easily, meaning only parents and carers have access.

## DON'T FORGET TO CELEBRATE

Every show deserves an afterparty or a team celebration, even if it's online. Check out this guide to virtual celebrations at <https://bit.ly/3oW4CXz> so you can get everyone together for a well-earned pat on the back after the performance is done. There are plenty of ways to add a bit of drama to the

occasion too – from handing out awards and creating party-style backgrounds to sharing video clips from the show itself. If you're using Flipgrid, parents can also leave good luck posts and well done messages so that everyone is part of the fun.

## PREPARATION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

It may be impossible to completely eliminate the risk of fallouts between your cast members during term time but you can at least guard against any unplanned hitches that might jeopardise your show itself. For

example, the hard-mute setting on Teams can prevent the sound of any mobile phones, coughing, talking or other background noise coming through during a live performance.

If possible, make sure you have your school IT expert(s) – or a tech-savvy parent volunteer – on hand too. They can help ensure your event is accessible and running smoothly, keeping in mind any privacy or security concerns you may have.

Of course, there's no denying this year's school shows, like so much of life right now, won't be the same experience as usual for now. But whatever type of performance you decide on, I hope the steps outlined above can help you ensure it puts a spring in the steps of everyone involved. And if it's (understandably) a bit harder than normal to keep up your students' enthusiasm, just remind them of this small silver lining: in 2021 they get to be stars of both stage and screen!

## EXPERT ADVICE FOR YOUR SHOW

- It's a good idea to create different teams for teacher-to-teacher interactions and teacher-to-student ones.
- Use OneNote as a digital scrapbook to show off the latest set design and costume concepts.
- Create a to-do list to work through the Task App on Microsoft Teams. View and manage all individual and team tasks, helping pupils and colleagues work through tasks and stay on track.
- You can also pre-record shows. Upload and share your recording via OneDrive or SharePoint. This allows you to control sharing permissions easily, meaning only parents and carers have access.
- Design your own virtual background or use Teams Together mode to bring everyone together into the same virtual space - perfect for a recital, play or concert.
- Safeguard against any unplanned hitches using the hard-mute setting on Microsoft Teams to prevent the sound of mobile phones, coughing, talking or other background noise coming through during a live performance.



**Chris Rothwell**, director of education, Microsoft.



# RESHAPING EDUCATION FOR A CHANGED WORLD

Graham Cooper asks can some of the new trends emerging from the Covid-19 crisis become a permanent feature of post-pandemic education?



**W**e all have moments when we yearn for a return to pre-Covid days, particularly when we seem to be stuck in a Groundhog Day spiral of shocking headlines, restrictions and lockdowns. So whenever there's a glimpse of brighter times on the horizon with positive news about vaccine programmes and falling infection rates, it's tempting to hope for a wholesale shift back to life as it was before the pandemic. But the fact is, life will never be the same.

This may sound alarming, but it needn't be because although we can't put Covid-19 back in Pandora's box, some of the adjustments we're having to make to our lives could lead to a genuinely better way of working.

## OPTIMISM AND OPPORTUNITY

History has shown us that turmoil, no matter how tragic, can be a driver of innovation. Although the pandemic will continue to cast

a black cloud over our lives for some time yet, there are some positives to take from the new working environment that it is creating. And the education sector could be particularly well placed to embrace these positives.

After all, the sector is blessed with its fair share of optimists. Teachers and school leaders enter the profession with the intention of opening up opportunities and securing brighter futures for children and young people. They are working harder towards this purpose than ever with inequality gaps widening and disadvantaged children falling behind.

Schools are having to go the extra mile and adapt their teaching and learning to accommodate rapid change.

This impetus to make the best of difficult situations has been plain to see throughout the different phases of the pandemic with teachers managing split cohorts of children learning at school and at home – and moving their lessons from the classroom out to the

playground and onto the laptop screen.

It has been inspiring, humbling and entertaining to read about teachers coming up with new ways to engage their pupils when Covid restrictions kept them apart. Necessity is the mother of invention as one teacher demonstrated when she describes how she gave her pupils feedback using emojis and GIFs, made a scrabble board out of household objects and even used her fridge as a whiteboard.

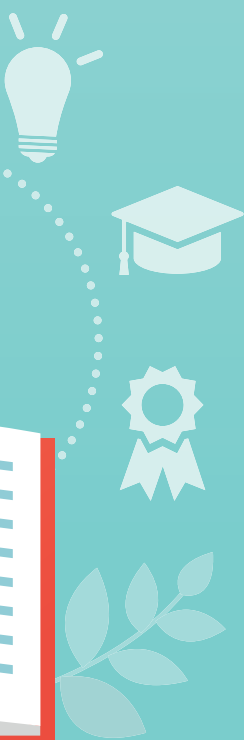
## TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITION

This spirit of innovation could bring a welcome new perspective to teaching and learning.

Our approach to pedagogy still mirrors the original Victorian model with a teacher in front of the class and children learning in groups. Classrooms may be more friendly, colourful and dynamic than they were for our Victorian counterparts, but there's an



“History has shown us that turmoil, no matter how tragic, can be a driver of innovation.”



argument that learning spaces need to evolve further to meet the needs of all pupils.

In the traditional classroom format it can be difficult to cater for a wide range of abilities, keep everyone interested and engaged, and encourage children to think for themselves.

There could be an argument here for continuing to blend face-to-face teaching with technology even when lockdowns have become a thing of the past. The proliferation of new learning software, apps and online games can be used to great effect alongside in-person teaching to build pupils' confidence, which has taken a hit during the pandemic.

Many digital resources give teachers the option to differentiate more effectively by setting individual tasks for children to carry out in an enjoyable, low-stress way. This can also help teachers to identify where the gaps are so they can deliver more tailored support to a child.

Blended learning also has a part to play in helping pupils re-integrate into their school

setting. Children who feel comfortable answering maths questions on a screen with encouraging feedback from the digital task-setter may be able to overcome their reticence to answering a question in class.

## INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE

While there's no doubt that supporting children's learning while they're at home is a challenge, some children have flourished through remote learning, and have learnt skills that will be vital in a changing workforce where flexible working is likely to become more common.

Many pupils have had the opportunity to develop their ability to access resources online, research topics and present their work skilfully using technology. Sadly, there are also children who have not been able to share this opportunity due to economic circumstances or lack of available devices.

As well as a learning gap, we may see a widening technology gap where some children have become adept at using tools and software, while others have been left behind.

That's where a reshaped education can help by preparing children for a technologically connected world, whether that's through an introduction to coding, an understanding of where to find information or knowledge of how to communicate electronically.

This will help to create more independent learners who will thrive in the future workplace.

## PASSIONS AND PURSUITS

It is not only their technology skills that children have improved while home learning.

Many children have enjoyed taking up additional pastimes and developing new interests while they have been staying at home. Some children have discovered the joys of the outside world with a newfound curiosity for plants and wildlife. Others have enjoyed baking with their families, writing stories or making dance videos.

This learning is important too, as it shows children what they can achieve when they put the effort in, and it gives them a stronger sense of their place in the wider world. Schools can keep these passions alive back in the classroom by encouraging children to share their skills with classmates.

Natural performers might be happy to teach the class a dance, while a cooking enthusiast could show a video of themselves baking their latest showstopper at home.

## COMMUNICATION AND CREATIVITY

Teachers have also learnt new skills while managing remote learning. Some have found

## HOW TO BRING NEW SKILLS INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Retain some of the digital teaching tools your school found successful during lockdown, such as podcasting apps or maths games, and use these in combination with face-to-face teaching.
- Encourage colleagues to create videos of their best lessons and use these more widely across the school so all classes can benefit from them.
- Give children the opportunity to share some of the skills they gained while learning from home by getting them to teach small groups of classmates how to plant seeds or sing a new song.
- Build confidence and resilience among pupils by allowing them to answer questions and complete tasks on-screen and then sharing them with the class.

new ways to engage their pupils by screen-sharing simple science experiments, filming art projects or organising music quizzes.

Even teachers who were initially reluctant to appear on camera have discovered fresh sources of creativity by making videos to keep their pupils engaged and learning. This new expertise needn't go to waste when the school gates are open to all.

Schools can get their best digital communicators to keep up with the video making so they can teach more children than they would usually reach through timetabled classes. Then every child in a school can benefit from brilliant lessons from its most talented English teacher. This would have the added advantage of freeing up other staff members to work in smaller groups on targeted interventions.

We can't turn the clock back to 2019 and undo the damage unleashed by the pandemic. But what we can do is to take some of the trends to emerge from the crisis and use them to reshape education for a changed world.



**Graham Cooper is a former deputy headteacher and chief marketing officer at Juniper Education. He is also a contributor to a Covid-19 exit strategy white paper which can be downloaded at <https://bit.ly/36IH2al>**



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My staff are finding new and engaging resources to use every day, whether it's a grammar game, an activity based around a news article or a quick comprehension exercise - we are yet to find something that doesn't work for us!

**Mr Neil Bardsley**  
Head teacher, St Michael & All Angels  
C.E Primary School

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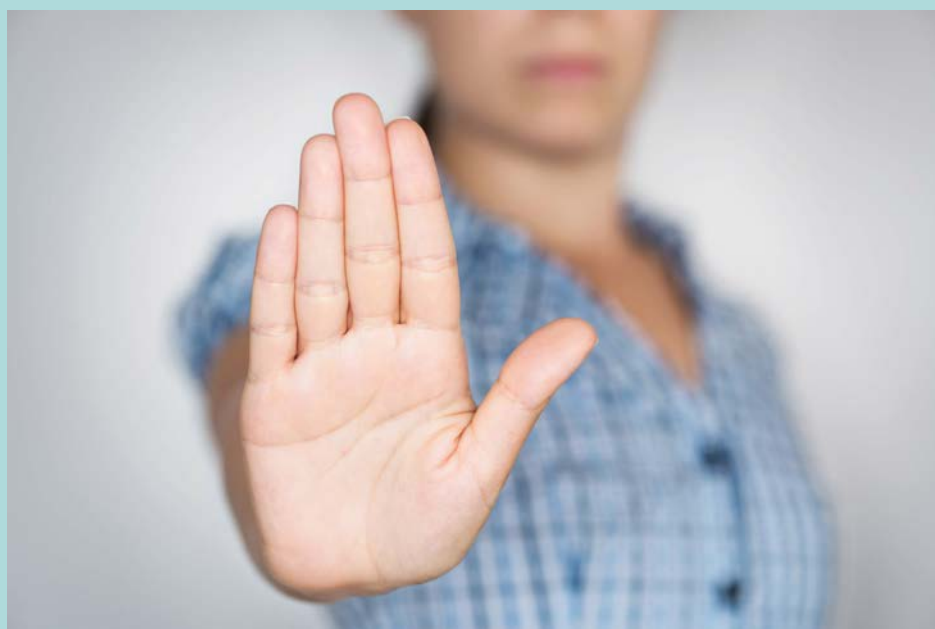




# Leadership & HR

## PREVENT RECURRING PROBLEMS

Emma Meadus explains why communication and culture can lead to the smooth running of a school



**T**he role of headteacher is complex and ever-changing. A year ago, we'd never heard of lateral flow tests and remote education systems, yet here we are delivering them and dealing with the associated concerns. Dealing with the daily issues that crop up is a large part of the job but I realised that the same types of problems were popping up persistently which sapped my energy and enthusiasm. "Why is this happening again?", I'd wonder. Here's what I did to help manage two of my persistent issues.

Effective communication is challenging with part-time workers, staff absence and people who won't read their email. Sometimes there are

staff and parents who manipulate the communication issue so they can follow their own agenda instead– the old "well, no one told me" defence. I've attacked the communication issue with a multi-platform approach.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

A good email system linked to your school information management system is a must. No one is ever missed out – parents and carers, governors, volunteers, teachers, kitchen staff, caretakers, volunteers etc all sit in your system in neat contact groups. I layer up my communication using our school website app and a social media blast. I use Twitter, Instagram and Facebook

"Social bubbles have made face-to-face communication with school staff difficult."

but only need to make one post which is shared across the sites using a social media platform manager. It's a great time saver and well worth the small monthly cost.

Social bubbles have made face-to-face communication with school staff difficult. Our staff meeting now happens via Microsoft Teams. Using the record feature and writing the minutes in the posts section means that anyone not able to be present at the time can catch up later. We've also now got an Online Staffroom in Teams. Staff were feeling isolated in their classrooms, missing the professional support from colleagues in staffroom conversations. Having an online place for this does not replace that personal experience but it's a step in the right direction. The Online Staffroom has a Staff Hub feature. This is where I put the weekly diary of what's to come, reminders and notices for staff. We've got it set up to appear when staff open an internet browser in school.

This layered approach for staff, parents and governors means "I wasn't told!" just doesn't wash anymore.

## MAINTAINING YOUR CULTURE

A shared set of beliefs and values is a critical feature to a successful school. However, without sustainability measures in place culture can be lost from staff turnover or as new initiatives come about. Learning walks used to expose many issues around culture for me. I spent too much time unpicking issues with individuals so I made building a sustainable culture a leadership focus in my school development plan. I've developed a three-part strategy that helps considerably:

- **Create a document on school culture.** This takes the most essential parts of our policies and procedures and values, putting them in an easy-to-read document. After a couple of years, I got a designer to make it into a booklet to give it more status. But it's no good just handing them out. You have to invest time throughout the year to revisit the culture document or else it becomes just another initiative that fades away.

- **Better Induction Programme.** The culture document features heavily in this, making sure that new staff understand its gravitas. There is a schedule for check-ins with leaders throughout their first year in school. Each check-in point has an agenda to assure the culture and other essential matters are revisited.

- **Checking your Decision Making.** It's easy to become seduced by the next big thing or someone else's enthusiasm for a project but being swayed off course can dilute your culture. I developed a mantra, something I say to myself and staff in decision-making processes – "Does this sound like us? Is this the sort of thing we'd do?". It's a very simple but effective tool for sense-checking our thinking and making sure we put culture at the heart of what we do in school.

We can't plan for every scenario that may occur in our attempts to prevent persistent problems - we're all only human after all - but a few good, simple systems can make lighter work of recurring issues.



**Emma Meadus,**  
headteacher Coppice Valley  
Primary School, Harrogate

@BristolEdu

[www.coppicevalley.com](http://www.coppicevalley.com)



## SIX WAYS TO SUPPORT BEREAVED EMPLOYEES

Rebecca Mian explains how you can support employees going through the grieving process

**D**eath is something most of us avoid thinking about but, as an employer, it is vital to consider how you support bereaved employees.

Unfortunately, this topic has become even more relevant as the pandemic continues across the UK. As a result, it is possible that you need to support bereaved employees in different ways, and often remotely, which can make an already challenging situation feel more stressful.

To help ease the burden, Benenden Health has identified six ways you can support bereaved employees right now.

### 1. Understand the differences associated with a coronavirus-related bereavement

People who lose a loved one at this time not only undergo the typical feelings of loss, they also have the added emotions of not being able to gather to celebrate their loved one's life. We have found in our conversations with colleagues that utilising Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) and gaining a greater understanding of local 'care of the deceased' policies, puts you in a more informed position to support your workforce.

### 2. Get to grips with the grieving process

Everyone should learn about the grieving process. If they haven't had any, it would be beneficial to offer training. The way in which people grieve is entirely individual and it is not a linear process. Instead of a neat set of stages which the bereaved move through in an orderly fashion, grieving is much more like a rollercoaster.

### 3. Understand the role of work as a coping mechanism

As a caring employer, your first reaction to hearing of an employee's bereavement might be to encourage them to take as much time off as is necessary. While in

many cases this is very appropriate, it's also worth understanding the important role work can play in a recently bereaved person's life. Everyday routines – such as work – can become a much-needed anchor.

### 4. Be flexible

It goes without saying that while some bereaved employees will want to get back to work as soon as possible, others will not. Make sure you offer flexible bereavement policies which will enable your employees to take the time they need away from work. If possible, allow them to choose the date they come back and consider implementing a phased return and remaining flexible with their hours.

### 5. Remain compassionate

Once an employee is back at work, it doesn't mean business as usual. Birthdays and anniversaries of the death of a loved one may be difficult, so it's important to ensure flexibility and compassion on an ongoing basis. Benenden Health's most-recent research highlights that fewer than one in ten UK employees would confide in their employers if they were suffering with their mental health. If you're concerned that there could be a broader issue, explore our guide on mental health in the workplace (<https://bit.ly/3nPEZaa>).

### 6. Provide resources

It can be helpful to supply relevant resources. Access to a confidential helpline is an example of this. Training Mental Health First Aiders is another valuable resource. As part of Benenden Healthcare for Business (<https://bit.ly/39zZd2z>), employees have access to a 24/7 Mental Health Helpline.

**Rebecca Mian, Head of HR at not-for-profit healthcare provider Benenden Health**



# Relationships are vital for a leader

Beth Cubberley explains why making yourself available is an essential leadership tool

Being a good leader will enable students, staff and parents to work together so that the best outcomes can be achieved. That is easy to write, not so easy to achieve. The only true way of achieving this is through making relationships with all stakeholders.

There have been times when I have berated myself for not taking the time to walk away from my screen and office to actually go and speak to my colleagues or the pupils. Being a SENDCo is a tough role as there are always deadlines, meetings, EHCP applications, annual reviews... the list is endless. But relationships are fundamental to any organisation and important for good mental health.

I believe that being a good leader is about showing compassion, it's about knowing your staff, taking the time to find out their strengths and talents and using those to ensure they bring the best to your organisation. It is about showing equality across the organisation so that everyone knows they are valued. It is about listening to them but offering challenges when needed, giving them space to grow in confidence and being abundantly clear about expectations.

*"I believe that being a good leader is about showing compassion"*

## Challenge

I am sure that many leaders across the land will be questioning their role, their ability to lead and their passion to continue with such a role. It has been the hardest year emotionally, mentally and physically. Being a leader in education during the Covid crisis has been a challenge partly because of the constant changes from the Government, the pressures on school and the lack of clarity, guidance and support. Yet these core values are what true leaders will live and breathe despite it not being modelled from the DFE and those Ministers in charge.

As members of our Government have experienced, being a leader is not always popular. The rest of the organisation does not always know, recognise or appreciate

the pressures leaders are under. I am sure that if you are interested in developing leadership you will have read/seen Simon Sinek. He discusses some of the greatest leaders and why they were so admirable and left such a legacy. He noted from his research that they all "act and communicate in the same way within the 'Golden Circle' asking the 'What', 'How' and 'Why'". Thus it reminds us to go back and re-evaluate our purpose and how we should be working from the inside out. We need to get the 'why' right. So when you are doubting your ability to continue to lead during this demanding time, your focus is pulled away from the objective, your soul is weary and you are exhausted in all ways; the simple reminder is that we all lead because we desire the best outcomes for pupils. The most effective way to ensure this is to work collaboratively as a team. That means that everyone has a different role and if given the right tools, the collective vision will be achieved.

## Communication

Communication is vital, leadership teams get criticised for not having good communication channels in place. There are plenty of ways to ensure this does happen and having an 'open door'

policy will also help. If we make ourselves available, show that we genuinely care, listen to viewpoints, understand frustrations and take the time to celebrate successes; we will all have an impact and be seen as credible leaders. If leadership teams successfully build relationships, show compassion and communicate well, achieving the best outcomes for pupils will be the ultimate focus and drive. However, to be a leader, we must always put our own oxygen masks on first, before we can put them on others. This year has been tough and it is easy to lose sight of the mission and reason for our role. If you are doubting your ability or desire to continue in this role, you need to remember that you have led your teams through this historical crisis. Being a leader is not easy, it requires you to give your all at times, so ensure you are kind to yourselves over the coming months and keep your focus on the positives and the things that have been achieved, teach and the families will have appreciated your time and efforts.

**Beth Cubberley, assistant headteacher, Grove Wood Primary School, Rayleigh, Essex.**



# A STRATEGY MUST BE PUT IN PLACE

Jules White believes a national plan is required to recover from the pandemic

**T**he pervasive, far reaching global pandemic has blighted our lives. Many families have faced awful circumstances and all of us have been negatively affected by Covid-19 in one way or another. Extended periods of lockdown have also been very hard to manage. In order to get through, individuals and households have had to re-evaluate the importance of family, friends and even the simple everyday pleasures of a visit to the cinema, playing or watching sport, or just having the freedom to go for a pint with friends in the local pub. Things that were often taken for granted are now valued and cherished much more. Similarly, many people have really begun to assess the importance of schools and how their provision is integral to the lives of so many families and the nation as a whole.

## WELLBEING

During the first lockdown teachers and support staff often raised a wry smile as parents in large numbers told us how tricky teaching their child actually was! We also saw more clearly that families rely on schools to allow them to carry on with their own duties, whether it be at work or in other contexts and this is just how it should be.

And then, of course, we have all had to consider the centrality of schools to children themselves; not only in terms of a child's academic development but to their social, personal and emotional wellbeing as well. There is nothing new here, but the crucial importance of school to children has been brought into even sharper focus.

It is only when the extensive scaffolding – provided by schools – to children's lives has been removed that the imperative of our work has been so clearly realised.

In short, the academic development, health and wellbeing of virtually every child in the country is strongly dependent on our schools, staff and the myriad of services that we provide.

## CHALLENGES

Against this background, the urgent goal must be, therefore, to get schools open as quickly and as safely as possible. That, however, is only the start of a very long and complex journey that we will all be forced to embark upon as the invasive and pernicious

tentacles and reach of the pandemic continues well after the final vaccine has been administered.

Snippets of such future challenges have burned brightly but fleetingly across social and more conventional media platforms. Recently we have seen rows over the inadequacy of free school meals provision while fears continue to develop in relation to the growing 'achievement gap' between pupils from disadvantaged families and their more affluent peers. But these significant problems must not hide other very urgent concerns that will affect children for years to come.

In particular, the already considerable issue surrounding the mental health of young people is becoming more acute as Covid-19 grips the wellbeing of children ever more strongly. A recent report by NHS Digital states that in 2017, one in nine children aged five-16 years were identified as having a probable mental health disorder. In 2020 this has now risen to one in six.

In December 2020, The president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Professor Russell Viner, articulated the obvious, but nevertheless very worrying impact of the pandemic: "The interruption of education is a huge issue, but we also need to prepare for the impact on mental health and child protection services... Many children will be living in families pushed further into financial insecurity or outright poverty."

And so, the frightening list of dreadful statistics grows. The police, for example, reported a seven per cent increase of offences flagged as domestic abuse related in the period March – June 2020. At the same time the number of children made more vulnerable to the scourge of 'County Lines' has multiplied as lockdown has allowed criminal drugs gangs to locate their targets much more easily and exploit

"It is only when the extensive scaffolding – provided by schools – to children's lives has been removed that the imperative of our work has been so clearly realised."





children with alarming alacrity.

All children have suffered from the social effects of being isolated from friends and family and these issues are significantly amplified for those children being brought up in cramped, overcrowded and other difficult conditions.

## SUPPORT

For a decade or more, schools have often been the 'fourth emergency service', offering remarkable levels of care and support to children when other services have been denuded of capacity and

their resources have been stretched to breaking point. Often, such intensive support provided little more than a vital sticking plaster to cover up gaping wounds and it is clear that with so many new difficulties ahead, this ad hoc, reactive provision is neither manageable nor desirable in future.

Children and their families will need to benefit from a nationally coordinated and fully resourced 'Recovery Plan'. The complexity of the challenges that lie ahead can only be overcome if educational, social and health services are properly equipped and supported to deliver on behalf of every child in the country.

The government will only be able to help us tackle these issues by implementing root and branch capacity to the services that children will rely on. Schools and other providers will not be able to deliver on a wing and a prayer. Money, training and a cohesive, strategic plan is urgently required and any plan will need to be co-produced by involving all of the critical stakeholders in a meaningful and transparent way. A superficial top-down approach simply

will not do. During the pandemic some positives have arisen from a desperate situation. The value of schools beyond academic metrics is one of them. We all hope that this terrible problem ends soon but now is the time to think beyond the immediate issues that we all face and consider how to support our most precious future generations regain the opportunities and good health that have been so cruelly lost over the past 12 months.



**Jules White, headteacher  
Tanbridge House School,  
Horsham, West Sussex.**

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- In the short term try to coordinate a wellness programme for students and colleagues.
- Recognising that many children and adults have found the pandemic very hard is half the battle. Often staff are keen to supplement more formalised curricular and other wellbeing programmes by delivering yoga, reading, nature and other mindful activities.
- We should all encourage the government to deliver much, much more in support of mental health and practical support for students and their families to overcome the challenges of lost learning and more complex domestic and social challenges.
- Just insisting that children 'catch up' may not be helpful without the long term support to do so.
- There is an opportunity to reassess curricular and assessment opportunities for children of all ages. Now is the time to demand change!

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# Are you harassed at school?

Steve Waters explains what actions to take if you are bullied at work

**W**hat is the difference between bullying and harassment? There is no legal definition of bullying. That is why it is difficult to take action. The bully usually waits until the target is alone to mount attacks, making it difficult to produce evidence beyond a 'he/she said' accusation.

Harassment, however, is defined by the Equality Act (2010) as: 'Unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.'

Where the bullying/harassment relates to a protected characteristic, it might amount to unlawful discrimination. There may also be grounds to bring a claim against the bully and the employer (technically the governing body or trust board) under the Equality Act at an employment tribunal. The average settlement was £13,706 between March 2018 - April 2019.

The protected characteristics are: sexual orientation, sex, age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage/civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race and religion or beliefs.

## OFSTED

The revised Ofsted Inspection Framework, effective from September 2019, includes a specific statement about bullying in Leadership and Management: 'Good (2) Leaders protect staff from bullying and harassment.'

Ironically, most anecdotal accounts

of bullying on social media report leaders are the perpetrators. Due to the disruption caused by Covid-19, there has not been the opportunity to assess the impact of the 'new' Ofsted statement on bullying and harassment in schools.

## THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL EFFECTS OF BULLYING AND HARASSMENT ARE:

**Physical:** chronic fatigue, repeated illnesses e.g. colds, flu, high blood pressure, migraine, chest and back pain, stomach disorders and hormone disturbances, IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), thyroid problems, skin disorders, increased risk of heart problems, nail biting or clenching teeth and grinding teeth when asleep.

**Mental:** panic attacks, sleep disorders, stress, anxiety, depression, poor concentration and poor memory, irritability, obsessive disorders, hypervigilance, mood swings, increased sensitivity, loss of humour, self-medication: alcohol, coffee, anorexia or bulimia, thoughts of self-harm/suicide.

In addition, bullying is often accompanied by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the mental impact of bullying or harassment can last for a long time. Even years.

## MAKING IT WORSE?

What action can the target of bullying/harassment take? The first question you should ask is: 'Will my taking action make things worse?' In most, perhaps all, cases of bullying, the answer is almost certainly, 'No'.

Bullies rely on their targets being unwilling to take action in case they bring more suffering

upon themselves. They rarely stop and usually escalate when they see that their behaviour is having the desired effect.

## TAKING ACTION

- Contact your union
- Consider counselling or contact Education Support for help (08000 562 561). Phone lines are staffed 24/7 by qualified counsellors.
- Implement the Write it - State it - Let it Go (**WWW.SLG**) method of dealing with unfair treatment (Teach Well Alliance):

**1 W:** Write a statement of the physical and mental impact of being bullied/harassed. Include what you would like to happen next i.e. behaviour to stop.

**2 W:** Write an email to the perpetrator, requesting a meeting.

**3 W:** Once it is scheduled, write your statement in a second email, saying that you would welcome the opportunity to discuss it then.

**4** Take two copies of the statement to the meeting, in case the perpetrator has 'forgotten' their copy.

**5 S:** State your opinion, referring to your statement. Bring the discussion back to your statement if the perpetrator tries to divert it.


**6 LG:** Letting it Go. Email the perpetrator, summarising the meeting and outcome.

- If you are unable to meet the perpetrator alone, ask the school union representative or a friend to accompany you.
- Keep a record of everything that amounts to bullying or harassment.

And if this doesn't work? Leave the school before you adopt the belief that it is teaching that is making you ill. Fortunately, not all schools are like this. Try one more. You might be happier teaching somewhere else than you ever imagined possible.

**Steve Waters is the founder and director of the Teach Well Alliance which supports schools to implement a culture of staff wellbeing and mental health. Free advice on Bullying and Harassment can be found at [www.teachwellalliance.com/bullying-and-harassment](http://www.teachwellalliance.com/bullying-and-harassment)**

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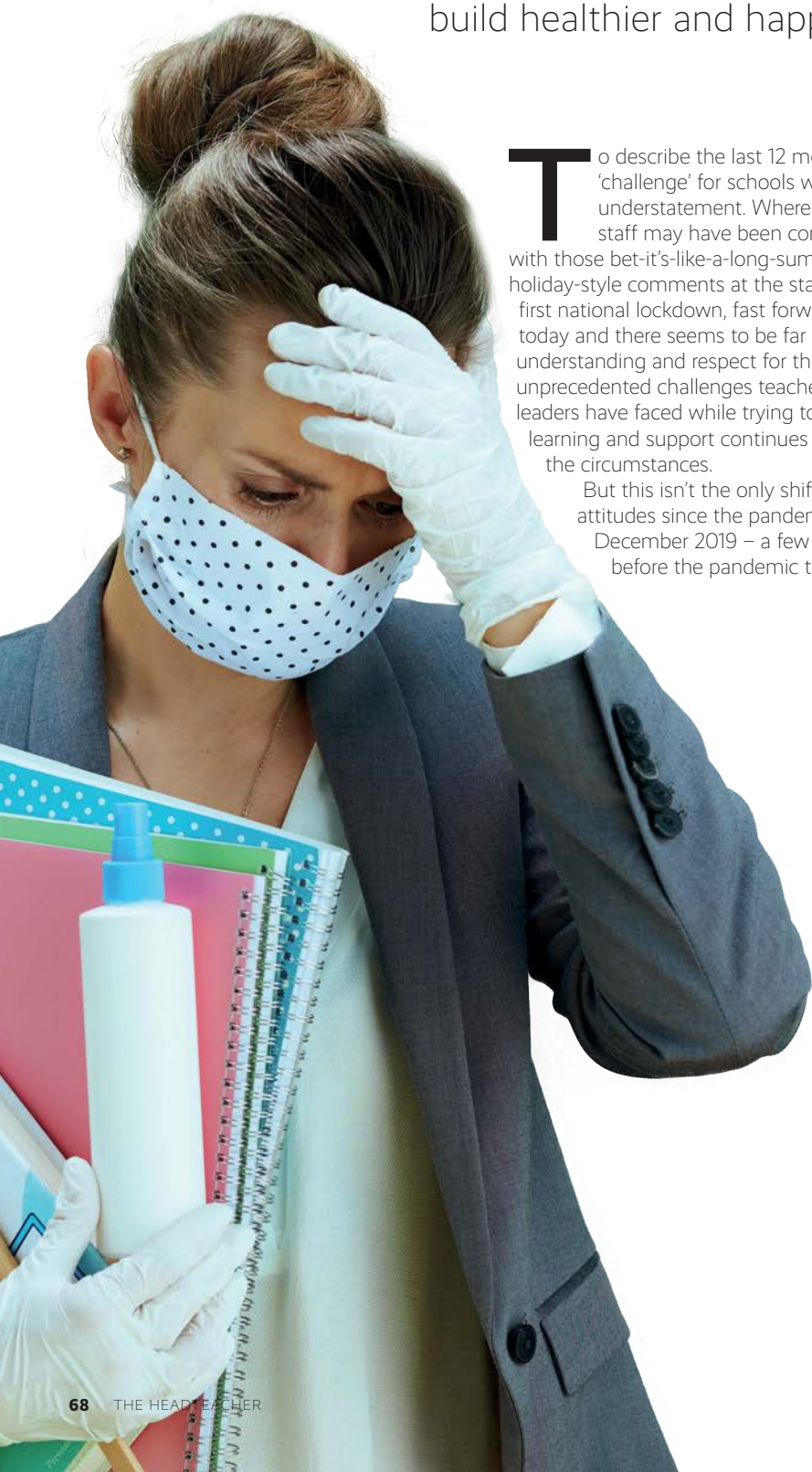
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# SUPPORTING TEACHER WELLBEING IN TESTING TIMES

Isla Billet reflects on teacher wellbeing in schools today and provides some advice and considerations for leaders looking to build healthier and happier schools



To describe the last 12 months as a 'challenge' for schools would be an understatement. Where school staff may have been confronted with those bet-it's-like-a-long-summer-holiday-style comments at the start of the first national lockdown, fast forward to today and there seems to be far greater understanding and respect for the unprecedented challenges teachers and leaders have faced while trying to ensure learning and support continues no matter the circumstances.

But this isn't the only shift in attitudes since the pandemic. In December 2019 – a few months before the pandemic truly took

hold in Britain – Pearson surveyed over 1,000 UK teaching staff for their views on mental health and wellbeing. At that time, when it came to building a happy and healthy school, those teachers considered the three most important things to be pupil mental wellbeing (59 per cent), staff mental wellbeing (46 per cent) and a safe environment (41 per cent).

When asked this question in summer 2020, following the outbreak of Covid-19, teachers rated a safe environment above their own staff mental wellbeing. While it feels quite right to prioritise school safety around Coronavirus, these two points feel like they could well be inextricably linked: a safe school environment should involve good – and safe – mental health practices among its staff too.

Though the days of jetting off to sunnier climes may still be out of reach – anyone who's ever travelled by plane will remember that all-important advice from the pre-flight briefing: in the event that this cabin loses pressure, remember to put on your oxygen mask before you begin to help others.

It is vital – of course – that primary leaders and teachers do all they can to help the children in their care with their wellbeing, especially given the formative nature of early years education. But they must also practice what they preach.

Responses to the Guardian's call for teachers to share their work experiences at the end of last year indicated a widespread downturn in teacher wellbeing, often sparked by feelings of isolation and the pressure of supporting vulnerable children. Words like 'stress', 'disillusionment' and 'manic' came to the fore, tallying with the survey results from Pearson, in which more than half of respondents reported that their mental health and wellbeing had been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

If these findings chime with you or your school, what can you do from here? Here are a few techniques and considerations to help build healthier and happier schools.

“Where self-reflection and awareness can be healthy qualities, too much self-doubt, on the other hand, can be damaging.”

## HAVE COURAGE IN YOUR CONVICTIONS AND PLANNING

As leaders and teachers navigate another year of announcements and changes in education due to the pandemic, it is natural to doubt your decisions and approaches occasionally. Where self-reflection and awareness can be healthy qualities, too much self-doubt, on the other hand, can be damaging.

Remember that you and your school staff are the experts when it comes to teaching and learning. So draw on what you already know, what you've already experienced and the tools and approaches that work for you and your staff and have courage in your convictions.

Planning can also provide a great deal of reassurance. While many leaders will have already planned for the possibility of further school closures and changes, it's still not too late to review the Education Endowment Foundation's Guide to Supporting School Planning. It has been developed with expert school leaders from across the country and includes strategies, evidence and approaches to handling the unpredictable, as well as signposts to further support.

## FLIP THE NARRATIVE

Talk of learning loss and the negative effects of the pandemic can feel hard to escape in the news these days. So it's even more important to watch the phrases and messaging that you use with your school community. Some schools I've spoken to find that terms like 'catch up' and 'closing gaps' are loaded with negative connotations and causing anxiety for teachers and learners alike.

Turn this on its head and start using terms like 'accelerated learning', 'levelling up' and 'getting back on track' to reinforce more positive messages and phrases in the

staffroom and classroom, ultimately creating a more supportive environment for everyone in your school.

## WORK TOGETHER

In a period marked by social distancing, and self-isolation, it's vital to stay connected and to remember that you aren't alone.

Encourage school staff to come together, to talk openly about any challenges they're facing and to work together on developing strategies to support and overcome them.

This can be achieved in a variety of ways. You might use staff meetings, in-person or virtually, which are focused on personal and emotional support or introduce teaching buddies – another member of teaching staff to confide in or let off steam or planning activities with staff. Always ensure open channels of communication so that concerns are heard and seek further support if needed from the likes of Education Support, a UK charity dedicated to supporting mental health and wellbeing among educators.

## ENCOURAGE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the practice of training the mind to enhance our awareness of our thoughts, feelings and sensations. It can help by increasing attention span, concentration and emotional resilience throughout periods of uncertainty, when it's common for stress and anxiety to build up. Knowing particular skills and techniques to manage stress and anxiety can help you and your teachers to improve resilience and overall mental health. Try and share the techniques in Pearson's free Mindfulness for Unsettling Times guide, which supports teachers to practice mindfulness along with their students.

## LOOK OUT FOR BURNOUT

Any teacher suffering from stress is likely to find it hard to deliver their best in the classroom. Although it can be tough to enforce, it's so important to foster a positive work-life balance culture in your school and to lead by example.

Staff need to be encouraged to switch off when they're not at school, establish non-work activities as part of their routines, feel that they can request time off when they're under the weather and have managers and leadership teams who are promoting wellbeing and avoiding staff burnout.

Ultimately, amidst all of the chaos and changes, educators must remember that they will be little help to anyone if they cannot help themselves. Just keep thinking of that oxygen mask.

## WAYS TO HELP YOUR WELLBEING

- Have courage in your convictions and planning. Draw on Education Endowment Foundation's Guide to Supporting School Planning for further support managing unpredictability.
- Flip the narrative and develop a stronger sense of positivity and support within the staffroom. Use phrases that have good associations (e.g. 'accelerated learning' rather than 'catching up') to brighten your school environment.
- Work together and find extra strength in the community around you. As educators, you can use your network to share strategies and experiences; even your classroom planning. A wealth of help and understanding is out there.
- Encourage mindfulness to increase your teachers' emotional resilience, giving essential space for them to ground themselves. Try joining in with wellbeing exercises that have been developed for your pupils: you might be surprised at how helpful they are.
- Look out for burnout and foster a culture of positive work-life-balance, leading by example.
- Celebrate the little things and the impact you and your teachers make day-in, day-out.

If you're in need of a pick-me-up, take a step back and think about the little things that made you smile or the life-changing impact you make day-in, day-out to children's lives - not to mention the revived devotion and gratitude from parents home schooling across the country.

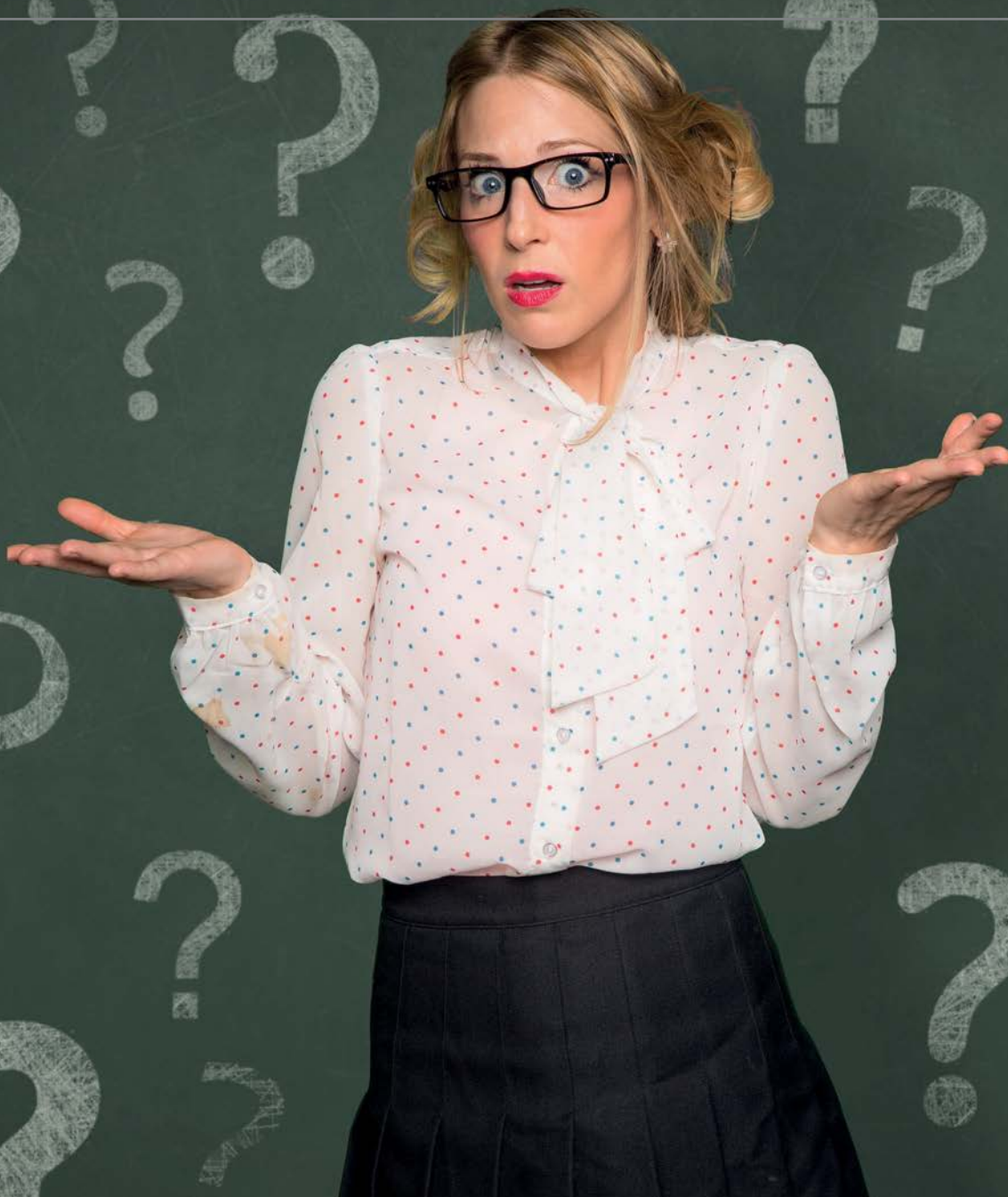
On behalf of pupils, parents and carers everywhere: thank you for all that you do.



Isla Billett is the Intervention Transformation Lead for Pearson's UK Schools

business. For further mental health and wellbeing support for schools, visit Pearson's Wellbeing Zone: [go.pearson.com/Wellbeing-Zone](https://go.pearson.com/Wellbeing-Zone).





# HOW DELUDED ARE YOU?

Bruce Robertson asks how effective are your teaching practices?

**H**ow good is the teaching in your classroom or school, really? Are you sure? How do you know? Not every teacher or school leader feels comfortable asking such questions, either of themselves or of others. They are challenging questions, there is no doubt about that. But they are also very important questions. Asking them isn't about criticism or finding fault. Suggesting that we

should get better is not a negative thing – on the contrary! The better we get at something, the better the outcomes we achieve and the more we tend to enjoy what we do. Making our teaching better and better – regardless of how good it is already – will be of benefit to both the students we teach and to ourselves. A mindset of continuous improvement is an exciting and empowering mindset to have.

## THE RIGHT THINGS, IN THE RIGHT WAY

That said, achieving continuous improvement is easier said than done. Adopting this mindset is one thing; using it to bring about real improvement is quite another. So how can we do this?

The key is to ensure that we are focusing on the right things, in the right way. But what are the 'right things'? And what is the 'right way'? Of all the questions posed so far, these are perhaps the most difficult to answer.

## THE TEACHING DELUSION

A lot of teachers and school leaders think they know what the right things are, but really, they don't. They think they know what the right way is, but really, they don't. They think the teaching in their classroom or school is good enough, but really, it isn't.



“A lot of teachers and school leaders think they know what the right things are, but really, they don’t.”

most important skills for students to be developing. For me, this is delusion.

To ensure these ‘21st century employability skills’ are being developed, many school leaders and inspectors are telling teachers that ‘students need to lead their own learning’, that ‘lessons need to be less teacher-led’ and that ‘there needs to be more groupwork’. Accordingly, teachers across the country have been changing their teaching practices to reflect this. But are these the ‘right things’? Whisper it quietly: they might not be. Actually, now that we’ve alluded to it, I’m going to say it: often, I think these are the ‘wrong things’.

Let’s take groupwork as an example. Groupwork is a ‘right thing’, isn’t it? If students participate in groupwork, they will develop their skills in teamwork, collaboration and active listening, won’t they? Perhaps, if the groupwork is carried out well. But the reality is, with a class of 28 students split into seven groups of four, this is usually very difficult to achieve. Even if you assign clearly defined roles within each group, invariably, human nature kicks in. Some students dominate and some spectate. Some students think and some switch-off. A few students actually think and talk about the things that you want them to, but many don’t. Out of your class of 28 students, how many of them actually learn what you planned for them to learn? And, as a bigger question, what did you want them to learn through groupwork (beyond teamwork, collaboration and active listening)? If it was a science or a geography lesson, perhaps you wanted them to learn about the greenhouse effect and its link to climate change. Do you think that students will learn this best through groupwork or might there be better ways to teach them this?

This example gets to the heart of the delusion. Groupwork, in itself, is neither a good thing nor a bad thing. It’s just a thing. Its purpose is to help students to learn something. Whether or not it is a good way to do this depends on whether or not your students learn it. If, through groupwork, all students learn what you planned for them to learn, then great! It was a good way to teach them this. However, in order to know this with any degree of confidence, you need evidence of what students learned as a result of the activity. The effectiveness of a particular pedagogy should be determined by the extent to which students have learned what you wanted them to learn. It’s as simple as that: it’s all about the learning.

As uncomfortable as it is true, these are common delusions in the teaching profession. Let’s refer to them collectively as ‘The Teaching Delusion’. Calling this out is important because it is getting in the way of teachers and school leaders focusing on the right things, in the right way.

## 21ST CENTURY EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

In my job, I am in the privileged position where I get to watch a lot of teachers teach and talk to them about this. Frequently, I see learning intentions which focus on the development of skills such ‘teamwork’, ‘collaboration’ and ‘active listening’ (whatever that is) at the expense of anything else. Some schools have gone so far as to insist that every lesson has a focus on the development of such skills. Why? Because they have identified these as the skills that employers are looking for and, therefore, the

## HERE’S WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- **Block time each week for professional reading.** Find a time in the day that works best for you. It doesn’t have to be long – 30 minutes is often enough. More than likely, you’ll enjoy it, you’ll learn from it and it will fire you up.
- **Discuss your reading with colleagues.** Dedicate time at weekly team meetings for this. Set-up a whole-school Professional Reading Group for wider discussion.
- **Identify a specific aspect of your teaching you want to improve.** Make a short, written improvement plan summarising the ‘what’ and the ‘how’. This will clarify your thinking and help hold you accountable to yourself.
- **Pair-up with a colleague you respect and trust, or form a small group.** Share and discuss improvement plans with one another.
- **Invite staff you respect and trust to watch you teach.** Ask for feedback on specific aspects of your practice.
- **Block time each week to observe other teachers each.** As with reading, this doesn’t have to be long. Agree a time to sit down and chat over coffee. If possible, link discussions to your improvement plan, or to theirs.

## BE INFORMED

As interesting as it is to try out different pedagogies to see if they work or not, the reality is we just don’t have time to be doing that in every lesson. Our time with students is too precious. Yes, we can experiment within our lessons, but to avoid wasting everyone’s time unnecessarily, such experimentation needs to be informed by educational research about what is more or less likely to work, which often depends on what we’re teaching. In 2021, with such a rich body or educational literature available to us – more than we have ever had before – there is no excuse not to be engaging with this or for our teaching practice not to be informed by it.



**Bruce Robertson, senior education consultant and author of *The Teaching Delusion: Why Teaching In Our Schools Isn’t Good Enough (And How We Can Make It Better)*.**

# AN EVOLUTION IN LEADERSHIP

Anthony David asks if executive heads are the necessary model for the future?

Over the years I have written widely on the executive head model, often trying to dispel how it differs from head teachers.

As I write we are in the heart of the pandemic. Times have never been tougher.

This period of lockdown is not the same as before; the World War II mentality is less obvious than in March; staff feel very exposed and expectations have increased beyond all proportions. The rhetoric towards schools from both the Department and OFSTED has intensified, demanding schools remain open for more students than in the past lockdown with contradictory messages that everybody else should stay at home. Budgets have been acutely hit. The additional income created by lettings or wraparound services that schools rely upon has largely gone; schools with nurseries have suddenly discovered that unless they open they will not be funded and the expense of keeping classes open during the autumn term spiralled out of control. The national effort has cost schools dearly. I know of two local heads who have announced that they are taking early retirement. I suspect that many more are considering their positions and it won't take many heads to create a leadership crisis. These are tough times.

To be clear, while I have been an executive headteacher (EHT) for many years across several schools - a job I love - I still believe the best model for any school is one champion; a single headteacher. It's worked for hundreds of years in schools across the world. The rise of the executive model is

still, in relative terms, new. Eight years ago, I was only the second EHT in my borough. Fast forward and the model has grown significantly. So, the thrust of this article is to examine what drives the creation of an EHT and offers some conclusions in reflection, particularly in terms of the current global crisis which may further stimulate this new direction of leadership.

## DEFICIT MODEL

Typically there are two models of EHT with one model often following the other; for the sake of this article I will refer to these as tactical and then strategic. The first step of the evolution of the EHT is stimulated by two things; a need to support a local, failing school and a desire to retain an ambitious school leader. This model, where one school supports another, could be referred to as a deficit model and is purely tactical to support a local provider and retain leadership. Typically, this model will have a loose agreement, often spanning a two-year period, where schools can choose to reevaluate if they wish to continue. Calling it a deficit model is not a negative indicator but a reality check in that there is a cost to supporting a failing site.

“The rise of the executive model is still, in relative terms, new.”

A recent example is where a newly appointed EHT recruited one of his teachers from his first school to be this new head of school. This has immediately put the first school into deficit. However, this model of deficit should, over time, move to balance when the schools establish themselves. The risks of this model is that the EHT can be seen as the headteacher across both sites, literally doubling their workload. It is a short-term tactic and with limited financial saving; running two schools is only marginally cheaper than one. Economies of scale only come with scale. An ideal model is three to five schools (any larger and it would effectively be a MAT with the EHT becoming the CEO).

## TACTICAL

It is therefore not unusual that within a two to five year period for this model to evolve into a permanent structure which is more strategic. At this point the schools have effectively two choices; create or join an academy MAT or become a federation. Nationally 45 per cent of schools are in some form of MAT. But, when you drill down to the primary sector that figure falls dramatically to around 26 per cent, with a significant percentage coming from church schools who were quick to set up local MATs. For this reason you often see secondary schools choosing MATs and primaries beginning to prefer federations. A federation is a long-term model that can stabilise a small group of schools' futures with clear, established roles.



My second model is strategic use of EHTs. A weakness of tactical growth models, where a successful school/leader supports other schools, is that it is difficult for the EHT to move away from the local perception of 'our head' which in turn makes it challenging for the head of school to establish themselves. This can only evolve if a) the founder EHT leaves to be replaced with a new EHT or b) a school network is established with an entirely new EHT. Model b is rare but there are growing examples of where the

leadership team have been removed from several schools to be replaced enabling the EHT to establish the community vision of the group of schools. It is within these models that we see the purest of executive leaders and my suspicion is that it is a model that we will begin to see evolve over the coming decade.

## CHANGE

Not that long ago, I would have said that these are all long-term models but times have changed. Financial pressures have never been more acute and there is a genuine risk that our most experienced heads will decide enough is enough and, with dignity, 'tap out' following such a challenging year. With these twin burdens Governing Bodies will be considering more radical models and with the model of executive not seeming so alien as it did a decade ago we could see an increased momentum towards this.

### QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED

- What is driving change in school leadership?
- Has the current crisis forced schools up and down the country to dramatically consider what were once seen as radical new models?
- Is the country moving towards the American System of Superintendents but under the guise of Executives?
- Will the current crisis drive the need for change?
- What can be learned from the last decade of Executive leadership that will help support the future ten years?
- Where does the Executive model stop and the CEO model start?
- How does the executive work with the full-time head teacher/head of school?
- What do you gain and what do you lose?

Current circumstances are rapidly driving change and, whether it is a financial, tactical or a strategy, there is little doubt that we will have more and more executive models in the coming years with school communities having to prepare themselves for a very different approach to how education is led.



**Anthony David, executive headteacher, St Paul's CE Primary School and Monken Hadley CE Primary School.**



# STAYING SANE WHEN PEOPLE COMPLAIN

Colin Tapscott gives his advice on how to deal effectively with complaints

**S**he leant forward, elbows anchored on the desk and her head sunk into the palms of her hands, covering her eyes. She rubbed her eyes, temples and forehead in a smooth rhythm, as if trying to rub away the madness. In front of her two contrasting emails. "I'd like to complain about too much home learning in lockdown," doing combat with "there is not enough home learning being sent to my child in this lockdown."

Complaints are a growing issue for school leaders and the pandemic and lockdown adds a whole new dimension to them. So how do you stay sane when people complain?

## FIND THE PIN

We come across many annoying people and some annoy us more than others. This is

"I have found three key things to do in each area of before, during and after a complaint, that helps us to take back control, helping us to feel like a leader again."

because how we manage our mind dictates the level of how insane complaints can drive us. Emile Chartier, known as Alain, a French Philosopher from the early 20th Century, tried to help us deal with annoying people by coming up with a simple formula. "Never say that people are evil, you just need to look for the pin." Look for the source of the agony that is causing such behaviour from them. Move from anger to pity.

## MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE DRAGON

One of my favourite children's books is, *Alexander and the Dragon*. In this book Alexander is scared of the dark and the dragon that lives under his bed. One morning he approaches his dad with the dilemma and asks what he can do. His dad replies, "there are only two things that you can do with a dragon – fight it or make friends with it." Alexander decides to fight it with his plastic sword. But, after bashing it on the nose and the dragon's ensuing 'ouch', he decides to make friends with it. The result of which: the dragon helps him with his dilemma of the dark.

If you consider situations where you are unhappy with something. It is much harder to get really cross with those that you know and have a relationship with. Our first step to sanity in dealing with complaints is building proactive relationships with those that have potential to complain; our staff, parents and community. If you have notorious complainers, invite them in before issues. Some complainers care passionately about the school; they just don't always know how to express it well.



## ALWAYS HAVE A PLAN

### BEFORE - PROACTIVE

- **Parameters:** decide what is acceptable and what is not. Plan and use consistent de-escalation phrases
- **Perspective:** create perspective by making time for relational, physical, mental and spiritual activities.
- **Proactive:** work proactively with stakeholders to address issues and

reduce the chance for complaints.

### DURING – TUNE-IN

- **Time:** when there are heightened emotions, time allows the logical part of the brain to catch up.
- **Tune in:** listen to them, summarising what they have said, to gain clarity and help them to regain a sense of calm.
- **Tag Team:** if it's affecting you, then consider either asking someone else to take over or rearranging for a time the following day.

### AFTER - REVIEW

- **Replenish:** know the things that replenish you and spend time doing that. Spend time with people who re-charge you.
- **Review:** unpick what worked well and anything you would do differently. This allows you to regain control and see this as a process.
- **Remind:** remind yourself that the poor behaviour is their chimp. Remind parents when you have dealt with complaints with a 'you said, we did' message.

By listening to them and maybe even engaging them in helping, you can turn the dragon from foe to friend. They may even be able to help you reduce the opportunities for complaints.

## MANAGE THE CHIMPS

Steve Peters, in his book *Chimp Paradox*, outlines how we can manage our mind to deal with emotions that we feel. He explains that each of us has a metaphorical 'chimp' that can get agitated and emotional when it feels under threat. This is our Amygdala, the emotional centre of the limbic part of the brain. So, when you have an emotional complainer it is because their chimp is agitated. In turn you have a chimp too that may well be agitated by their behaviour. Steve Peters outlines two key things that helps calm them and you:

1. Don't dismiss the chimp – recognise the emotion.
2. Reassure the chimp - Remind the chimp that you would like to help and remind of times when it has been ok.  
"I'd really like to help you. I can see this situation is upsetting you." Two sentences to start off your response helps the complainer to not see you as a threat.  
"I recognise this is emotional for me. But remember, in the past things have got better after dealing with a complainer." Two sentences that you can say to yourself to help your chimp to calm.

"We come across many annoying people and some annoy us more than others."

## NINE-POINT PLAN

There is a risk with complaints that we can feel like a victim. I have found three key things to do in each area of before, during and after a complaint, that helps us to take back control, helping us to feel like a leader again.

### Before – Be Proactive

Firstly, decide what are the PARAMETERS, what is acceptable from a complainant and set de-escalation phrases everyone uses. Secondly, it's about PERSPECTIVE. As a leader it is important that we create balance so that complaints don't take too much perspective in our mind. As hard as it is, try to ensure there is time for relationships. Look after yourself with a good balance of sleep, diet and exercise. Take time to read and watch articles that develop your mental ability and time in the spiritual disciplines that inspire you. Finally, be PROACTIVE. Work proactively with stakeholders to address issues and reduce the chance for complaints. Give the complainer less opportunity for a complaint because you have already dealt with it.

### During – TUNE-IN

During a complaint, TUNE-IN to their complaint and your emotions. Firstly, when someone is in 'chimp' behaviour they will struggle to engage in the logical solution finding part of the brain. Time allows the logical brain to catch up and so try to give a little time, a cup of tea, a planned appointment the following day. All of these can allow them to engage that part of the brain. Secondly, TUNE-IN. Listen to them to understand them, not just to hold a

conversation. Summarise what you think they are saying to check understanding. They will feel listened to and you will gain clarity. Thirdly, play TAG. Dealing with complaints doesn't have to be a solo sport, you can tag a teammate. If it's affecting you, then consider either asking someone else to take over or rearranging for a time the following day.

### After - REVIEW

After a complaint, you can sometimes feel exhausted, so firstly it is time to REPLENISH. Know what replenishes you and then spend time doing that. Spend time with people who appreciate you and energise you. When you work in a school the youngest children can often offer replenishment. Secondly, REVIEW it. Unpick what worked well and anything you would do differently. This allows you to regain control and see this as a process. Thirdly, REMIND yourself that the poor behaviour is their chimp. It is about their inability to control their emotions. Also, it is good to REMIND parents when you have dealt with complaints with a 'you said, we did' message. Where it is something that affects a number of people, highlighting your response in your next newsletter helps show your community focus and build reputation.

### Taking control

Staying Sane when people complain, is about taking back control of your mind and the situation. Proactively working on creating perspective in your life and working hard on reducing the opportunity for complaints helps you reduce the chance of frustration taking hold. Tuning in to the complainer and your emotion allows you to remain in control. After the complaint, reviewing your emotions allows you to choose how to respond. All of which helps you to keep it under control and improve the situation.



**Colin Tapscott, director  
Everyday Leader and  
author of Everyday People,  
Everyday Leaders.**

# BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Dan Edwards believes that being transparent is key to being an authentic leader

**T**he journey to leadership is never easy. Many years working towards a position, only to find that when you actually arrive, there are so many other elements to the role that you never really expected or, indeed, were warned about.

Primary leadership, of course, is all encompassing, from developing school improvement plans, financial accountability, HR matters, to sorting out playground squabbles between that group of Year 5 boys and helping fit the toner in the staffroom photocopier. No two days are ever the same, but, I'm sure like me, this is what makes our roles both challenging and hugely rewarding in the same breath. The diversity of tasks we fulfil on a daily basis, allows the job to be anything but repetitive and, in fact, anything like we imagined it would be.

My journey to leadership didn't follow the usual path. I came into teaching late and, having trained as a secondary Drama and English teacher in 2005, through the now rebranded Graduate Teacher Programme, I was focused purely on a career in secondary education. Naively, the only real experience of the primary sector at this stage in my career would be steeped in blurred and fuzzy memories of my infant and junior school of the early 1980s. Recollections of 'Come and Praise' song books, ill-fitting plimsolls, maypole dancing and developing an understanding of British history through a weekly television programme called 'How We Used To Live'. Sadly and, again, quite wrongly and somewhat worryingly, at the very start of my teaching journey, this was what I believed primary education still was. I was a secondary teacher and that was where I would remain.

## LEADERSHIP

However, having spent many years snuggled cosily in the corner of a typical drama studio of a large secondary school, whiling away the hours teaching the whys and wherefores of Stanislavski, the finer theatrical points of Bertolt Brecht and, occasionally, gathering A-level students together to flail around the drama studio, hysterically screaming and shouting as we delved into the maniacal world of Antonin Artaud, after five years of teaching a gamut of expressive qualifications, I soon realised that I was, indeed, very bored.

So cutting a rather long, and convoluted, story short, after spending five further years

cutting my teeth in the primary classroom and progressing through senior leadership, I was given the opportunity to lead a school. My school, the school, today, that I am proud to call home and, furthermore, honoured and somewhat baffled and amazed, to hold the title of principal.

For three years now, I have continued to work with an amazing staff team, wonderful pupils and a fantastic community of parents and carers, friends and family to ensure we maintain our journey of school improvement; moving forward together, every day, in order to make the school the best it can be.





## DEFAULT

However, feeling comfortable in my current position has taken me a long time. As a new head teacher, I was always looking for the correct way to do things, searching for the mystical handbook or manual of amazing leadership, rummaging in dusty boxes and cupboards for the elusive, steadfast persona of headteacher while trying to make sure I presented myself as the archetypal school leader every minute of the day.

When moving into any new leadership position, we immediately try to find our default. A characterisation that allows us to protect ourselves from vulnerability. Just like the old maxims that were passed on to us in our early teaching careers, such as not smiling until Christmas, the majority of these tropes of career advancement are normally centred around keeping your staff at arm's length, reducing any real presentation of emotion and, importantly, never showing any kind of weakness in order to maintain your employees utmost confidence in your unwavering and unfaltering ability to lead on all levels at every moment of the day, week and term.

Of course, these fallacies of leadership, regardless of their origin, are continually passed down time and time again and, unfortunately, serve to do no more than reduce leadership recruitment by the thousands. If not passed down, picked up by bizarre educational osmosis as we find ourselves, somehow,

believing that these qualities are the essential characteristics that will keep us protected in our role as leaders. Masquerading our imposter syndrome by adding a superficial layer of leadership and, in turn, removing the personal in order to become the persona.

## EMPATHY

That said, with the high stakes accountability and the need to show rapid improvement, in sometimes the most difficult circumstances, the ability to work behind a persona can appear to be the first action of the embattled leader and rather preferable to say the least. Sadly, looking at the projection for headteacher retention, the unwavering reality of school leaders leaving their posts is something that we are all becoming too familiar with and, given the current circumstances, coupled with the ever changing roles within our schools, there is an ever growing amount of empathy for those that do decide to move away from the profession.

Moving forward, however, it is important that we focus on a conversation of leading in the now and making sure, as leaders, we reflect on the current challenges within our role in order to be the best we can be for the pupils, parents, carers and staff members that require us to be there, day in day out,

“When moving into any new leadership position, we immediately try to find our default.”

## THREE STEPS TO TRANSPARENT LEADERSHIP

- **Know that you don't know.** Feeling the need to answer every question on demand may look like that you are highly efficient but, failing to give the correct answer or the wrong advice, will only serve as a negative. Have the confidence to say I don't know...yet!
- **No journey is the same.** Never compare yourself with others. There will always be younger leaders, more effective leaders, leaders who are trailblazers of education, leaders who are adorned with accolades and the educational equivalent of the Midas touch. Remember, it's all about the journey, we get there in the end.
- **Go to where the information is.** When making changes to school culture, strategic or operational, consult. There will always be someone in your school who has been there longer than you. Who will have witnessed what has gone before, what worked and what didn't. Don't be afraid to go to where the information is.

ensuring the highest quality education we can offer. In essence, navigating the challenges together in order for us to remain standing up.

The key to all of this is honesty, be yourself, a mentor once told me. The ability to lead with authenticity and genuine humanity. This may sound glib but it's possibly the best piece of advice I was ever given. Acknowledging ourselves as individuals, sharing our fallibility, presenting always as human and ensuring we connect on a personal level to our staff and wider stakeholders, enabling us to lower our shoulders and, furthermore, reduce the much wasted energy we spend by trying to be someone else.

Of course, for some of us, this is easier said than done. However, this isn't about blurring the lines of professionalism, nor shifting accountability from the roles we hold, but merely a consideration to explore leadership through a different lens.



**Dan Edwards, principal of Woodstock Primary Academy, Leicester.**

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[www.leadinginthenow.org](http://www.leadinginthenow.org)

# Learning Ladders

A digital ed-tech platform for integrated education provision



- Vigorously engages and helps students in their daily learning
- Remote learning, resources and tracking all in one place
- Supports teachers with easy to understand data and integrated resources
- Supports parents with access to their child's progress and quality home learning content
- Includes every BBC Bitesize & Oak Academy Resource

Reviewed by: John Dabell



The intimate and delicate connection between teaching, learning and assessment is fluid and dynamic. They feed each other in a never ending cycle of baton exchange with rung after rung of goals and objectives.

But how do we reliably tap into this data to help us edit, craft and fashion educational experiences? What's the first step?

A ladder would help. In fact, Learning Ladders would certainly help you reach new heights. The software contains a plentiful and punchy package of features including a tailored algorithm, automated pupil reports, online portfolios, self-marking homework, meaningful data and analysis, parental portal and more.

What makes BETT Award winner Learning Ladders so appealing is that it can be swiftly set up to mirror any curriculum or you can opt for their off the shelf tried and tested award-winning curriculum frameworks for all core and foundation subjects. They can also accommodate any curriculum and any subject in any language or multiple languages.

There really is very little point scratching around for resources aligned to your teaching plans when their Curriculum Lab function serves it up on a silver platter for you. How many systems can search every BBC Bitesize and Oak Academy resource in one place? Learning Ladders can.

If you are looking for a new assessment system then I'd recommend Learning Ladders in the drop of a hat because it is set up to help you how to spot when a child needs help and what needs to be put in place with a gap analysis tool. And there's more. If you want granular data mined to 4km or you prefer summary end of term teacher judgements, this system will work with you. With tracking, remote learning,

automated end of term reports and self-marking quizzes then it really is all here.

Lockdown learning has thrown parents in at the deep end, many are struggling to tread water and some feel like they are drowning. They are desperate to know how they can help their children and feel imprisoned and helpless when confronted by the bar method of maths.

The thing is, Learning Ladders have been throwing frazzled parents lifejackets for years with their integrated remote learning platform. This is genuine parental engagement at its best because it is able to up-skill parents at scale and on demand through help articles packed with insights into strategies used to support learning by linking work to explanations on how to help.

This hugely impressive pupil-centred resource fizzes like champagne because it gets home and school singing from the same song sheet. It's a multi-step solution that makes multi-tasking easy and creates the optimum conditions for quick wins, successful learning and connecting home and school so that parents aren't just supervising or sinking.

Learning Ladders makes a very strong case for why you should make it your go-to first choice digital ed-tech platform for integrated education provision. It is full of vital tools and with everything in one place.

Cost: £10 per student per year for everything.

the  
**headteacher** teach co  
LEADING SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

## VERDICT

- ✓ Inclusive, ingenious and resilient
- ✓ Removes a school's common 'pain points'
- ✓ No expensive set up
- ✓ Fully flexible, reactive and laser-sharp that supports, informs and enables
- ✓ Filled with the data detail needed to move molehills, mounds and mountains
- ✓ World class home support for parents so they can truly support children

## UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for a bespoke and user-friendly data platform that ticks all the boxes, thinks outside all of the boxes and comes with all you need to fill the boxes. Learning Ladders is a real step ahead and a step up to help children realise their light bulb moments and upskill parents.

To learn more book a discovery call  
- [www.learningladders.info/education/information/book-demo](http://www.learningladders.info/education/information/book-demo)

## ASSESSMENT

## Shine

Targeted interventions for primary reading and maths from RS Assessment from Hodder Education



## AT A GLANCE

- A complete solution for assessment, intervention and reporting from Y1-6
- Enables teachers to identify and address gaps in learning
- Effortlessly generates everything you need to provide targeted intervention
- Builds confidence among pupils
- From trusted brand RS Assessment from Hodder Education

reviewed by: Mike Davies



As any teacher knows, testing pupils is just the beginning. It's only once those assessments have been marked that the work really begins, assuming you want pupils to benefit from the information they reveal. Not only do you want to know who is struggling with what, but you also need to do something about it so that they can show tangible progress come the next stage in the testing cycle. Fortunately, Shine gives purpose to the whole process.

Developed by RS Assessment from Hodder Education, the trusted provider of assessment resources, Shine is a complete solution that makes assessment produce results. Starting with the tests themselves, it enables teachers to turn their pupils' performance automatically into useful reports that identify gaps linked to ready-made, targeted interventions. What's more, it's all wrapped up in one neat, easy-to-use package.

Shine is beautifully simple, yet comprehensive, detailed and streamlined. Once the termly standardised PUMA, PiRA or NTS assessments have been administered, teachers input the scores into MARK, the free online assessment and

reporting tool. This generates Shine reports for individuals or groups that highlight gaps in understanding at the content domain level. You'll also be provided with links to suggested learning sequences, expertly tailored to address those learning needs.

These learning sequences include 'Prepare, do, review' sections that give teachers all the information they need to implement the interventions successfully or delegate them to a teaching assistant. There are activities, worksheets, quizzes and review sheets to help pupils build confidence. There is even software provided for modelling responses on an interactive whiteboard – ideal for group work.

Intuitively designed and easy to use, Shine provides an effortless way of delivering targeted interventions in response to expertly created assessments that closely resemble national tests. It covers Y1-6 and allows for three test points per year. It's available for reading, maths or both.

Just think of the time and effort it could save: meaningful reports generated with a few clicks; no need to create child-specific intervention materials; no need to explain to teaching assistants how you want them

to deliver the support sessions. Where else could you find all this in one comprehensive package? It's almost like cheating. When it comes to assessment and targeted intervention, Shine has all the answers.

**the headteacher** teach 50  
LEADING SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

## VERDICT

- ✓ Created by experienced teaching experts
- ✓ Thoughtfully designed and easy to use
- ✓ Identifies learning gaps with precision
- ✓ Saves time and effort
- ✓ Suitable for group or individual work

## UPGRADE IF...

You want a comprehensive package that gives confidence and purpose to teacher assessment and intervention.



# NEW FOR SCHOOLS

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1

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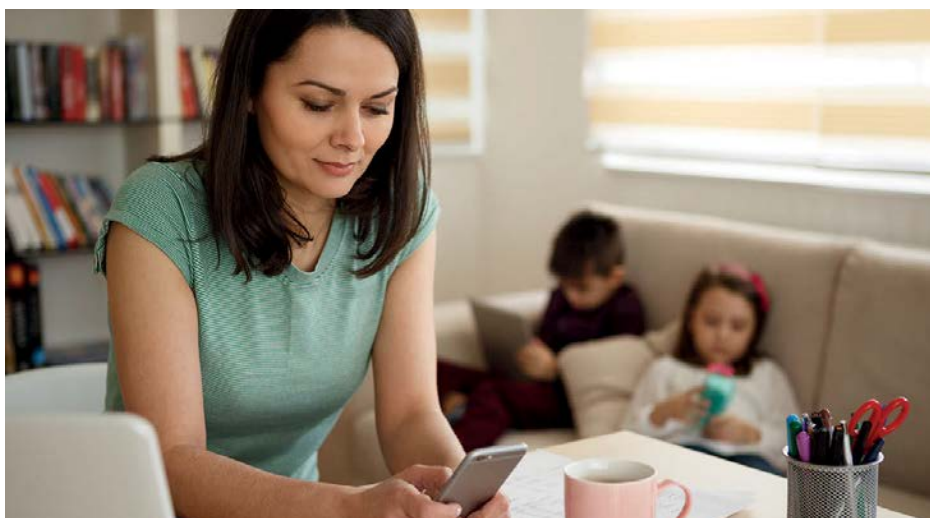
LEAD

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We are Cornerstones, passionate experts in primary curriculum design. We provide schools with everything they need to create a knockout curriculum. Curriculum Maestro is our smart online platform that helps you to design, plan, teach and assess your curriculum all from one place. It streamlines your workload and includes over 100

engaging and adaptable projects, resources, assessment and monitoring tools, making it the most complete platform available. Used in over 1,500 primary schools across the UK, Maestro is proving to be a gamechanger for leadership, teaching and learning. For more information call 03333 20 8000.

[www.cornerstoneseducation.co.uk](http://www.cornerstoneseducation.co.uk)



3

## RELIABLE COMMUNICATIONS

In a world of delayed announcements and unexpected decisions, schools need communications software they can rely on. Parent engagement has never been more important. That's why thousands of primary schools choose ParentMail by IRIS to stay in touch with their communities, every day. Our pick-and-mix suite of solutions provides:

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2

## QUICK, EFFICIENT CLEANING

Clearfog provides fogging machines and hypochlorous acid in a range of sizes to suit everyone's needs from schools, colleges, day centres to businesses. They aid as a potent yet totally natural weapon in the fight against covid-19 and viruses generally. This combination not only sanitises, it protects cleaning staff and significantly reduces cleaning time. Fogging with hypochlorous acid sanitises a six-cubicle toilet in under two minutes. Most of our customers see a return on investment within two weeks and invest in more foggers. In these uncertain times, fogging is creating confidence in staff and service users. For more information call 0203 535 875. [clearfog.co.uk](http://clearfog.co.uk)



4

## SIMPLE TO USE

Learning Ladders is a suite of child-centric teaching, learning and assessment tools specifically designed to help teachers to teach, parents to support and children to learn. Our mission is to get children to learn more and learn better. And we'll keep doing whatever it takes to make this a reality.

Learning Ladders actively engages pupils' learning day to day, supports teachers with easy to understand data and integrated resources, gives parents easy access to children's progress and quality home learning content, and makes the reporting process consistent across the school. It's simple to use, flexible and grows with your school.

[www.learningladders.info](http://www.learningladders.info)





## 5 FIRE PROTECTION

LFS provides passive fire protection products and services to the private and public sectors. From their accredited facility in South-East London, they use specialist machinery to manufacture bespoke Fire and Enhanced Security Doors and Screens plus other fire protection products to the latest Approved Repair Techniques. They have also built an enviable reputation for one-stop, service

maintenance and support; all of which is backed up by all of the leading fire industry accreditation bodies. In an industry which has undergone (and continues to undergo) massive changes in legislation, LFS are a business that continues to evolve in line with industry and government expectations. For more information call 0207 237 0958.

[www.lfsfire.co.uk](http://www.lfsfire.co.uk)



## 6 INSPIRATIONAL OUTDOOR SPACES

Timotay Playscapes are confirmed finalists for the APL Awards for Westbrook Hay (school) and Stanwick Lakes. Timotay Playscapes are extremely proud to have been selected as finalists for these prestigious awards, and this is through their incredible

teams who show tremendous dedication, expertise and hard work. The APL Awards (Association of Professional Landscapers) showcase and select leaders within the landscaping arena. Both projects deliver outstanding play value, featuring natural wooden playgrounds. The awards will take place in March.

[www.timotayplayscapes.co.uk](http://www.timotayplayscapes.co.uk)

## 7 THREE ESSENTIAL SERVICES

SchoolBooking is designed specifically for use by education establishments including schools, academies, colleges, trusts and districts. SchoolBooking operates as a cloud service worldwide. Our platform is split into three services – Bookings, Lettings, and Parent Meetings. Some customers choose just one service, others all three.

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**Parent Meetings** – Online appointment booking for parent interviews, evenings or conferences.

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[www.schoolbooking.com](http://www.schoolbooking.com)



## 8 CUT THE ADMIN

Efficiently managing your pre- and after-school clubs can often prove to be a bigger job than initially expected. Kids Club HQ is a cloud-based system built to solve this problem, featuring an online booking system for parents and numerous administration functions for school and club staff.

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[kidsclubhq.co.uk](http://kidsclubhq.co.uk)

# Don't get too carried away

Julia Harnden welcomes the beginning of the Government's school rebuilding scheme but sounds a note of caution

**T**he leaders and staff of the 50 schools chosen for major rebuilding schemes in the first phase of the government's ten-year plan will be both relieved and delighted that the long wait for investment in the fabric of their buildings is apparently over.

At ASCL we are delighted for them and very much welcome the £1 billion investment. Congratulations to all those involved for their work in developing these exciting projects, which will be of enormous benefit to pupils and communities.

But, before we get too carried away, there has been precious little detail revealed by the government so far and, quite possibly, more questions remain than have been answered. Without wanting to sound ungracious, let's keep this announcement in perspective.

## Vague

Details of the roll out of the project are vague. We believe the first 50 projects will begin in the latter half of this year, but rebuilds of this magnitude are a lengthy process and involve weeks, months and, potentially, years of disruption for the schools involved, not to mention a significant amount of logistical planning beforehand. With no start dates confirmed it is also unclear just how quickly pupils will be able to move in and start to benefit from the investment. One thing is abundantly clear; it won't be any time soon.

While the 50 schools selected will be breathing a collective sigh of relief,

the elephant in the room is what happens to those not on the initial list. The 50 represent a tiny proportion of the entire estate of 21,000 schools, with the majority having legitimate demands for capital to properly maintain their buildings. DfE has used its established Condition Data Collection survey (CDC) to select the lucky 50 but basing decisions on data alone removes the human element and gives the governing boards – the people who know their schools best – no chance to plead their cases. Just how much say school leaders will have on how the money is spent is also currently unclear but we need to create spaces flexible enough to meet the needs of the curriculum in 2021 and in years to come. In the remaining years of the project, an opportunity for the governing

*“While the 50 schools selected will be breathing a collective sigh of relief, the elephant in the room is what happens to those not on the initial list.”*

bodies to apply for funding and to justify how best to spend it to create the learning spaces of the future would be a welcome step forward.

## Refurbishment

Before the construction teams move in we should also give some consideration to how the return on investment will be evaluated. Involving school leaders early in the process will ensure that valuable lessons learned during the first tranche are built upon in future years. This is a large and welcome programme and we need it to be done well.

The £1 billion investment crucially needs to be set against a backdrop of a national school estate in a poor state of repair, with an enormous and ever-growing backlog of repairs and refurbishment. Four years ago the National Audit Office estimated that it would cost £6.7 billion to return all school buildings to satisfactory or better condition. The initial £1 billion is clearly more than a drop in the ocean but what is really needed is a firm commitment to invest the entire £6.7 billion, frontloaded in order to get as many school rebuilds underway as quickly as possible. We'll be paying close attention to what the Chancellor has to say when he sets out departmental budgets for the next three years later in 2021.

We are making progress but, frankly, we hope for a day when all schools are able to have facilities fit for the 21st century.

**Julia Harnden, funding specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders**





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