

PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

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# PSM

SCHOOL BUSINESS ADVICE

## Look smart

Why we need better  
monitoring

## Power up

Build your system  
capacity

# You're Hired!

HOW TO RECRUIT THE BEST

## Co-leadership

Are two heads  
better than one?



## THE DEFICIT DILEMMA

What to do when you're  
in the red

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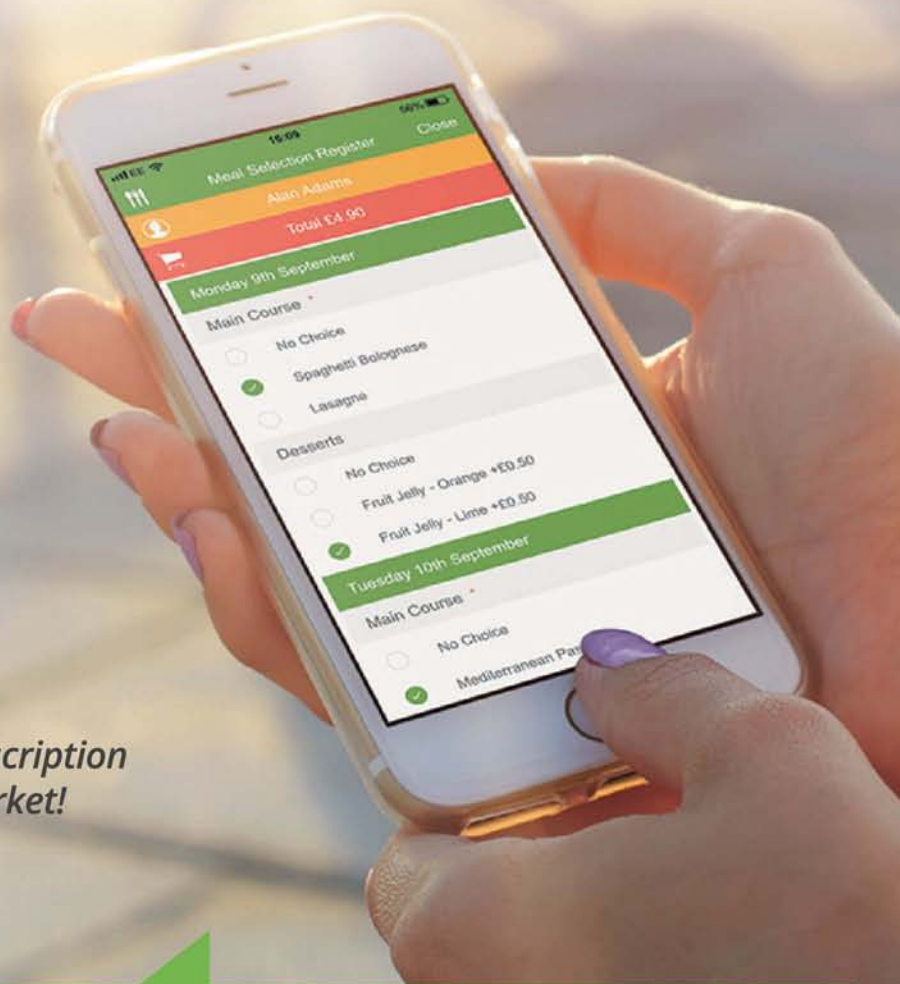
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We live in an age of self-improvement. As individuals, we're encouraged to carry out regular audits of our lives; to monitor everything from our physical activity to our parenting habits and career development, before taking proactive steps to do 'better'.

It's a mindset taken from large organisations and modern business culture. If growth is your ultimate aim, it makes sense to assess where you are and identify where you need to be in time for next quarter's results. And yet we're increasingly seeing those same organisations failing to make honest appraisals of themselves at a systemic level. Within entities composed of hundreds, possibly thousands of people, issues around workplace culture, financial incentives, employee support and probity can become abstract – numbers and percentages produced by aggregating people's first-hand experiences.

Granted, we can't expect complex businesses and public bodies to possess the same capacity for rapid self improvement as people – but a little healthy self reflection can certainly help. On p6, leadership veteran Andy Buck expresses misgivings with the schools accountability system, while on p60 we examine why there's a gender pay gap among primary leaders. On p54, meanwhile, Lesley Mifsud looks out how well-intentioned school policies can inadvertently result in discrimination.

There may be problems, but then there are also many ways in which systems can be changed for the better. New leadership models, for example – see the women making a go of co-headship on p58 – or different approaches to accountability, as discussed by Jeremy Hannay on p82.

You or I can resolve to take up running, but it should be possible for the organisations we work for to get serious about self-improvement too.

Enjoy the issue,

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From the  
makers of  
*Teach Primary*

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EDUCATION



# “Headship is one of the best jobs there is”

Former head turned Leadership Matters CEO, author and speaker Andy Buck shares his reasons to be cheerful...

## **Your new book is entitled *HONK! – When Teams Come Together, Organisations Fly*; who is it aimed at?**

My 2018 book, *Leadership Matters*, sought to take everything I learnt during 20 years of leadership in schools, combine that with what I subsequently learnt from going freelance and present it to schools, together with the best thinking I could find. The *Honk* book expands this to look at other sectors, pulling in wider examples from beyond the profession.

## **Have your attitudes to leadership changed since first embarking on your post-headship career?**

I was essentially an accidental head who started out pre-NPQH. Having been a deputy at a secondary school with 1,500 pupils in Dagenham when the head took early retirement, I suddenly found myself running it, which was an extraordinary shock to the system.

Looking back now, I was completely out of my depth for at least the first five years of that headship. I did get the school to Good, but it was tough, as I'd

not really had any proper training. Upon starting my second headship in 2002, I enrolled on the 'Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers' as it was then. By that point Tony Blair had set up the National College for School Leadership, which I found hugely enlightening. I came to realise that many aspects of school leadership had come quite naturally to me, that I was doing them instinctively, but that I'd previously never had any frame of reference within which to think about what I was doing.

When I went freelance five years ago, I resolved to try and codify my thoughts on what great leadership is. That way, all the learning I'd already done myself, and all the research I was doing into the great leadership models out there, could slot into it.

## **Do you consider the role of headteacher as one that's more difficult now, than it was then?**

I'm actually very optimistic. With the incoming changes taking place under the new Ofsted framework, what we're learning about leadership and schools owning that knowledge, I still think that headship is one of the best jobs there is. People are more sensitive to the importance of leadership skills and technical knowledge, and this is a country where there's generally a good degree of autonomy for leaders within the education system.

However, I also believe that the power of league tables and the imbalance within our current accountability framework have been unhelpful. There are three big factors that motivate school leaders – a belief in what we're doing; opportunities to get good at things; and the autonomy and flexibility to make a role our own. It's become much harder in some ways for heads to be the owners of their strategic directions. Doing what you believe to be the right thing by your children requires more courage now than it did previously, because of those external accountabilities.

## **In what ways would you like to see that accountability system change?**

One of the things I welcome about the new Ofsted framework is that it's trying to rebalance things to focus more on the experiences schools give to children – the curriculum you offer, how it's structured and how it's implemented – than on what your final exam results are. It's a real opportunity for heads to work out what they believe, care about and want to do, and develop a rationale for how they plan to do it and talk about it. I'm excited to see how it pans out.

There is a caveat, however, in that league tables still exist, as do those key measures between the end of KS1 and the end of KS2, which can drive some perverse behaviours and make heads feel more defensive than they should.

## **What are your broader thoughts on what's been achieved so far by the academisation project?**

I think it's done some amazing things, but for me, there's great irony to the academies system in that it was originally all about giving schools more autonomy. That became true for those single schools that became academy converters, but standalone academies are few and far between these days.

Most have come together to form trusts, giving rise to this notion that the thing to do is centralise your curriculum planning not just within a school, but within a group of schools. That has some advantages – you can get the best people planning your Y3 curriculum, the economies of scale and quality in what you do can be great – but the problem is that heads become leaders of franchises operating within the system, rather than owning and driving forward what they're doing in their own schools.

That means that the people running academy trusts at the moment are those people who *already knew how to do that* and progressed through the ranks accordingly. Where's the next lot of MAT leads going to come from?







**How conducive would you say the MAT system has been for encouraging collaboration and the exchange of good practice?**

I see lots of MATs, small, medium and large, that are leveraging their ability to collaborate fantastically. The most effective recognise the distinction between culture (the way we do things round here) and climate (how it *feels* to work here).

It's a combination of the two together that gets you that engagement you're looking for as a leader. Collaboration can be great, but ineffective if there's nothing driving it and holding the outcome to account. The best trusts know that there are levers they can operate if they need to, while recognising where the great practice is and the people best placed to lead on it. They then set those people free to do just that, working collaboratively across schools to move things forward in a particular area. Ideally, a system should give people plenty of autonomy while holding them accountable for what they do with that autonomy.

The trouble is that as MATs get larger, the connections between the people doing that driving forward and the frontline become harder to maintain. In that situation, moving to smaller clusters is the recommended course, which is what the best academy trusts are currently doing to ensure those local collaborations continue.



**What's your take on the gradual incorporation of certain business-centric practices into how schools operate – targets, performance related pay and so forth? Have they been helpful?**

Having now worked in a number of different sectors, I've seen that businesses can learn as much from education as education can learn from business. I've actually been shocked at how poor the leadership is in many facets of the business world, but ultimately the very best businesses will do what the very best schools do.

Take performance management, for example. It was introduced into schools because 'that's what business did,' but the available evidence has since

indicated that the way most businesses do performance management simply isn't that effective. Bonus pay has a 2% influence on people's motivation to work hard, whereas who your line manager is has a 25% influence on how motivated you feel at work. What the best schools have always done is recognise that great performance management is really about performance *development* – as have the best businesses.

The thinking used to be that traditional, top-down, carrot and stick extrinsic motivation was what business was all about, but that's very simplistic. The best businesses encourage intrinsic motivation. As CS Lewis said, "Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching." You do things because you want to, not because you *have* to. A strong culture and a strong climate will motivate staff to want to keep getting better every day. Some businesses are great at that and others aren't.

 **@Andy\_Buck**  
 **andybuck.org.uk**

## CAREER TIMELINE

1997	2007	2008	2009	2014	2018
Attains first headship at The Warren School, Barking and Dagenham	Appointed executive headteacher at The Eastbrook	Becomes a National Leader of Education	Edits the London Challenge publication <i>Reflections on the Journey from Good to Great</i>	Founds the online school leadership hub, <i>Leadership Matters</i>	Becomes a Founding Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching



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# THE PSM GUIDE TO... School Improvement

## HELP YOUR PUPILS COMMUNICATE

Failing to spot early indications of speech and communication needs can give rise to serious issues in years to come, says Claire Westwood

**I**magine not being able to fully express your thoughts, opinions, feelings and needs. What challenges might you face if you struggle to understand what's being said to you, or to follow instructions?

This can be a daily experience for the more than 1.4 million children in the UK – equating to around 1 in 10 – who have some form of speech, language and communication needs (see [bercow10yearson.com](http://bercow10yearson.com)), but by

identifying and addressing these appropriately, primary school teachers can make a real difference to their lives.

### THE IMPACT

Research previously published by Save The Children showed that one in four five-year-olds struggling with language didn't reach the expected level in English at KS2, compared to one in 25 of children with good language skills (see [tinyurl.com/psm-rtr](http://tinyurl.com/psm-rtr)).

The same further found that one in five five-year-olds with language difficulties didn't reach the expected standard in maths, compared to one in 50 children with good language capabilities. If left unaddressed, SLCN can affect a child's ability to access all areas of the curriculum.

There can also be an increased risk of these children being excluded from school, or coming into contact with the youth justice system further down the line. Approximately 60% of young offenders have communication difficulties (see [tinyurl.com/lcd-jo-2007](http://tinyurl.com/lcd-jo-2007)). Working as part of a youth offending team, this is something I've observed on a near weekly basis.

### THE RIGHT SUPPORT

SLCN can manifest in a variety of ways, but also appear to present as other conditions. Visible signs of SLCN can include challenging behaviour, withdrawal and/or difficulty in acquiring social skills, making it important for teachers to be aware of the signs and what to do next. More broadly, primary schools have a key role to play in ensuring that





effective interventions are put in place early on to support children with speech and language difficulties.



To that end, tools are available which enable primary teachers to carry out timely assessments of children's speech and language development if they suspect there might be an issue. We in the Children's Therapies team at Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust wanted to do something to help, which led to us partnering with GL Assessment and developing a new speech and language toolkit for primary schools.

WellComm Primary is designed to help schools quickly identify children between the ages of six and 11 who may be struggling with their speech, language and communication skills. The screening process can be completed in less than 20 minutes by school staff, without the need for additional training, with children given a red, amber or green score indicating the presence or otherwise of SLCN.

The toolkit also includes The Big Book of Ideas for teachers, which contains a series of activities, games and strategies designed to develop and strengthen language and communication skills both in the classroom and at home.

Meeting children's communication needs throughout their school career is vital for ensuring that they're able to access the curriculum, build social relationships and maintain a high level of general wellbeing. There's no question that effective screening and monitoring of children's speech and language skills can make a major difference throughout their primary years and beyond.

*Claire Westwood is a senior children's speech and language therapist at Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust and the author of the WellComm Primary Toolkit*

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## OFSTED'S NEW FRAMEWORK - WHAT'S NEXT?

Imogen Rowley examines what Ofsted's new 'quality of education' measure means for schools

**A**s of September 2019, Ofsted will combine its 'Teaching, learning and assessment' rating with the 'Pupil outcomes' grade, thus creating a new 'Quality of education' measure. The regulator's aim is to lessen the reliance on exam results as a measure of school quality, by taking into account a school's broader curriculum offering.

Having found no common definition for 'curriculum', Ofsted has come up with the following working definition to help inform inspectors' conversations with schools about their curriculum:

*'A framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage (intent) ... translating that framework over time into a structure and narrative, within an institutional context (implementation) ... [and] evaluating what knowledge and understanding pupils have gained against expectations (impact).'*

Think about and discuss your curriculum using the three focal points cited in that working definition, and prepare to discuss your curriculum with inspectors from this perspective.

In practice, that means being clear in how you answer three key questions: What are you trying to achieve through your curriculum (Intent)? How is your curriculum being delivered (Implementation)? What difference is your curriculum making (Impact)? Involve all members of staff early, so that everyone can talk about your curriculum consistently by the time of your next inspection.

Remember that there's no magic formula for the perfect curriculum - you

should always have sound justification for why you are or aren't doing something, and how this relates to your curriculum intent. What follows are some suggestions for how you might be able to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.

Prioritise phonics and the transition into early reading at KS1, and encourage older children to read widely and deeply. Encourage reading for pleasure at all ages, and feed language, writing and maths skills throughout all subjects.

Offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visitors to complement and broaden the curriculum, but make sure that these are purposeful and link with what's being taught in class.

At KS2, don't focus too heavily on English and maths to the detriment of the wider curriculum. Similarly, try not to spend a disproportionate amount of time on SATs preparation, such as mock tests and booster classes

Instead, consider offering specialist focus weeks or project days where all pupils come off-timetable, giving you the opportunity to provide broader provision in non-core areas such as technology, science or the humanities.

**Imogen Rowley is a Lead Content Producer at The Key - a provider of up-to-the-minute sector intelligence and resources that empower education leaders with the knowledge to act**

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 [thekeysupport.com](http://thekeysupport.com)



# How to respond to broken bones

Breaks, sprains and dislocations often can't be seen, but there are some visible indicators

**T**he law only requires a certain number of staff to be trained in first aid, but it's good practice to upskill all staff in basic first aid for common injuries (including lunchtime supervisors and all those assisting with PE and sports activities), so that you can be sure whoever's on hand when an injury occurs can take appropriate action, rather than potentially delaying care while waiting for a designated first aider to attend.

Making everyone aware – including children – of what to look for following an accident can prevent further injury and the situation from worsening. The injured child should be kept calm and comfortable whilst the situation is assessed. If there are multiple casualties, the priority will usually be the quiet ones! Always check for danger, response, airway and breathing before focussing on non-life-threatening injuries.

Broadly speaking, it's not possible to identify a broken bone unless there's a very obvious displacement or the bone is sticking out through the skin. An x-ray will be needed before being able to diagnose whether there's a fracture.

However, possible indicators that a child may have broken a bone include:

- **Pain** – the area hurts when touched, pressed, moved, or has put weight put

on it, though this is also true also for sprains and strains.

- **Odd angle** – the limb may be at an odd angle and have a wider range of movement than normal
- **Swelling, bruising, serious wounds** – these can indicate a possible fracture site, though again the same can be said for soft tissue injuries
- **Deformity and irregularity** – limbs may be shortened, or the broken area may show lumps, bumps, depressions or stretched skin
- **Sound** – there could be a snap or grinding sound as the injury occurs, and crepitus following the injury as ends of bone grate against each other

Should you observe any of the above, the child(ren) concerned should be taken to A&E for an x-ray.

## Emergency signs

An ambulance should be called in the event of an open fracture, where the bone protrudes through the skin, or if the casualty starts to show signs of shock, such as nausea and dizziness, or appears faint. Is there a possibility that they may have injured their head or spine?

Other prompts for calling 999 include difficulties breathing, apparent loss of consciousness, loss of feeling in the limb, abnormally cold extremities or

dramatic changes in skin colour.

Paramedics should also be called if you're unable to safely transport the casualty to hospital yourself while keeping the limb stable and supported, if there's a suspected pelvic or hip fracture – or, indeed, if you're worried about them in any way.

Educating a child so that they can help themselves or a friend when injured will give them an invaluable life skill. From September 2020, first aid training will form a mandatory part of the English PSHE curriculum – free resources and teaching materials to help introduce first aid to your pupils can be downloaded via [tinyurl.com/FAFL-resources](https://tinyurl.com/FAFL-resources)

**Emma Hammett is a registered general nurse and the founder/CEO of the first aid training provider First Aid for Life**

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# SCALE THE PRECIPICE

Spending time on building your system capacity will ultimately improve things for everyone, says Rebecca Leek...

**A**t 5.30am on a Saturday morning, after a long week at work, you'll usually find me in the polytunnel cutting flowers to take to market. I'll be up to my eyes in sunflowers, zinnias and my personal favourites, helichrysum, but whilst that might sound extreme, it's actually one of the most peaceful and relaxing moments of my week – until one recent incident...

The mellow sounds of birdsong, hoverflies and distant cockerels were suddenly interrupted by the splurt and gurgle of a new irrigation system, springing into life on all sides. Not a fountain or sprinkler system, but rather a gentle gush of water through a network of pipes placed among the flower beds. Still, it was something of a shock. "Ah yes, sorry," said my husband, once I'd returned to the house. "I forgot to tell you. We've finally got the watering system automated."

## HELL FOR LEATHER

Irrigation systems on automatic timers might seem like a far cry from the demands of running a school, but it's a good analogy for demonstrating how long-term system planning can help save resources, mental capacity and that most precious commodity of

all – time. We now lose less water, thanks to using drip pipes in place of indiscriminately spraying hoses, and the water actually reaches the plants, since the pipes are arranged along the beds. We no longer worry about the watering, or indeed even *do* the watering. The system does it for us.

It takes a certain amount of discipline to spend time considering how your jobs ought to be approached and managed, when the temptation can be to go hell for leather and attempt to complete them as quickly as possible. During a busy day, especially at schools on rapid improvement journeys, we'll often simply troubleshoot as we go along. There can be a tendency to feel that our resources are too stretched to allow for investing time and thought into how our systems are actually working.

However, stopping and giving yourself a moment, even just half an hour, to create a template or a process will reap multiple rewards in future. If you never make time for this, the likelihood is that you'll be constantly fighting an uphill battle to get things done, while never feeling as though you're actually getting anywhere.

## KEEPING THINGS GROUNDED

One area I've recently tackled in this way is subject access requests. As data protection officer for the ASSET

Education trust, these come directly to me. I've created a tracking template consisting of a process and record sheet for when we have to work through such requests, containing a key information box at the top, followed by a series of date checkpoints that are generated from the point when the request is received.

As many readers will know, there's a 30-day turnaround for providing data. The process sheet allows us to stay on track, allays worries about deadlines and provides clarity as to who's doing what, so that nothing slips through the cracks. It allows us to record any decisions made, as anyone with experience of data responsibility will know how careful we have to be about third party data. The tracking sheet keeps our work in this area grounded, and gives us a straightforward way of evidencing decisions, should anything be questioned or appealed in future.

This system we use isn't rocket science. If anything, it's utterly pedestrian, but it does mean that now, when we receive a subject access request, the process simply rolls on without us having to worry about non-compliance, since it incorporates a guide that shows people what to do. It's replicable and – here's the magic word – *scalable*. It doesn't matter how many requests we receive; the system will still be able to take them.

### THE POWER OF FORMS

One tool that I've found to be transformative in creating scalable and efficient systems are 'forms' applications. We're a Google organisation and therefore use the Google Forms app, but I've previously used Microsoft Forms and SurveyMonkey to good effect. Once you get to grips with them, you'll quickly realise just how useful they are.

When looking at induction and

onboarding in our trust, I built a questionnaire that took new employees through important information and documentation. We had to provide a flavour of our trust remotely, as it wasn't practical for us in the central team to meet everyone at all of our 13 schools face-to-face. We therefore created a form that took staff through a welcome video from

our CEO, links to key policies and a quiz that helped new staff find out about some of our other schools. It also included a GDPR awareness section and a field for entering feedback.

The beauty of forms applications is that they generate spreadsheets containing all the submitted data. At one point we faced the daunting prospect of onboarding the staff at three primary schools in one go, but we had a system that was both paperless and scalable. Within a week or two of the schools transferring to us, all staff had completed the questionnaires and we had immediate access to the evidence.

### ARCHITECTURAL APPROACH

I originally learnt the craft of design thinking and scalable systems when working as a SENCo. Five years ago, at

least, the business of SEND involved keeping track of many different pieces of paper and referring to unwieldy classroom folders. Individual education plans would often be produced in differing formats, with 'one page profiles' only just starting to become commonplace.

I worked hard to create templates that could be used consistently and helped devise a system of pupil passports, but the improvement that made the biggest difference was a standardised sheet for

“Stopping and giving yourself a moment, even just half an hour, to create a template or a process will reap multiple rewards”

use with the class folders. It was effectively just a straightforward contents sheet containing instructions, such as 'update each term', but it made the system come alive and become replicable without my constant input.

Design thinking takes into account the people using the system. I consciously examined the contents

sheet system from a class teacher's perspective, and made sure every piece of information was in the right place. I could then step away and let the system run itself for me.

To restate, this approach requires discipline and a certain level of resilience. You may have to tell people that you won't be able to do something straight away because you're working on system improvements. Some will always want instant action and results, but I'd encourage everyone to be more architectural in their approach. Scalable systems allow you to build significant capacity from one day to the next. If anything, to not use them is a false economy. After all, people can't run around like headless chickens forever.

On which note, I'm off to feed ours, because that's one system we haven't automated yet. All in good time...

### MAKE THE PERFECT SYSTEM

- Create templates that people can't write over – familiarise yourself with 'read only' and 'copy only' settings and restrict editing rights to the original files.
- Think through how people will follow the system and process. Will a 'guide to' database be needed, or can instructions be included within the templates?
- Consider the terms colleagues might use to search for specific items and save documents with sensible names. If you can develop a shared language, the files you create will instantly become more 'findable'.
- Ensure people know that your new system exists by working on the principle that people will need telling seven times (often in different ways) before the message really cuts through. Highlight it in the staff handbook, pin something to the noticeboard, mention it in conversation, bring it up at the next staff briefing – then add it to the agenda again a few weeks later.



**Rebecca Leek is director of strategy at ASSET Education, and a former SENCo and system leader for SEND, having previously founded and run an arts social enterprise for eight years; she also currently co-runs an organic fruit farm in North Essex with her husband**



# WORK WITH STAR POWER

Giving staff a key role to play in school audits can unlock their potential in multiple ways, says Louise Smith

**S**elf-scrutiny is a good thing – especially when you can use it to accelerate school improvement and simultaneously help create the next generation of school leaders.

This two-handed approach to internal audit and review has become an important feature of life at Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT) – a MAT comprising six primary schools and a teaching school situated in the north west. We developed STaR (Specialist Teacher Review) teams as a way of providing our schools with semi-independent, internal audits of teaching and learning practice to help us raise standards, share best practice and develop staff.

The fact that the STaR teams are led by teachers, rather than heads or members of SLT, is a deliberate choice. We wanted to move away from traditional peer-to-peer school improvement models led by school leaders, partly because our heads were already busy attending to the demands of a rapidly expanding MAT and lacked the time to commit to regular auditing of our schools.

However, another, even more important reason was that this new type of approach would give our talented staff professional development opportunities they wouldn't have been able to receive otherwise.

## HELPING SCHOOLS DEVELOP

Each school in the MAT receives a termly visit from the STaR team, which is made up of teachers from across WPAT who have been trained by us to conduct audits of practice based on the Ofsted framework. To ensure objectivity, STaR team members will never audit their own school. This also affords more opportunities for WPAT staff to get involved and share their knowledge and skills across the trust.

Every STaR team includes at least two practitioners, who are appointed at the recommendation of their respective

heads. One acts as the team lead, and will be responsible for coordinating the review and producing a report. STaR teams are also accompanied by a headteacher from a different WPAT school during visits, who will carry out quality assurance on the team's report before it's published. A copy of the final report will then be sent to the relevant school's headteacher and local governing body, as well as the trust board.

During the audit visit, the team will observe lessons and talk to pupils. The areas they examine will include book scrutiny, monitoring of pupil behaviour, conversations with staff and examinations of the school's pupil

progress and methods of tracking.

It's important to note that the STaR approach is centred on helping schools develop, rather than handing down judgements. Prior to an audit visit, the school will select a range of areas that it would like help with – perhaps preparing pupils for transition, or managing pupils' attitudes to learning – in addition to the priority areas that form part of every audit.

## OBSERVING PRACTICE

For me, the STaR team approach works because it distributes good practice and



## HOW IT WORKS

- Every STaR audit team is made up of two teachers drawn from two other WPAT schools, and supported by a WPAT headteacher from a separate school who attends to quality assure the team's report and be on hand to deal with any questions or concerns.
- While both team members observe lessons and scrutinise books, each has a distinct set of responsibilities during the one-day visits. One will chat to pupils and review safeguarding and behaviour, while the other speaks to staff and reviews current pupil progress and tracking.
- Once the evidence gathering has been completed – usually by lunchtime – the team will feed back to the head and then use the afternoon to draft their report. This is then QA checked by the attending headteacher, ahead of a final QA by myself and data manager Vikki Lovato. The report is then submitted to the school.

responsibility for raising standards, beyond the duties and capacity of school leaders, while involving the wider staff team. It also helps to identify those staff members with the potential for further career development within our trust.

WPAT's data manager, Vikki Lovato, has been instrumental in getting the STaR team system up and running. In her view, "It's proved to be a very effective process – teachers who have already been on the other end of the experience know what to expect when it comes to playing their part in the audit teams.

"When they go out to review they know what they're looking for, but they also get to see the practice that's happening in another school. We may be a MAT, but our schools are all individual and have their own ways of doing things. Up to now, it's been hard to see what happens in other schools, so it's a good



way of observing practice in another school that might not be approaching things in quite the same way. It's a way of picking up good ideas."

Katie Rowland, assistant head at the WPAT school Penketh Primary, believes the collaborative approach to auditing encouraged by the STaR team model has benefited the school in a number of ways:

"We've developed much stronger working relationships with those schools we've reviewed, and have had opportunities to share practice and see what's happening elsewhere in the trust," she says. "It's provided us with good professional development opportunities, and meant that we can play a part in helping all of our schools to standardise, and see what steps we need to take to continue improving across all phases."

## IMPROVING THE LANGUAGE

That said, we have needed to iron out one or two issues. One was the language used in the reports that STaR teams submit to the heads, which became one of the reasons behind the strengthening of the QA process. The practice of generating reports is also one that we've focused on during staff training.

We're still on a learning journey, and

doubtless the approach we're using will continue to improve as we go on. By the time we've completed our latest round of audits in autumn this year, the STaR teams will be operating at a very high standard.

The process of identifying staff members who can acquit themselves well as part of a STaR team remains ongoing. We're always looking to identify new candidates, so that there's a continual flow of colleagues coming onto the teams who can absorb and learn from the experience of established members. By building up a strong pool of people, we'll hopefully never lose the expertise that we're developing.



**Louise Smith is the CEO of Warrington Primary Academy Trust – a MAT consisting of 6 primary schools in Warrington and Widnes**

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# THERE'S MORE TO READING THAN PHONICS

The latest DfE announcement shows that literacy training is yet again failing to focus on many of the key aspects of teaching young children to read

In June of this year, the DfE announced that Ruth Miskin Training had been given the contract to run a new training centre to develop literacy specialists. The centre will provide training for up to 34 English hub leaders and 180 literacy specialists. The DfE says the training will focus on three priority areas – age-appropriate systematic synthetic phonics provision, early language development and promoting a love of reading. The centre will be run in association with I CAN, the National Literacy Trust, Sounds Write, Jolly Phonics, Sounds Discovery, Phonics International and Floppy Phonics.

At UKLA, we're concerned that the training yet again seems to prioritise systematic synthetic phonics teaching for very young children over every other aspect of learning to read. Most of the partner groups listed publish commercial phonics programmes. Although UKLA is clear that phonics instruction is essential for early reading development, we'd argue that it's not sufficient to develop fully rounded young readers. In particular, there's little indication in the announcement that comprehension will be a key focus. A grasp of phonics doesn't necessarily help children make sense of what they read, which is the prime purpose of reading.

We're pleased that language development and reading for pleasure are mentioned, but once again, phonics is prioritised and other aspects of reading seem to be an afterthought.

## COUNTER TO EVIDENCE

The elevated status of phonics instruction runs counter to research evidence which suggests that understanding what reading offers is even more important for young readers before, and when they enter school.

Ruth Miskin has been very successful in developing and promoting phonics teaching, but there is less evidence that a phonics-only approach helps children to read all words accurately. For example, common words like 'come' and 'the' aren't phonically regular, while words like 'read' can only be pronounced accurately in the context of its sentence. Every teacher will recognise this.

In fact, there's now evidence that points to significant errors in current phonics programmes. In their article 'How linguistically informed are phonics programmes?' (see [tinyurl.com/ukla-lit-phonics](https://tinyurl.com/ukla-lit-phonics)) Roger Beard, Greg Brooks and Jaz Ampaw-Farr write "The number and range of the linguistic errors in current phonics programmes pose a significant risk, not only to the implementation of the national curriculum, but also to the quality of teaching and learning of early reading... Inaccuracies in how GPCs [grapheme-phoneme correspondences] are referred to can only add to the difficulties that some children experience when learning to read." This is a serious issue which most teachers aren't aware of.

The offer of support from English hubs will be primarily for schools with phonics check scores that are below expectations – yet if there are inaccuracies in current phonics programmes, this puts less

experienced early readers in an even more precarious position.

## A BALANCED APPROACH

Discussions of phonics can distract attention from some of the fundamental experiences that help children become successful, committed and lifelong readers, the most important of which include being read to by family members and adults in school. Any training programme should further reflect the substantial research that shows how a balanced approach to reading is the most effective. These additional areas ought to include word reading strategies, language development, comprehension and inference making, alongside an awareness of the reading experiences children bring with them from home.

The Reading for Pleasure research carried out by the Open University and UKLA offers a rich set of possibilities for the training hubs to draw on. We hope that when details of the training programme are published, these will include a range of teaching approaches that go beyond synthetic phonics instruction and provide all children with genuine and life-enhancing reading experiences.



**David Reedy is a UKLA trustee and former principal adviser for primary schools in Barking and Dagenham**

# NARROW THE LITERACY GAP

Dr David Lamb explains how paired reading interventions can cultivate a love of books and enhance reading outcomes

It's a joy to witness how a simple, low cost reading intervention can have a profound impact within a school. In our experience, the paired reading intervention has been extremely effective for children with barriers to learning in reading, particularly those receiving Pupil Premium funding. Statistics show (see [tinyurl.com/lit-gap-18](https://tinyurl.com/lit-gap-18)) that the literacy gap is shrinking, but at a very slow pace. While there's no single solution to narrowing this gap, school-based literacy interventions such as paired reading can really help.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

The tutor and child both read out loud together. The tutor can be fractionally ahead, or read alongside the child in unison. When the child feels confident enough to read independently they give a signal, such as a knock on the table. The tutor will then only join in again if and when the child misreads a word – the tutor states the correct word via direct instruction, the child repeats it and they then carry on reading again together.

One might assume that 'the tutor' in this instance would be an adult – a teacher, LSA or parent – but what's interesting is that the intervention can work as a peer support strategy, providing opportunities for cohesive learning throughout the school. More advanced readers can fill the role of tutors, with less advanced readers being the tutees. There's also the opportunity to encourage discussion between tutors and tutees about the texts they're using before, during and after paired reading sessions to help promote reading comprehension, and more importantly, build a positive tutor-tutee relationship.

Children make progress when they're happy, confident, connected to their learning environment and have some control over their learning, which is exactly what this intervention provides. Its

psychological underpinnings draw on self-determination theory, which posits that the needs of competency, relatedness and autonomy must all be met simultaneously in order to increase intrinsic motivation – the most effective type of motivation for long-term engagement.

## LOW COST, HIGH IMPACT

In May 2018 we conducted a six-week paired reading intervention at a primary school in North Lincolnshire, St Peter's CE Primary School. Pupils receiving paired reading increased their reading age by 3.7 months and spelling score by 3.12 points, compared to 1.2 months and -0.34 points for the control group. Pupils' confidence towards learning increased by 6.59 points in the intervention group, compared to 1.08 points in the control group. (see 'Paired reading in practice').

We revisited the school in May this year, to find out how paired reading was continuing to have an impact on the school's learners and the school as a whole. We saw significant progress in reading, spelling and confidence scores across all participants. Paired reading had originally been implemented for all KS2 children in receipt of Pupil Premium funding, but following the success of the project the intervention had since been rolled out across all of KS2, for children not making expected progress.

Jo Winney, SENCo at Barton St Peter's CE Primary School, told us, "Part of my remit is to analyse the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions across the school. This is done by breaking down each intervention into cost per child based upon a number of factors, including length, frequency of intervention, wages of staff delivering and the number of children in a group. Paired reading has been, without question, the most effective intervention for improving reading across the school."



When it came to reporting these successes to school improvement partners and governors, Barton St Peter's preferred method of assessment was using termly PiXL tests (see [pirl.org.uk](https://pirl.org.uk)) to measure skills in retrieval, inference and predictions, as well as the language choices, themes and conventions of written texts. Where paired reading was used at least three times a week for a duration of 10 minutes with a trusted adult, the school saw a rise in average pupil reading progress of seven PiXL test points, compared to just three points for those children who didn't receive the intervention. The cost of the intervention worked out at around £1.80 per session.

According to the school's headteacher, Adeline Brack, "Following the success of the paired reading pilot project, it has become an integral part of support strategies at our school. The accelerated progress made by those children who participate in paired reading isn't currently matched by any other

intervention, and it's the most effective intervention we have in terms of boosting confidence and raising attainment."

## A CHILD'S NEEDS

Paired reading sessions are short, typically lasting 10 to 15 minutes, and can

be conducted on a one-to-one basis or in small groups – ideally on a daily basis. Given that it works well with standard children's books, schools can actively promote the intervention among parents and encourage its use at home.

By focusing on hearing and reading words at the whole word level, it's ideal for children who struggle with decoding and experience phonological difficulties. The approach of reassuring, explaining and maintaining pace underpins the skills of resilience and confidence a child will need when faced with similar challenges in future. What's important is that it promotes self-efficacy, which fosters positive attitudes towards reading. It becomes fun and enjoyable, giving both tutor and tutee a feeling of accomplishment, and contributes towards getting children to read for pleasure.

The results of our randomised control trial at Barton St Peters CE Primary School were clear. Following the pupils' use of the paired reading intervention, assessments showed that their word reading, spelling and reading confidence significantly improved, highlighting the value it can have as a primary education

## PAIRED READING IN PRACTICE

- The Paired Reading results are averages taken from the Barton St Peter's Primary School project, which ran from January 2018 to May 2018. 49 students were assessed over six weeks for 10 minutes per day.
- Participants were split into a control group comprising 25 pupils that didn't receive paired reading and an intervention group of 24 that did. The pupils ranged from year 3 to year 6, and all were eligible for Pupil Premium funding.
- The pupils' standards of word reading was measured by the British Ability Scales 3rd Edition, and their spelling by the Wide Range Achievement Test.
- The pupils' Academic Self Concept ('confidence' for the purposes of this project) was measured by the Myself As a Learner Scale (MALS), and administered to 18 pupils from the control group and 17 from the intervention group.

strategy for narrowing the literacy gap.

Paired reading is a low cost, simple intervention that can be implemented across a school without the need for specialist resources. An inability to read well can affect children's academic attainment in the short term, and broader emotional wellbeing in the long term, potentially over the course of their lives. It can be addressed by an intervention that's been proven to transform reluctant readers into confident, brave and happier ones.



**Dr David Lamb is an educational psychologist and director at Applied Psychologies**

 @AppPsych

 [appliedpsychologies.com](http://appliedpsychologies.com)

"We saw significant progress in reading, spelling and confidence scores across all participants"



# SAY NO TO TESTING 4-YEAR-OLDS



More and more educators, experts and parents are realising the flaws in the roll-out of reception baseline assessment (RBA).

96%

of primary school leaders think they should not be spending the first few weeks of term preparing for the tests\*

OVER  
5,000

schools have said no to the pilot

OVER  
70,000

people have signed a petition demanding a halt to the roll-out

## WHAT DO THE EXPERTS THINK?

"Flawed, unjustified and totally unfit for purpose"

The British Educational Research Association

"Verging on the immoral"

Durham University Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring

"Pointless and damaging"

Letter signed by over 700 early years education specialists

## THERE'S STILL TIME

If your school has signed up — perhaps to find out more and prepare for next year — **YOU CAN STILL WITHDRAW**. Your reception teachers and pupils do not have to endure the disruption it will cause in those critical first weeks of term.

Say NO to testing 4-year-olds. Together we can change the system.

Join our campaign [www.morethanascore.org.uk](http://www.morethanascore.org.uk)

more  
than a  
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\*YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 230 senior primary school teachers in England. Fieldwork was undertaken between 15th January and 4th February 2018. The survey was carried out online.

# Helping hands

Dr Margot Sunderland explains how leaders can create school environments that are beneficial for their staff's mental health – as well as their own...

**C**hallenges come in all shapes and sizes, but there are few tougher than ensuring a school is a mentally healthy environment in which to teach, learn and prosper. Then there's your own mental wellbeing to consider – again, no easy task.

The Education Support Partnership's 2018 Teacher Wellbeing Index reported a dramatic increase in mental health problems among headteachers, with 45% of senior leaders feeling stressed most or all of the time. You play a vital role in creating a happy, nurturing learning space for staff and pupils, so it's crucial that you know how to improve and maintain your mental health both for your own sake and that of others.

## THERAPY AND COUNSELLING

How can you support teachers and pupils effectively if your own mental health is poor? Counselling sessions, where you can offload, weep and rage to a trained professional, will reduce your toxic stress, thus improving your own state of mind while ensuring that you can support others' mental health needs.

## VALUED TEACHERS

Make sure your teachers feel appreciated for their contribution to the school. Feeling valued contributes to good mental health, while shame triggers the same reaction in the body as a physical injury. A practical way of showing teachers that you value them is to reward their successes and issue commendations to senior staff. Knowing that your hard work matters and is appreciated is a morale boost for anyone.

## HELP 'LONE' TEACHERS

Teachers without regular access to a TA can effectively find themselves as a

'single parent' to as many as 30 children. Teaching solo is isolating. Loneliness can trigger the panic/grief system in the brain, which can in turn lead to panic attacks. To help 'lone teachers' feel more supported and emotionally regulated by other teachers, organise regular talk-time groups where staff feel comfortable enough to discuss feelings of impotence, loneliness, abandonment and lack of recognition.

## REDUCE TOXIC STRESS

A quick 'there-there' chat in the corridor before a teacher's next lesson won't be sufficient to reduce toxic stress levels. Provide them with 'reflect and restore rooms' – these aren't expensive to set up, and can include the following elements to trigger the anti-stress chemical oxytocin and opioids (euphoria-inducing

enkephalins and endorphins): warm lights (uplighters); colours; soothing music; pleasant smells; comforting fabrics and external warmth (such as electric blankets).

Also remember that children with troubled home lives may not arrive at school in an emotional state conducive to learning. There are many fun and easy ways of reducing vulnerable pupils' toxic stress levels, as well as some interventions best implemented at the start of the school day: accompanied drumming; tai chi; mindfulness; meditation rooms; sensory play; and spending time with animals or outside.

## EXTERNAL FACTORS

Your school's wellbeing, morale and overall mental health levels shouldn't solely rest on your shoulders. If schools are to become mentally healthy places for teachers and children, the value of wellbeing must be properly recognised from the very top of the sector, starting with the DfE. There needs to be national recognition of how important monitoring the mental health culture of all schools really is. Governing bodies, trust boards and directors alike can – and should – introduce new KPIs based on staff and pupil wellbeing.



**Dr Margot Sunderland is director of The Centre for Child Mental Health (CCMH), a not-for-profit organisation that provides mental health training in schools, and co-director of Trauma Informed Schools UK.**

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

[childmentalhealthcentre.org](http://childmentalhealthcentre.org)





# Why I Love...



**Simon Hunt** explains how the Juno amplification system has given both he and his pupils a whole new voice...

**“I’m a teacher at Tottington Primary School.**

I’ve been teaching for 10 years now – currently Y4, but have previously taught reception and Y6 as well. In 2018 I was named ‘Inspirational Teacher of the Year’ at the Manchester Evening News’ Greater Manchester School Awards.

I love teaching – it’s my passion. No two days are the same. As part of my role I also get to travel to schools around the country delivering CPD, sharing new technologies and conducting training on how to implement different teaching methods.

**“I’ve been using Juno for about two months,**

yet it feels like I’ve had it since the start of the school year. I nearly always wear the microphone around my neck when I’m teaching now. The first things I do each morning are switch on the classroom lights and put my Juno microphone on.

**“Pre-Juno, I used my ‘teacher voice’ when speaking.**

That means you’re not talking normally; not necessarily shouting, but definitely talking louder. When the season turns cold, you get that shred in your voice that soon starts to hurt – it’s just something that always happens. But when using the Juno, I can just speak in my normal voice; I don’t have to speak loudly.

Another great thing is that I don’t need to position myself in the centre of the classroom in order to be heard. Via Juno,



the children can always hear me, wherever I happen to be standing.”

**“I wanted to see if the class noticed a difference**

after we’d been using it for a couple of days, so I switched it off. Straight away, the kids at the far end of the classroom asked me to turn it back on. At breaktime I asked them why they’d wanted me to put it back on, and they explained that it was because they couldn’t hear me.

As a teacher, what was interesting was that they told me this had always been the case. They couldn’t always hear exactly what I was saying, but because they’re quite bright children, they’d tried to fill in the blanks. Unfortunately, this process of

filling in the blanks naturally meant that they’d missed content and potentially got it wrong.

**“Another benefit for the students is having their own voices be heard.**

My students are quite young, and some of them have tiny voices. Unless you’re quite near them, it’s sometimes hard to hear what they’re saying. When the students are given opportunities to pass round the microphone, they know they’ll be heard. Their willingness to engage and share their opinions has increased significantly as a result.

I wouldn’t go back to not using Juno, no chance. You’re not going to take mine, are you...?



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# Buildings & Facilities

## APPOINT THE RIGHT SITE MANAGER

Given the wide array of duties now expected of site managers, schools should be careful in how they choose theirs, says Caroline Collins...

I've heard many a school business manager grumble when asked about their site manager. The reason for that is often that there are still many 'old-school' site managers out there, who are renowned for their lack of positivity when it comes to change. Yet many of these site managers are now retiring from the profession, giving schools the opportunity to appoint people with a more positive and flexible approach to the demands of the job.

When our site manager informed me that he was retiring, I knew exactly the kind of person I wanted to succeed him. This person would be willing to go that extra mile, not be afraid to do a little bit of handiwork and be prepared to work with me for the good of the school. The school needed somebody with a 'can-do' attitude that wouldn't immediately call on an expert every time a small job needed doing, in the process wasting school money that could be used in more productive ways. We needed somebody willing, able and keen to do the work and help the school.

### THE JOB SPEC

Our starting point was a re-written job description and person spec. Site managers who have been in post for a long time will typically still be working to

an old job description that simply doesn't match the needs of the school in the current climate. Changes were therefore made to the job spec, the role itself was re-evaluated and we identified the essential and desirable characteristics needed for the new post-holder. We then advertised.

When interviewing, it's very to ask questions that one might consider to





'politically correct', but I'm a firm believer in describing things as they are and getting the information needed quickly and easily. With that in mind, we made sure that the questions we asked were relevant. We wanted to know if our prospective site managers could perform painting tasks, and what their response would be if they suspected an intruder was on the premises. We also wanted to gauge their ideas for the future, and for any other ways in which a site manager might be able help the school they work at.

In the end, we were lucky in being able to appoint a site manager who exhibited the most positive attitude from those we saw, who was very willing to help the school and suggested plenty of ideas for future activities around lettings and gardening clubs. He possessed experience of working with children over a number of years, and shared with us his thoughts on how the children could be included in some aspects of the site manager's role. It was a real pleasure to subsequently see him during summer school, showing the children how to roast marshmallows on an open fire and involving them in improving the school by helping to paint fences, among other activities.

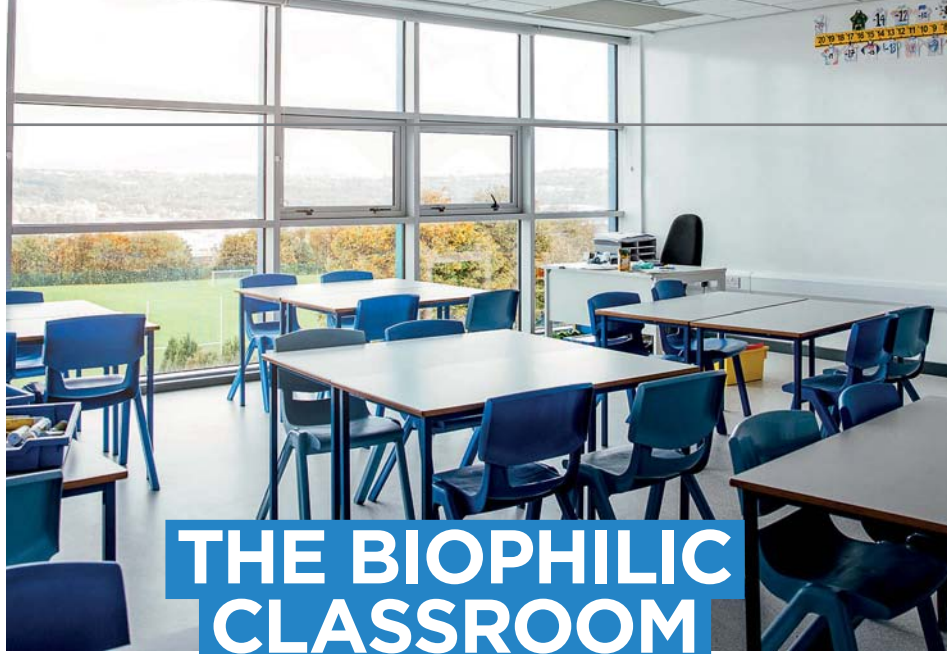
## WANTS AND NEEDS

Making sure you choose the right person isn't easy, but focusing on what you want and what you need as a school certainly helps. Since our new site manager's appointment we've managed to bring in over £5,000 in revenue from letting out our premises, as he's willing to open and lock up during weekends and unsociable hours. And he never claims overtime.

My advice to anybody looking for a site manager now would be to tighten up your person spec, make sure you get the job description right and ask appropriate questions at interview. After that, work with them closely, and let them know you'll always be there to offer them support when needed.

*Caroline Collins is head of school business strategy and resources at Miles Coverdale Primary School*

 @caroline\_261



## THE BIOPHILIC CLASSROOM

The design of our classrooms can help tackle rising levels of poor mental health among young people, writes Lloyd Coldrick

**C**reating learning spaces in which young people can flourish will boost their motivation, productivity and overall wellbeing. Classrooms that have been designed to promote student wellbeing will, in turn, lead to their schools experiencing increased growth.

The 'biophilic' approach is one of the most popular methods of developing a healthy and positive environment in the classroom. Biophilic stems from the word biophilia, meaning a 'love of nature', and was originally coined by German psychologist Erich Fromm. It was later popularised by American psychologist Edward O. Wilson in the 1980s, who used the term to point out how the rapid rise of urbanisation was making us more and more disconnected from nature.

As humans, we have a deep-rooted biological connection to nature, with the result that outdated, uninspiring classroom designs can affect our overall health and wellbeing. It's no secret that stress-related illnesses are a major contributor of disease, yet when we think of nature, it often provokes thoughts of calm, relaxing environments.

Some educational institutions have embraced this type of thinking by bringing the 'outdoors' into their interiors and shifting to a more open, human-centred approach. This might see the incorporation of features such as large, open window views and natural materials such as wood, stone and water features in order to soothe and inspire the mind.

Research into the health benefits of biophilic designs, carried out by Bill Browning, founding member of the US Green Building Council's board of directors, and Sir Cary Cooper, CBE professor of organisational psychology

and health at Lancaster University, has found that they can bring about significant increases in students' level of wellbeing.



The process of incorporating direct or indirect elements of nature into classroom spaces was found to reduce stress while lowering blood pressure levels and heart rates, resulting in happier students, lower absenteeism, fewer illnesses and ultimately, increased engagement.

Further research published in the Journal of Experimental Psychology, found that by adding just one plant per square mile in a learning environment, young people became 15% more productive than those without plants in their classroom. Indoor greenery also helps to improve air quality, thus benefiting both the surrounding environment and students' overall health.

It's estimated that most people in the developed world can spend as much as 90% of their time inside buildings and cars. According to the UK mental health charity Mind, being out in green spaces can help reduce feelings of stress or anger, making young people feel calmer, while improving their confidence and self-esteem. Designing classrooms with easy access to outdoor areas, increased natural light and open views of the school's surroundings will therefore invoke positive feelings.

By encouraging the adoption of learning spaces which work to reduce stress and boost wellbeing, the education sector can see to it that the mental health of young people is nurtured within happy and healthy learning environments.

**Lloyd Coldrick is managing director at the interior design specialist, Cobus**

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# Design by democracy

How the creators of a new software application are aiming to open up the design of school buildings to everyone...

Schools will often be at the centre of a local community, yet teachers and pupils are typically the last to be consulted when it comes to the way their schools are designed and constructed. Yet that's now set to change, thanks to an innovative new app.

Evidence shows that there's a clear correlation between schools that are well designed and standards of pupil performance and behaviour. Good design alone won't raise standards, of course – but poor design can have an actively negative impact on the quality of teaching, the aspirations and self-perception of pupils, and the sustainability of the school itself.

Demand for new schools is now at unprecedented levels, due to a combined nursery and primary pupil population that's been rising steadily since 2009, reaching 4.6 million in 2018 (see psm-pp19).

As Rory McGrath, interim headteacher at Shacklewell Primary School in East London, points out, teachers and pupils currently play negligible roles in the process of creating a new school building: "In my experience, it's common practice for educators to be last on the list of people consulted when new education infrastructure is being built." This becomes even more significant when one considers the DfE estimates that around a hundred new and replacement schools are currently needed in the UK every year.

McGrath's comments were made at an event organised by the tech-led architectural firm Bryden Wood, which was invited by the school to showcase its new Seismic School app to a group of pupils from years 5 and 6. The free app seeks to democratise the school design process by allowing a wider spectrum of community stakeholders – including teaching professionals, pupils, school governors and parents – to contribute in a creative way, while ensuring that their ideas are consistent with DfE spatial requirements.

"We're at the forefront of a 'Design to Value' revolution in the construction industry," says Jaimie Johnston, Bryden Wood's head of global systems. "It's therefore critical to us that anything we design is centred on creating the best outcomes for the eventual users and occupiers. We're doing this in hospitals for a better patient experience, in prisons for rehabilitation, and in the education sector to foster greater community involvement."

Designed to appeal to as broad a range of users as possible, the Seismic School app's colourful and intuitive interface takes inspiration from popular games such as *Minecraft* and *SimCity* – younger users can even place a T-Rex or a Loch Ness in their designs.

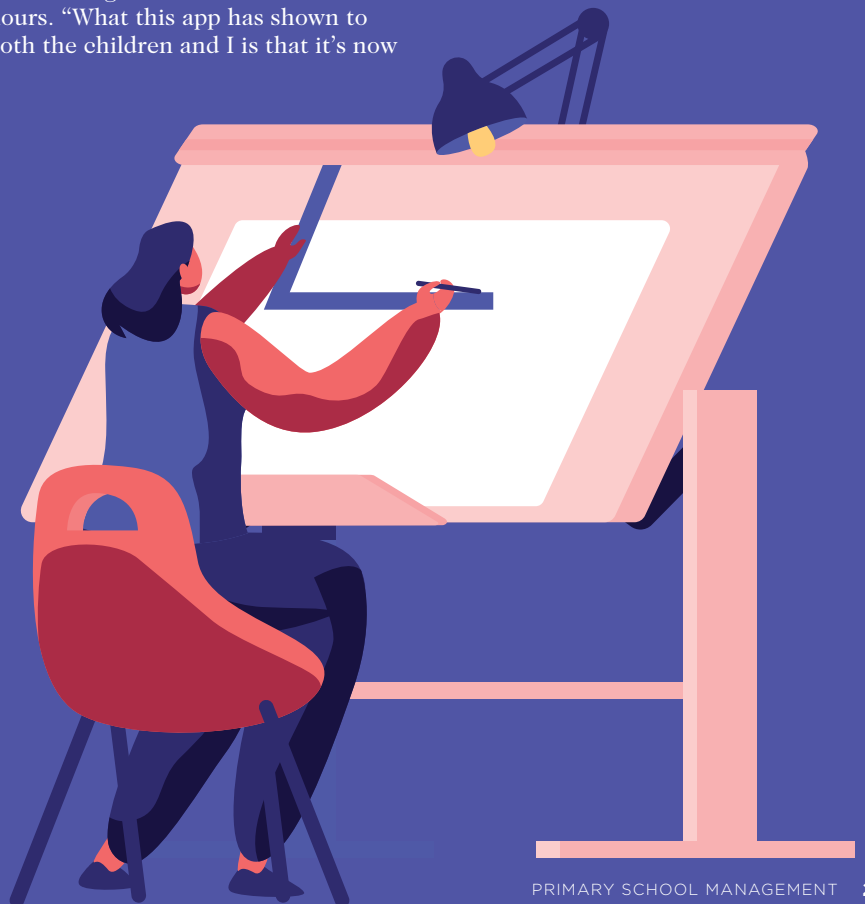
One of the ultimate aims of the creators behind Seismic is to reduce the time it takes to create a fully-compliant school design from weeks to a matter of hours. "What this app has shown to both the children and I is that it's now

much easier than it would have been previously to get the people who are involved in the teaching to make decisions around spaces, shapes and areas for learning and play," says Rory McGrath.

That's a view echoed by one 9-year-old involved in the test user group, who pointedly asked, "Who actually goes to the school? It's mostly children. So why can't they design it?"

Well, now they can – while at the same time leveraging skills they use for play in the service of a construction project, and gaining insights into construction sector. A sector with a massive skills shortage...

**A video recording of the Shacklewell School Demo can be viewed via [tinyurl.com/psm-seismic](https://tinyurl.com/psm-seismic); try the software for yourself at [seismic-school-app.io](https://seismic-school-app.io)**





# Rooms for IMPROVEMENT

Mark Brown highlights the actions schools should take when looking to expand their premises with a modular building

1

## SEEK EXPERIENCE

Look for a provider with plenty of prior experience working in education.

Educational sites present some quite unique challenges in terms of health and safety, such as ensuring access while keeping the site safe and discrete. Enlisting a company used to the sector and its needs will save an awful lot of heartache.

2

## VIEW ONE

The word 'modular' can potentially refer to a wide range of different approaches. If possible, try and organise a visit a building previously delivered by the provider at a nearby school. There's nothing like seeing an existing building that's already in use for getting a real, tangible sense of how it will work in your setting.

3

## CONSIDER ACCESS

Some modular buildings are complete units that are moved into position; others might be assembled on site. Both approaches entail different challenges. The former group will require a crane and heavy lifting equipment, while the latter can be delivered at sites with relatively limited access.

4

## SPECIFY A USE

You may need extra classroom space, but a stand-alone building might be best used as a studio or a dedicated SEND space. Assigning a modular building a more specific purpose can free up classroom space that may be better situated within the main building, closer to the rest of the school.

5

## AVOID HIDDEN EXTRAS

A number of suppliers operating in this space will offer an all-in price with a turn-key service, including planning permission. This gives you a fixed price, full knowledge of what it will cost and project delivery from planning to handover, without the prospect of any unexpected charges.

6

## EMBRACE SUSTAINABILITY

A building that uses sustainable materials for its frame, cladding and other design elements can stimulate conversations between pupils and staff around environmental citizenship. Having an actual eco-building on your site adds a whole new dimension to your teaching around environmental and sustainability issues.

7

## CHECK THE RUNNING COSTS

It's possible to design and construct a modular building that generates zero energy costs through a shrewd and intelligent use of solar panels, sun pipes and active ventilation. It can be worthwhile investing more upfront on making the building fully passive, so that you can realise significant energy savings in the long term.

8

## POSITION IT WELL

A stand-alone building can provide views of nature, levels of natural light and ready access to the outdoors that aren't possible with traditional buildings. When positioned and oriented appropriately – your provider should be able to advise you on this – the building can enhance the wellbeing of students and staff.

9

## EXPLORE FINANCING

Fundraising for additional stand-alone buildings can be challenging and time consuming, but there are a number of financing options out there – state schools can use operating leases, for example. They can also be a source of revenue themselves; being separately heated and secured from the main building, they're ideal for letting out to the local community.

10

## FUTURE-PROOFING

Schools don't always have the funding to purchase all the extra space they need straight away, but can approach the process over multiple phases. Phase 1 might involve constructing a usable stand-alone building, with phases 2 and possibly 3 later seeing that building expand once financing is available in future years.



**Mark Brown is a consultant for the eco-friendly buildings specialist, TG Escapes**

[@learningescape](https://twitter.com/learningescape)  
[tgescapes.co.uk](http://tgescapes.co.uk)





## FEEL AND FINISH

*Mark Brown takes us through TG Escapes' delivery of a building intended to ease the pressures caused by one school's rapidly growing breakfast and after school club*

### DESIGN

Bishops Tachbrook Primary in Leamington Spa approached TG Escapes for a bespoke modular eco-building, having been impressed by the design, feel and finish of a building that the company had previously delivered for the nearby Sacred Heart School.

At the time, Bishops Tachbrook was seeing a rapid growth in demand for its breakfast and after school club provision, which was consequently placing a great deal of pressure on its existing school hall facilities.

The school's preferred approach was to set aside a unique, separate space for its after school club provision, albeit one which could also be used by the school during the day as an additional learning environment when required.

The project was finally completed in September 2018, at an overall cost of £193,000.

### FLEXIBILITY

TG Escapes sought to provide the flexibility the school needed by designing a building that contained a large room, toilets and kitchen. The school was keen for the structure to also include a viewing platform from which spectators could view sports activities taking place in the playground, which was achieved via the addition of an extended decking area.

TG Escapes worked closely with the school throughout the process to adapt elements of the building and resolve issues on site, such as a pooling of water that threatened to hinder access to the ramp. The flexible delivery process meant that additional elements could be incorporated into the design with ease – one example being the decking seating area, which was added following further discussions with the school.

### SAFEGUARDING

According to the school's headteacher, Andy Bretell, "Working with a company that understands schools, and which takes safety and safeguarding seriously, was a breath of fresh air. With previous projects, I often had to chase contractors to ensure tools were kept safe on site and that their staff signed in correctly, spoke courteously and secured the site properly. None of this was an issue with TG Escapes.

"TG Escapes were attentive to our needs throughout the project, finding solutions along the way to ensure we achieved everything we wanted, and everyone involved was fantastic to work with. TG Escapes really understands the needs of schools, and it was never a problem having them on our working school site during term time."

## KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

Some important and useful documents for those seeking further guidance on the planning, construction and maintenance of school buildings...

### BB103/104

These two documents set out the government's non-statutory school buildings and site area guidelines for mainstream and SEND/alternative provision respectively. Both documents contain useful information for headteachers, governors and others seeking advice on the amount of space recommended for particular teaching and learning activities. [tinyurl.com/psm-bb103](http://tinyurl.com/psm-bb103) / [tinyurl.com/psm-bb104](http://tinyurl.com/psm-bb104)



### Planning advice for maintained schools

If you're in need of an explainer on the intricacies of planning permission, permitted development rights and the like, this guide for state-funded schools (maintained only) by North Yorkshire County Council does a helpful job of collecting and condensing an array of information and advice in one place. [tinyurl.com/psm-nycc](http://tinyurl.com/psm-nycc)



### Good estate management for schools

Launched by the DfE and ESFA last year, 'GEMS' is a comprehensive manual and toolkit aimed at supporting schools, academies and MATs in all aspects of managing and maintaining a school estate, from overseeing the functioning of essential utilities to complying with health and safety regulations. [tinyurl.com/psm-gems](http://tinyurl.com/psm-gems)

# *“Everyone is passing the buck”*

Lucie Stephens describes what led her to campaign for the removal of asbestos in schools – and why the present situation resembles a ticking time bomb...

**B**efore she retired, my mother, Sue, had been a teacher for 30 years. Not long after, she started experiencing spells where she'd feel slightly breathless. When she found a lump on her chest, we steeled ourselves for what we thought would be a breast cancer diagnosis. After much of to-ing and fro-ing – her condition seemed beyond the expertise of hospitals local to her – the diagnosis came back in September 2014. Mesothelioma.

At that time I'd barely heard of asbestos. It was one of those things from the past you'd hear people talk about – asbestos in buildings now seen as the danger it was all along, like smoking. She was stage 4, for which there's no cure. It was just a question of time.

It's a horrible disease – but what upset her the most was the thought of all those classrooms she'd taught in, and how she hadn't been able to protect her students. No one had told her that there was asbestos in her workplace, and the notion that the children might have been affected caused her enormous distress.

That compelled me to find out if what happened to mum was simply an awful one-off – but the more I looked, the more I came to see just how widespread the problem is.

## **A PERVERSIVE PROBLEM**

My daughter was six when mum died. She's now eight, and has just started at a primary school housed in an old Victorian building. I discovered, after writing to the school, that asbestos had been present in the building at one time, having been used for fire doors and classroom partitions. Fortunately, it had been possible to remove the asbestos that was installed, but there are countless schools where the asbestos risks are far higher.

I then wrote to our LA, and it seems that asbestos in schools is a pervasive problem in our local area. That prompted me to start sending out a series of

Freedom of Information requests (see [tinyurl.com/psm-ls-foi](https://tinyurl.com/psm-ls-foi)) and find out as much about the issue as I could. There are many, many parents out there who, as was the case with me, don't know anything at all about the asbestos problem, but it's so important that they do – particularly with schools built in the 60s and 70s.

These are schools that were often designed as temporary structures with short lifespans in mind, but there are many still in use. Asbestos material can be found embedded throughout the infrastructure of these buildings, making it very difficult to remove. The Health and Safety Executive advises that as long as asbestos isn't damaged or disturbed, it doesn't pose a significant health risk to teachers and pupils – but as some unions have pointed out, all it takes for asbestos to be disturbed is for those schools to suffer some form of minor damage, such as a water leak.

There was one recent case of a school in the north east, where asbestos was present in the roof of the gym. When the wind blew hard enough, it would lift the ceiling tiles and cause dust from the asbestos insulation behind those tiles to fall down into the space below. The situation was deemed serious enough to require multiple visits by asbestos decontamination units. The headteacher of the school is on record in a 2017 Public Accounts Committee report (see [tinyurl.com/psm-pac-17](https://tinyurl.com/psm-pac-17)) as saying there were multiple instances when the school had to be closed, with students needing 'defumigation treatment' after being exposed to asbestos dust.

## **PHASED REMOVAL**

The DfE's latest response to the asbestos issue has been to carry out the Asbestos Management Assurance Process (AMAP) – an online survey launched in 2018 which asked schools to provide written assurances that they were compliant with

## **THE AMAP REPORT**

**Key findings from the DfE's Asbestos Management Assurance Process**

- **19,522 schools in England (88.4%) ultimately submitted their data to the AMAP**
- **80.9% of participating schools reported that asbestos was present on their estates**
- **17.7% of participating schools were found to be compliant with the law, but pursuing asbestos-related practice not in line with DfE guidance**
- **98.9% reported taking professional advice in relation to asbestos management**
- **95.4% of schools with asbestos present have an asbestos management plan in place**
- **93.6% have assessed the potential risk from Asbestos-Containing materials**

existing asbestos management legislation.

However, participation in the AMAP wasn't made mandatory. It was intended to run for three months, but the deadline had to be extended three times due to the poor response rate it received. The AMAP officially concluded in February this year, but it took until July for the DfE to report its findings (see 'The AMAP report').

Even then, the information released by the DfE is aggregated at a national level. The acknowledgement of those schools taking part doesn't state whether these schools do or don't contain asbestos, and the 12% that didn't respond to the survey haven't been identified. The DfE's justification for not releasing direct



information about individual schools is that doing so will lead to fewer schools responding to such surveys in future.

However, we know from work previously carried out by the NEU that only around 50% of teachers are aware of whether or not their school contains asbestos. We also know that the most effective way of keeping people safe in the presence of asbestos is to be transparent about where it is, so that people can avoid disturbing it.

This isn't about singling out individual schools and spreading anxiety, but about communicating the scale of the problem and making the case for a centrally funded, phased removal programme. It's an issue that should involve everyone, particularly those bodies – the LAs, the MATs – that have a responsibility for

school buildings, but have been poor at sharing information about asbestos. While everyone's passing the buck, the asbestos that's there is continuing to age and degrade.

In the FoI responses I've received since 2016, I've seen LAs stating that they've devolved all responsibilities for monitoring asbestos presence to individual schools, but that's not good enough. Schools need backup – an additional tier at the responsible body, with a duty for co-ordinating and storing asbestos data, and better support in helping them understand what constitutes a good asbestos survey.

At a time when there's a real shortage of money, it's an expensive problem – surveys by qualified and registered professionals are costly. There's the risk that schools wanting to follow procedures, but which have to economise, won't receive reliable data. There's now less money to tackle asbestos in schools than there was when my mother was alive. Staff and parents can see that schools are crumbling around them, which is just making the problem even worse.

## REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

For the past 30 years in the US, schools containing asbestos have produced written reports detailing where their asbestos is, how it's being managed and what their future plans consist of. The process has kept the issue live in the minds of teaching staff and those with responsibility for managing it, while at the same time raising awareness among parents and children, which is why I'm petitioning for similar reporting obligations on schools in England (see [tinyurl.com/psm-asb-reports](http://tinyurl.com/psm-asb-reports)).

I'm also seeking crowdfunding for a website that will enable teachers and parents to check conclusively whether their school or any others in their local area contain asbestos (see [tinyurl.com/psm-ls-cf](http://tinyurl.com/psm-ls-cf)). The reality is that the majority of schools are trying to tackle the problem as best as they can – but if you're the only school in your area talking publicly about the asbestos management you're doing, you run the risk of being defined by it due to people's lack of knowledge over how widespread the problem is.

A report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Occupational Health and Safety found that a five-year-old is five times more at risk of developing mesothelioma than a 30-year-old, yet 'acceptable' levels of asbestos exposure in schools are set at adult levels. It's a ticking time bomb – in 40 to 50 years time, we'll see the true consequences of the delays and lack of action so far.





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## Prowise

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## ORGANISE YOUR MEDIA FILES

It's worth asking whether your broadband provider's offering could be more competitive, says Terry Freedman...

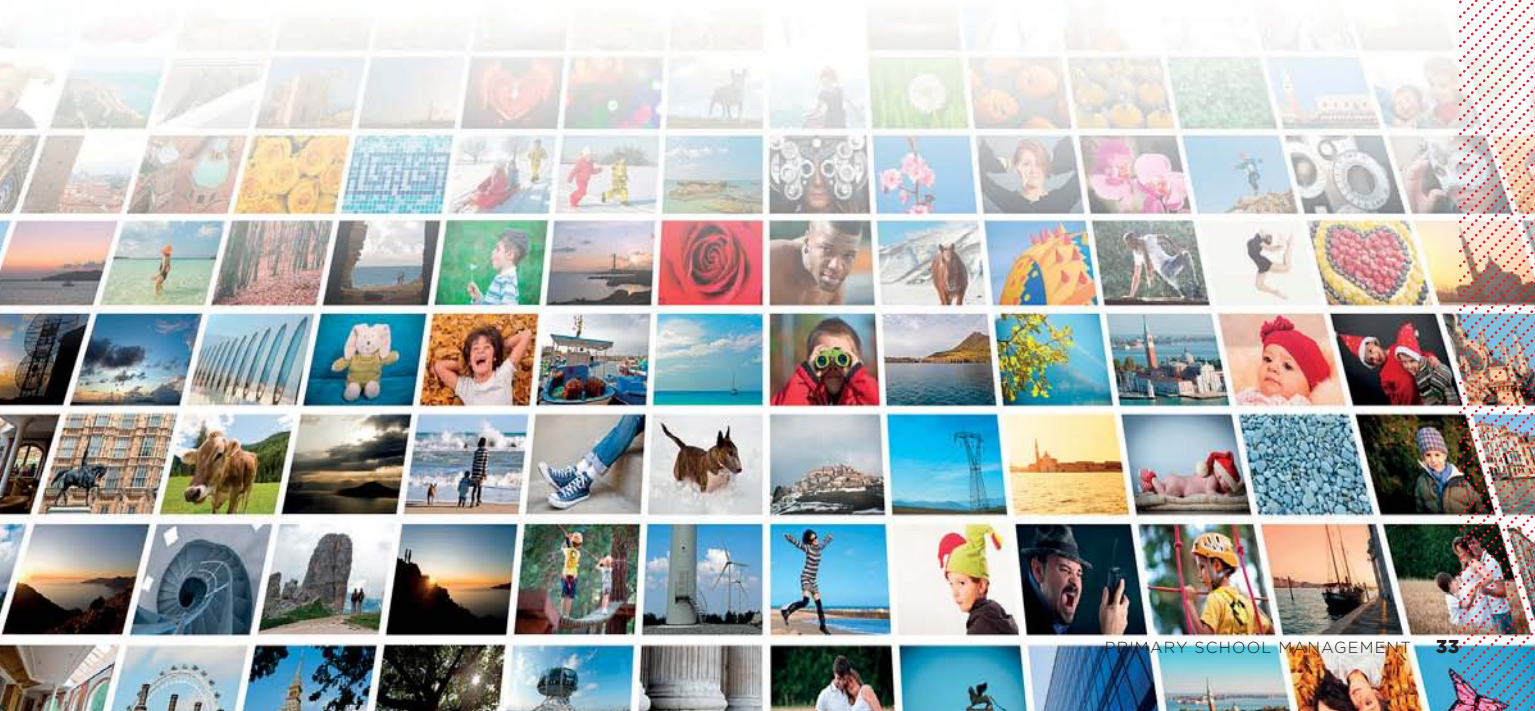
**H**ow many of us are diligent enough to carefully save and organise our media files in a way that makes them easy to retrieve when needed? The temptation is often to save them virtually anywhere as quickly as we can because we're in a hurry and don't want to lose them. Yet this short-term, time-saving measure typically translates into a long-term headache. Nobody wants to be stuck at the front of a class looking for that one video you saved several days or weeks ago that you've planned the whole lesson around...

The path to frustration-free media storage involves several steps. First, decide where they should be saved to. Regardless of whether your school favours an on-site server or cloud-based

storage (see [bit.ly/psmmmedia](http://bit.ly/psmmmedia) for more on that), it's important that the relevant files are saved in a central location that can be easily accessed from different devices throughout the school – not just on an external hard drive, USB stick or laptop.

### FILE NAMES

The files in question should be easily locatable, which means giving some thought as to how your digital filing system should work. To be clear, I'm referring here to the system of files and folders found in Windows, macOS and other operating systems. Media applications such as iTunes often include 'library' functions to help users organise and sort their media, but configuring these across multiple





machines and users can be difficult. In most cases, calling up the file you're looking for via Explorer or Finder will be quicker and easier.

When it comes to the format of your folders and filenames, there's no single 'right way', but whichever approach you decide on must be consistent. Filenames such as 'Y5CompScratch01', 'Y5CompScratch02' and so on will give a clue as to what those files contain, even if you don't know the exact name. Ensure that any numbered files include leading zeroes (01, 02, etc.) so that they can be listed in numerical order.

One problem with this naming approach is that while it might work for an individual's own media collection, it can cause issues if multiple teachers are regularly saving media of their own to a shared folder and aren't aware of when filenames have already been used by a colleague.

Labelling filenames with the date can help – try using the 'YYYYMMDD' format so that they can be reliably sorted into chronological order.

## FOLDER STRUCTURES

Consider also your folder structure. Will your files be stored in folders distinguished by media type, year group, subject or a combination of all three?

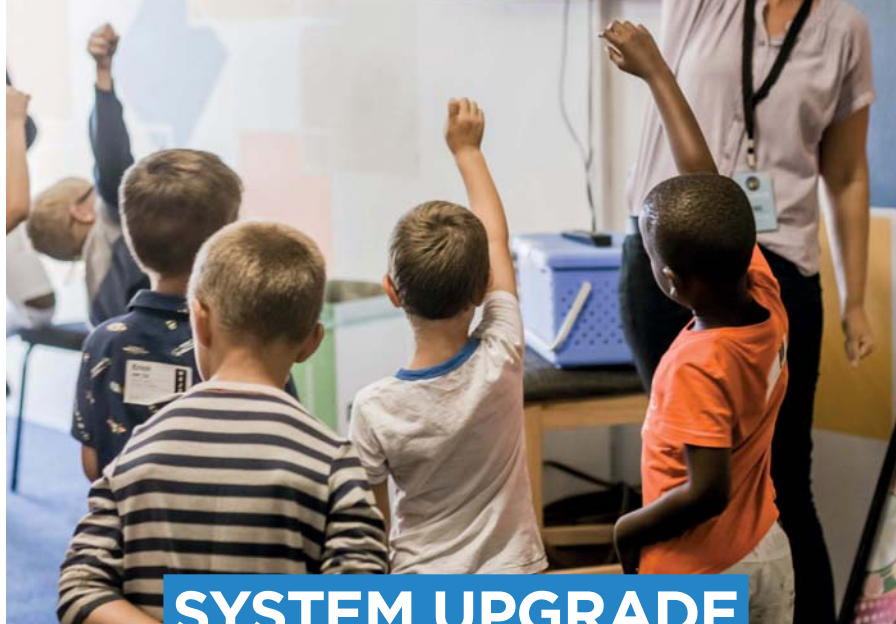
You could, for example, create a folder called 'Year 1', and create inside that a series of subfolders for different subjects, plus further subfolders inside those for different types of media (eg. 'Audio clips', 'Presentations', 'Photos', etc.) The resulting folder path might look like this: 'Y1' > 'Computing' > 'Video clips'.

Having determined the approach you'll be using, three further elements will be needed to ensure things go smoothly: a 'style guide' or section in the staff handbook clearly setting out how the system works; a staff training session slot to ensure everyone's aware of it; and if possible, a regularly updated list of files on the system that staff have access to and can be referred to at any time.

*Terry Freedman is an independent education technology consultant and writer*

 @terryfreedman

 [ictineducation.org](http://ictineducation.org)



## We find out how one Scunthorpe school will be starting the year with a dramatically improved ICT network...

For the pupils and staff at Bottesford Infant School in Scunthorpe, the 2019/20 school year will see a marked difference in their ability to utilise the latest advances in learning technology, thanks to a brand new, world class ICT infrastructure.

The school's IT network was previously overseen by the LA, and often subject to a number of connection issues. Lacking a centralised server of its own, the school was reliant on a Wi-Fi connection controlled through a server administered by the county council, leading to instances of network downtime and disruption to classes. Seeking a better solution, Bottesford approached school ICT specialist Education Lincs to see if its networking technology could be brought up to speed.

Education Lincs set about rebuilding the school's ICT infrastructure from the ground up. At the heart of the new configuration sits a centralised server, to which the school can connect the 120 iPads, eight 70-inch, WiFi-enabled interactive screens, nine laptops and 10 desktop workstations used by the school's 206 pupils and 22 staff. Based around the Nebula Cloud Platform from Zyxel, the school's network can now be managed and configured remotely, with any changes made instantaneously.

The deployment of Nebula will also give staff at the school a much clearer picture of how the school's internet connection is being used, levels of user traffic and how the resulting load is being distributed across the network, with the option to intervene instantly, if needed – a marked contrast with the set up that was previously in place.

As Ed Parrott, senior system technician

at Education Lincs, explains, "Our solution included Zyxel's Nebula cloud managed network technology, access points and Power over Ethernet (PoE) switches, which ensure high security and efficiency at a reasonable cost. The implementation was straightforward and entirely nonintrusive, taking just three hours to fully complete."

According to Bottesford's business manager, Lesley Zetterstrom, "This upgraded network solution marks a new milestone for our school. Both pupils and teachers alike benefit from having real-time access to important information that makes the learning and teaching process more interactive and stimulating."

Parrott adds, "We've worked with Zyxel for two years, and in that time have successfully completed 18 school ICT projects together. Its products are affordable, but still offer high performance. Suppliers we've worked with in the past have been very expensive for licensing, which for schools is usually unsustainable"

Completing the school's new network configuration are a series of Zyxel gigabit switches, which ensure that the school's network remains running at a fast and stable speed while pupils and staff complete a whole host of different tasks, whether those be print jobs or updating the school's records. The discreet Zyxel NAPI02 access points installed by Education Lincs provide strong coverage for all mobile devices throughout the school, supporting activities that range from streaming videos in the classrooms to web browsing in the staffroom.

 @EducationLincs

 [education-lincs.com](http://education-lincs.com)

# Host an online safety evening

Holding an online safety event can help schools share important messaging around the issue with parents, says Mark Bentley – but make sure you're properly prepared...

**O**ur team often hears from school staff who have been asked to run a parent session on 'online safety', and are looking for advice on what they should do. These evenings can often be intimidating – how do you ensure that parents actually turn up, and once they're sat down, what should you tell them? My own tips on how to run an interesting and informative online safety seminar for parents would include the following...

## Drip-feed information

Are parent sessions alone really the best way of keeping your parents and carers informed? We would recommend drip-feeding information to families throughout the year, thus making the news and advice you'll be sharing at the session less overwhelming. If you already send home regular newsletters concerning the school curriculum and organised events, why not add an online safety pointer, or signpost to a useful resource to each issue? It's an easy way to make a regular impact on parents.

Face-to-face sessions can also be helpful, but stop to consider whether a standalone 'big bang' annual approach will be effective. How likely is it that parents will attend? Will your efforts lead to measurable, sustainable support? If the answer to those questions is 'no', it might be wise to consider a different approach.

## Gauge parents' confidence

A good way of sparking productive discussion is to present the following statistics (all taken from our 'Hopes and Streams' survey of 40,000 young people) on a large display as parents enter the session:

- Two in five pupils have never told anyone about the worst thing that's happened to them online
- Of those who have, 94% told

someone they knew, and 71% chose to confide in a parent/carer

- 73% of pupils trust their parents' advice on online safety, but only 56% talk about it more than once a year

Ask the parents if they feel confident discussing online safety with their children. Then point out how the first two stats highlight the need for families to be open with each other, while the third stat indicates that children recognise how helpful adults' life experience and wisdom can be when facing a challenge online.

## Don't scaremonger

We don't recommend providing lists of 'good' and 'bad' apps. This can generate a false sense of security, provide the sites with free publicity that might draw more young people to them or sow panic among parents. Focus instead on helping parents understand the latest features and functionality of games and

apps, and ensure they're familiar with general guidelines surrounding sensible online behaviour.

## Involve the kids

Hearing live testimonies from the children has a big impact. Get some pupils to come along and tell parents what video games they play, which apps they use and their online likes and dislikes. Make sure there's enough time for parents to ask questions. You'll be surprised by the answers, and so will the parents!

## End on a positive

Screen time isn't inherently dangerous. In fact, it has many educational and social benefits, and it's important that parents are made aware of the many positives associated with the internet. It's essential that pupils today are equipped with the digital skills they'll need to thrive and prosper – and that this be emphasised to parents.



**Mark Bentley is the Digisafe safeguarding and cybersecurity manager at LGfL**

 @LGfL

 [parentsafe.lgfl.net](https://parentsafe.lgfl.net)

# THE ABC OF VLES

Derek Devine looks at the planning, preparations and actions schools should undertake when introducing a new virtual learning environment

**V**irtual learning environments allow students to expand their learning beyond the classroom walls. They enable learning to take place anytime and anywhere, thus empowering learners to take ownership of their own learning experiences.

Traditionally, VLEs have been used to facilitate distance education as an alternative to classroom-delivered courses with the aid of computers and mobile devices in the home. Increasingly, however, they're not just being used for distance learning, but also as a way for schools to provide blended learning within classrooms – that is, linking them in with standard classroom lessons, but in a way that gives students additional access to courses or curriculums they may not have been able to access otherwise.

## CHOOSE YOUR USE

VLEs can be used in a variety of different ways. One popular application is to help identify and support intervention strategies, which might involve parents using a VLE at home to support their children, or teachers in classroom settings using one to identify where particular intervention strategies may be required and implementing them. They can be used to provide catch-up support for new students who may have recently entered the school, or to provide extension activities for students working at a faster pace.

Another use for VLEs is to assist those students who are unable to work in traditional classrooms due to a particular set of challenges. It may be that they physically can't access the classroom, or that the classroom environment, for one reason or another, isn't able to support their needs.

When choosing which VLE to use, it's important to think carefully about what your specific needs are. Some programmes will simply provide curriculum content via online means. Others will also provide access to a dedicated qualified teaching professional who can communicate with the students directly via emails, text messages or through online lessons.

The inclusion of live lessons can be a big differentiator between one VLE solution and the next, and how they're

implemented can vary a great deal. It may be that students can call up lessons that are pre-recorded, or even dial into livestreamed lessons and webinars taking place at scheduled times.

Of course, one of the most important considerations of all will be how the VLE can support your curriculum. Some systems will provide content focused on core subjects only, but it may be that your school is looking for a straightforward and cost effective way of expanding its curriculum provision into other areas. Modern languages, for example, or the arts – subjects where you might currently have a shortage of relevant teaching knowledge and expertise.

## GETTING PERSONAL

A key feature of many VLEs are their inclusion of built-in assessment tools. When introducing a new programme of learning delivered via a VLE, this will let you gauge where students currently are and how appropriate the learning content will be. Will it be necessary for your students to start the course from the beginning, or do they already understand a lot of the material that will be covered?

Given the range of different systems available, the first step is to outline what your goals are. Identify your specific needs, prepare a list of questions for





providers and see which solutions appear to be the best fit for your setting and budget. Systems that feature live lessons tend to command a premium, and may vary in cost depending on how many students will require access to them. Something to consider is whether you're looking to use those live lessons and remote teaching professionals as part of a one-to-one programme

– perhaps for a pupil with SEND – or to support the teaching of 30 pupils within a classroom settings.

You can also expect VLEs that incorporate adaptive technology to cost more. Rather than simply presenting students with an existing course of learning to work through, these systems will be capable of generating individual learning plans based on a pupil's specific needs, having identified what those are via built-in assessment tools. Other possible features to look out for include progress monitoring and reporting functions, and translation tools that can be used to support students with EAL.

To introduce a VLE is to embark on a long term project, so you'll want to get things right from the start. It's important to access the material and test the means of delivery for a prolonged trial period of at least a month so that you can be sure it's right for you.

Involve teachers during the trial period, familiarise them with how it

works and then hold a debriefing once the trial has ended. Reflect on what worked for you and what didn't – more often than not, the trial period will raise numerous questions about the system that you'll probably want to take up with the provider.

Once you've settled on a particular system, an implementation strategy meeting should be planned with the provider. Use this to develop a plan for the upcoming academic year regarding how the system should be best configured and rolled out in accordance with your needs. Make sure that you agree a series of key touchpoints, where you and the provider will exchange information on how the implementation is

progressing, what's working well and whether anything needs to change.

A time frame should also be agreed for staff and pupil training. Will this be carried out on site? Is it going to be delivered remotely via webinar? Will the school require any additional training materials? Consider appointing VLE 'champions' within the school to help with your training efforts – teaching staff who understand both the capabilities of the system and the concerns and perspectives of their colleagues. Bear in mind, however, that teachers move on – ensure that there's more than one VLE champion among your staff so that this expertise doesn't go when they do.

**“Test the means of delivery for a prolonged trial period of at least a month”**

## REACH OUT TO PARENTS

Finally, communicate your aims and goal for the VLE to parents. Many of the schools I've previously worked with hosted a dedicated parents' evening, where they presented their reasons for introducing the system. It's important to stress that far from being a way of replacing traditional teaching – as some parents might see it – a VLE is there to

## ROLL-OUT CHECKLIST

- Distribute details of the plan and outcomes you've agreed with your provider to all staff who'll be using the system
- Your provider should issue you with manuals, best practice guides and other resources; make sure that staff know where these are kept and how to access them
- Check that the bandwidth of your school network has sufficient capacity to support the VLE applications you have in mind and number of users likely to be accessing them at the same time
- Clarify what's included within the initial set up cost – what does the standard feature set consist of? Is there a particular feature you need that will incur an additional expense?

support students as much as possible, and potentially help personalise their learning.

Communicating that message to parents effectively and getting them on board early on is key, because depending on the system you choose and how it's implemented, those parents may well be interacting with it themselves. At the very least, if you're expecting their children to access the programme from home, a significant proportion of parents will want to see for themselves what it does and how it works. If parents have confidence in the system you're planning to introduce, it's more likely that the implementation will be a smooth and successful one.



**Derek Devine is international business development manager at Edmentum**

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# 5 REASONS TO TRY... Parents' Evening Manager

FROM PARENTMAIL

Neil Hardiker, Education Sales Manager for ParentMail, explains how Parents' Evening Manager can take the pressure out of parents' evenings



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

Parents' Evening Manager syncs with SIMS and other MIS to make planning one of the busiest events in the school calendar straightforward and easy. Eliminating pupil post with the free ParentMail App and its handy push notifications enables busy parents to respond to invitations on-the-go, ensuring schools receive a great response.

### 1 COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY

Improve responses and ensure a great turnout by sending invitations and information directly into parents' hands. With the ParentMail App, parents receive a notification when it's time to book, and can select convenient appointments to suit their busy schedules in seconds. Online communications take the paper out of parents' meetings, with event details stored securely online – no more lost booking slips or side-stepped appointments!

### 2 SAVE TIME

Online communications and in-app bookings do far more for your team than simply reducing print costs. The flexible system makes planning the night quick and easy; set appointment durations in advance, determine booking windows and arrange reminders for parents yet to respond. Gain an overview of the event with the handy reporting suite, and provide parents with all the information they need in advance (meeting locations, where to go upon arrival etc.) to ensure the evening runs smoothly.

### 3 SUPPORT TEACHERS

While appointments may be brief, it's important that everyone leaves feeling they got the most out of their time. Enable teachers to plan ahead for their meetings by providing parents with the opportunity to leave notes when booking appointments. Sharing timetables and notes with the staff team in advance will ensure that teachers are well-placed to plan for individual meetings and have



relevant information for each student immediately to hand – a sure fire way to impress parents!

### 4 POWERFUL FEATURES

Parents' Evening Manager utilises ParentMail's market-leading communications platform to make managing one of the busiest events in the school calendar simple and

seamless. Parents' Evening Manager is just one solution designed by ParentMail to save time and money for schools. Highly effective as a stand-alone product or as part of ParentMail's wider parental engagement platform, thousands of primary schools turn to Parents' Evening Manager to support their busy teams every year.

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Lots of Explorify's activities are discussion-based which encourages pupils to talk to and learn from each other. The tasks empower children to explore ideas and lead their own learning, developing skills that are transferable across many subjects in the primary curriculum.

## 3 *Accessible for all*

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**Elaine, Wales**

Develop your pupils' thinking skills and enhance your science teaching. Explorify is a free digital resource for primary school teachers that is easy to slot into your teaching, inclusive and a great assessment tool.

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# Community Engagement

## COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD

Constructive engagement with parents shouldn't entail having to sacrifice your own personal time, says Winston Poyton...

**P**arental engagement is a key ingredient in the recipe that produces pupil achievement. No one would deny that encouraging enthusiastic parents to become more involved in their child's education is a good thing, but teachers are increasingly finding themselves buried under an avalanche of parental emails, and feeling the need to respond to them out of school hours.

If your teachers have inadvertently opened the floodgates, what can they do to keep their heads above water?

### ORGANISE YOUR INBOX

First, decide which parent emails are genuinely urgent and which can wait until you're back in school tomorrow – but that can be easier said than done. Some teachers find that sorting incoming messages into separate folders can help them sort the high priority emails regarding an unhappy child in their class from less pressing concerns.

A good habit for preserving your work/life balance is 'batch checking', whereby school emails are checked at several set points during the day, rather than answered all in one go during the evening.

### TARGETED COMMUNICATIONS

School communications software enables personalised messages to be sent to specific parents, classes or clubs. This will allow you to pre-empt many parental enquiries and reduce the overall volume of your email activity by deploying different methods of communication and modes of messaging that work more effectively for certain sets of parents.

More importantly, this type of personalised approach will enable you to set and better manage parents' expectations of when they can expect to receive a reply. It's no longer necessary to distribute blanket communications to the whole school,



an entire year group or class – an approach that can tie up valuable resources without addressing everyone's concerns.

Instead, sending out a message regarding that week's additional reading support to a small group of parents, or reminding the families of the after-school rounders team to bring their kit with them, can answer parents' questions for them, before they even feel the need to ask. Some communications systems also allow for the inclusion of links to external information sources, such as reading lists or useful websites for helping children practice their times tables.

### DEVICE-FRIENDLY

Another effective way of cutting down your email traffic is to deliver relevant messages directly to parents' smartphones and tablets. Some schools will ask parents to download a mobile app that provides ready access to all forms of information they might need over the course of their child's time at school. With all those details in place, parents will, in theory, have less need to email in specific queries.

Rather than bombard parents with permission slips to sign, attendance forms to fill out and numerous other data requests, and then waiting for them reply, schools can use mobile apps to capture this type of required data directly. Once parents are able to book seats for the Christmas production, pay for the museum trip and submit their consent forms via a few taps and swipes, you'll likely see the volume of routine parental emails plummet.

Adopting a more streamlined way of sending rich, relevant and targeted information will help schools dramatically reduce their incoming emails, and enable their teachers to attain a better work/life balance. As *Middlemarch's* Dorothea Brooke puts it, "What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?"

*Winston Poyton is education, charities and commercial product director at IRIS Software Group; find out how ParentMail, part of the IRIS Software Group, can help improve home/school communications at [parentmail.co.uk](http://parentmail.co.uk)*



## EMBRACE MINDFULNESS

How a new Scope initiative is looking to help schools engage with 'mindful monsters'...

**A**s awareness of and interest in mindfulness has grown among the public at large, an increasing number of schools have begun to incorporate mindfulness lessons and activities into their curriculums and daily routines. Now, those interested in engaging in mindfulness education for the first time, or in organising a special event as part of the mindfulness provision they already offer, are being encouraged to sign up to a schools-focused extension of the Mindful Monsters initiative devised by the disability charity Scope.

Originally launched in 2017, the ongoing Mindful Monsters campaign sees families receive seven mindfulness-inspired activity cards each month, which aim to help children develop emotional resilience, observation, kindness, concentration and relaxation, in exchange for a recurring £7.50 donation to the charity.

From September, Scope will be providing schools with 'Mindful Monster Primary School Packs' aimed at Reception to KS1 learners, which contain a new set of activity cards specifically developed for use in the classroom, lesson plans and promotional materials. While the packs will be free to order, the charity expects those taking part to commit to fundraising for Scope throughout the year.

Having received the packs, the idea is for schools to hold their own Mindful Monsters Week at a time of their choosing, the first four days of which will involve children exploring the themes of concentration, positivity, creativity and calmness, each with their own assigned monster character. The activities contained in the pack are structured so that they don't distract from the standard school curriculum, with teachers

expected to record how children are feeling both before and after each activity in order to gauge the resulting impact on their mental health. Each Mindful Monsters Week will then conclude on the Friday with a party that optionally doubles up as a fundraising event for Scope.

According to Si Muddell, Scope's director of engagement and innovation, "Scope created Mindful Monsters two years ago to answer parents' need to help build children's emotional resilience and wellbeing, while also providing a fun activity so parents could spend quality time with their children.

"Since then, teachers have continually told us about the need for Mindful Monsters in school – especially after Ofsted recently made pupil wellbeing and resilience part of their school inspection guidelines."

The charity cites research by The Key, which in its 2017 State of Education report found that 79% of school leaders had observed increases in stress, anxiety and panic attacks among pupils, and that six out of 10 school leaders believed pupils to have become less emotionally resilient over the preceding two years.

Scope's development of the packs included trials at two schools – Rockmount Primary School in London and Houghton Special School in Telford. Ms Knowles, a teacher at the latter, was quoted as saying "Mindful Monsters is great way of getting your children focussed and calm for the school day ahead. It also helped me, as a teacher, to focus on the children. The cards made me check how children were progressing along the week, and I'm seeing a difference in the students' behaviour already."

 [mindfulmonsters.co.uk/schools](http://mindfulmonsters.co.uk/schools)



# Could your pupils benefit from higher learning?

Ruth Edwards and Kimberley Ang describe how a partnership between Bath Spa University and three local primaries helped boost pupils' reading attainment

**T**he Bath Spa University Access and Participation Office is committed to supporting the progression of learners in groups currently under-represented in higher education. In accordance with this priority, one of its strategic aims is to support local schools and the educational attainment of their learners.

Low prior attainment has been identified by the Office for Students as a crucial barrier to accessing higher education (see [tinyurl.com/ofsa-attainment](https://tinyurl.com/ofsa-attainment)). The Access and Participation Office has therefore developed a Primary Reader Scheme in collaboration with the Bath Spa University Students' Union to support reading progression and encourage pupils' enjoyment of reading at three primary schools in Bath – Twerton Infant School and Nursery, St Michael's Junior Church School and Roundhill Primary School. The selected schools all have high proportions of pupils in groups currently under-represented in higher education, including those

eligible for free school meals, and are situated in areas where the proportion of young people participating

in higher education is recognised as being relatively low, according to the participation of local areas (POLAR) classification (see [tinyurl.com/psm-polar](https://tinyurl.com/psm-polar)).

To ensure the Scheme supported the university's aims and benefited both the schools and pupils involved, staff from the Access and Participation Office and Students' Union met with senior staff at all three selected schools to discuss priorities. Schools were supportive of this initial contact and indicated that they'd be receptive to receiving reading support, having identified reading attainment as a priority area that doesn't always receive an appropriate level of resourcing.

The Scheme was piloted in all three selected schools from January to June 2019. University student volunteers were each matched to between three and five pupils and proceeded to work with them at their schools on a weekly basis, listening to them read and participating in discussions on comprehension.

Prior to this, the university had worked with the schools to select those pupils who would benefit most from the Scheme's additional support. While each school used their own metrics, pupils were most commonly chosen because they either had a lower reading ability than their peers, or because they enjoyed reading but lacked the time for it. The schools' teachers hoped that the pupils' participation in the Scheme would thus either help narrow these attainment gaps, or provide much-needed opportunities for further

practice and development of their skills.

The university also worked with the schools in providing training for the university student volunteers who would be supporting the pupils with their reading. The schools were keen for the student volunteers to possess a basic knowledge of phonics (letters and sounds up to Phase 5 Part 1); staff at one of the three schools thus delivered a training session attended by the Scheme's volunteers.

Though we are still collating a full 2018-19 evaluation report for the Scheme, our initial findings suggest that it's had a positive impact, with teachers indicating that it's successfully supported pupils with their confidence in, and enjoyment of reading. Evaluation responses from the pupils themselves point to improvements in their reading ability, alongside comments that the student volunteers helped them with their pronunciation and understanding. Whilst it's not possible to attribute these reading improvements wholly to the Scheme, it's nonetheless a positive indication that the pupils may be benefiting, even if indirectly, from the support it provides.

The university hopes to deliver the Primary Reader Scheme again in future academic years, while broadening its scope through increased uptake within the three schools and delivering it within additional schools.

**Ruth Edwards is an evaluation officer and Kimberley Ang an outreach officer at Bath Spa University's Widening Participation Office**

 @bathspauni

 [bathspa.ac.uk](https://bathspa.ac.uk)

# ATTRACT THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST

When appointing a new member of staff, nobody wants to settle on someone who's not quite right says Hannah Day – and with the right approach, you won't have to

**I**nterviews can often feel quite one-sided, but in reality the school is being judged just as much as those being interviewed. I remember how, when I was looking for my first teaching role, I would have taken anything – after all, a job is better than no job – but what about now?

Like many experienced teachers, I'm happy with where I currently work, but also open to new opportunities should anything interesting come along. What this means is that schools and colleges have to do more than simply advertise their posts if they want the very best staff to consider applying. These, then, would be my tips – beginning with...

## CRAFT THE ADVERT

I recently became aware of a Grade 1 college that advertised for a member of staff by detailing the area of expertise the outgoing person had, since they wanted a close fit replacement, plus their responsibilities. The end result was a hyper-focused job advert that served to put many off applying. Would-be applicants evidently interpreted the advert as a 'must-have' list, rather than a series of preferences.

When the college found itself with a meagre collection of applications to choose from, a second advertising approach was conceived (with accompanying costs), but this time with a few changes. First, the detailed skill set requirements were condensed into a much more concise expression of preference. Second, they rethought the role and put out two adverts – one advertising a teaching role with additional management responsibilities, and another for a role focusing just

on teaching.

This netted the college a much larger pool of applicants to choose from, enabling them to interview those who embraced the management aspects of the role and those who didn't. They then examined how the department could be run with the new team in place. By being less prescriptive they were able to give themselves more options, and thus succeed in filling the post.

## INFORM YOUR CANDIDATES

Make sure that anyone selected for interview is provided with all the information they'll need. What will the mini-teach component focus on? Where will they park? What's the outline of the day? The more you tell them, the more they can prepare. At the same time, you'll look more organised and help the candidates feel more confident about your institution.

## WELCOME YOUR CANDIDATES

Interviews are nerve-racking affairs, so make sure your candidates are welcomed appropriately. The best interviews I've had are those when I've been met by a member of SLT or the principal, and they've been willing to talk me through key elements of the standard school day. It looks professional, and can help answer many questions that candidates will have, without them having to ask – not least, 'What is this institution really like, and do I want to work here?' An efficient start will make it more likely that they'll answer that question with 'yes'.

It also demonstrates a school-wide interest in the appointment. Managers are busy people, so seeing one take time out of their schedule shows that the process is important to them – and by extension, that we, the interviewees, are too.





## SHOW EVERYTHING

If I'm going to leave my job, then I want to know what I'm leaving it for. I need to have a look round and get to know the place. While this has typically been the case at interviews I've attended, I know of people for whom the entire interview processes took place in one small section of the building. Their impressions were of institutions trying to hide what they were really like, resulting in them not accepting the jobs being offered.

That may have simply been an oversight on the part of the schools, but without being shown around, how can candidates confidently accept the job and all the major changes it will entail for their personal and professional lives? Tours aren't just there to show candidates where the staff room and canteen are – they also show how staff and students interact with each other, how well kept the school is and its general behaviour and culture. All are vital pieces of information that candidates will be eager to glean.

## DEVISE A TIMETABLE

Make sure you've carefully planned out the day on which you'll be conducting interviews, issued clearly laid out schedules to all interviewees and organised everything you'll need ahead of time. I was once left sitting in an empty corridor for 20 minutes before

having to go and find someone. I'd been delivered to the 'student panel', but no one had thought to organise any students to actually interview me. Needless to say, as a result of their disorganization I didn't want to work at that particular school.

## RE-JIG IF NEEDED

Equally, you may wish to start with a wide range of candidates and edit down the shortlist at lunchtime. That's fine, if done efficiently and politely. Don't tell unsuccessful candidates in front of the successful ones that they'll be going home. Separating them will spare those who are not right for the post time otherwise spent in formal interview, while speeding up the day for everyone else. Re-organise and re-print the timetables, then continue in a professional manner.

## FIND OUT WHAT THEY WANT

Experienced staff are likely to be confident in their teaching and/or management abilities and clear as to their basic expectations of what a school environment should be, but what about their long-term goals? Are there any aspects of their career they want to develop that you could support them with? You'll never know without asking.

During the application process, ask applicants to consider any additional elements of their career they'd like to

## HOW DID IT GO?

If asked, give feedback. It can be helpful for unsuccessful candidates to reflect on the day and draw on the experience to set them up for success next time. Job interviews aren't just about securing jobs; they also present opportunities for education professionals to reflect on where they are in their careers, where they'd like to be and what they need to do to get there, for which interview feedback can be invaluable.

discuss and set aside time for this at the end of the interview. That way, they can come prepared with a considered answer. It's best to avoid asking them for responses during the application process itself, as it may put off those who love to teach and want to focus on the classroom.

## ENDING THE DAY

Be sure to thank each candidate as they leave and let them know when they can expect an answer. It's always best to state a period that's longer than what you think will be needed. 'This evening' might be doable, but telling candidates that you won't be letting them know until the end of the following day will give you time to mull over decisions if there are any differences of opinions and make an offer, while giving the candidate space to accept or decline.

Don't put off a potentially great member of staff because your school failed to shine on interview day. Make sure you're as prepped as your candidates.



**Hannah Day** is head of visual arts, media and film at Ludlow

**College, and interviewed for a new post just last month**

@ludlowcollegeuk

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# HOW TO RECRUIT A SCHOOL BUSINESS LEADER

Hilary Goldsmith looks at what headteachers should do to find the perfect person to oversee their school support services...

**T**he school business profession covers a huge remit – leadership, strategic planning, finance, HR, payroll, administration, premises management, health & safety, catering, ICT, commercial activity, marketing and communications. Your school might need some, or all of those areas covered by your new SBL, depending on your context – so before you dig out the advert you used last time and download the first SBL job description you can find on Google, here are a few pointers to think about...

**1. Get the job description right.** You can start with a generic one, of course, but spend some time tailoring it to the actual role you want your SBL to carry out. There's nothing more off-putting than a generic job description, since it can indicate to potential applicants that you don't really understand the role yourself.

**2. Prioritise the areas of the role** to match where your school's at on its improvement journey. If the next three years will be all about finance then say so. If you've got an expansion, or any building condition issues coming up, make sure that's reflected in the advert and person spec.

**3. Examine your existing SLT and middle leaders** and understand the skills you already have around you. If you've got a fantastic premises manager, or an assistant head who's an expert in data management, think about what you might be able to compromise on if your favoured candidate doesn't excel in every area of the job description.

**4. Spend time on the advert.** No one wants a boring job, but neither do they want to be misled about the school's position. A good SBL will be fascinated by the challenges of a deficit budget and a crumbling doer-upper, as it's a chance to make a real difference.

**5. On interview day, let middle managers meet the candidates.** They'll ask the questions you didn't even know needed



asking, but which will be the ones that really matter to your support teams. Listen to their feedback before making a decision.

**6. Instead of the usual 40-minute written finance task,** consider setting some written work ahead of the interview and give the candidates 48 hours to work on it. It's rare for an SBL to bash out an important piece of work in 40 minutes, so give them enough time to write you a professional report of the standard you'll be expecting in future. If you're worried about collusion you can insert some follow-up questions into the interview to test their knowledge, but remember that a large part of the SBL role is about ethics and trust.

**7. Ditch the PowerPoint presentation.** It's not in the natural skillset of most SBLs and likely to show them at their worst, rather than their best. By all means, test their ability to deliver complex messages – but do so in a meeting sat round a table where they can shine, not shake.

**8. Be present.** Many interview processes will hold the head in reserve for the panel interview like a diva, with maybe a five-minute introduction at the start of the day. Yet the relationship between a head and SBL is close and mutually supportive – you need to know if you can get on with this person, and they need to see the real you, not the public veneer. Wipe your diary for the day and spend some informal time with the candidates. This is an important appointment, unlike any other on your senior team, so it's vital to get it right.



**Hilary Goldsmith is a school business leadership consultant**

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# MOVING THE NEEDLE

Children's behaviour issues are invariably symptomatic of an underlying anxiety or problem. The COMPASS approach can point you in the right direction, writes Sue Gascoyne...

**W**orking with children as a play therapist and sensory engagement specialist is a bit like being an 'emotions detective', in the sense of trying to put yourself in a child's shoes to better understand what they might be thinking, feeling and needing.

We all have three fundamental psychological needs that underpin our wellbeing and openness to learning new things. The need to belong (relatedness), the need to be, do and explore (autonomy) and the need to feel 'I can' (competence).

For children, behaviour is invariably a symptom of an underlying anxiety or problem, which if left unaddressed can spark a chain of misunderstandings and disappointments.

Working therapeutically in schools with children experiencing behaviour issues, the COMPASS approach provides a tool for focusing on:

- **Children's behaviour as a recognised means of COMMunication**
- **The importance of People-friendly environments**
- **positive Attachment with significant caregivers**
- **Sensory approaches to caring and learning**
- **Developing Self regulation**

At the heart of this tool lies the four compass points of noticing, exploration, structure and warmth.

## NOTICING

Just as finding north is key to taking accurate readings on a compass, noticing is essential for understanding the child, their actions and needs, the impact of the environment and adults' own impacts. The COMPASS approach starts with noticing, as this is not only fundamental to understanding children, but experience has shown that simply

by noticing we can convey to a child their value and sense of worth.

Working as a play therapist has certainly sharpened my focus on noticing the children with a history of trauma, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that I work with. Stepping back from firefighting and classroom 'management' affords the luxury of observing.

## STRUCTURE AND WARMTH

The remaining three compass points are closely interrelated. In many ways exploration and structure are two sides of the same coin as it is only when children feel safe from consistent boundaries, routines and structure that they are able to engage in and explore the environment around them. Given a secure foundation of attachment (essentially structure and warmth), children are naturally curious, sensory beings, hardwired to investigate and explore with their body and senses.

Warmth prevents structure from feeling harsh and overly restrictive, as well as being an essential component of developing a strong foundation of attachment between young children and their caregivers.

## MESSY PLAY

Containment (another form of structure) is a key theme of messy play. As the following vignettes demonstrate, sensory engagement can be essential for maintaining children's connection with learning.

For **Rebecca**, aged seven, touching sensory materials literally breathed life into her (noticing). Initially, touching sand, dried rice or shredded paper with just her hands was not satisfying enough and she needed to climb into the tray, engulfing herself within it. With continued sensory experiences within 'special time' (the name given to play

therapy sessions), simply immersing her toes within dry sand became enough for engaged conversation and sparkly-eyed interest (exploration).

By the time she was ready to end special time, running her fingers through an ice-cream tub of sand on her desk was sufficient to keep her engaged and focused on her work. With support from teaching staff she was able to notice her need for sensory support (warmth) and self-regulate.

Exploring the sensory media provided the essential connection Montessori and Jung refer to between the body and mind, imperative to children's learning.

The containers gave the necessary structure, and warmth was provided not just in the careful noticing (and therefore provision of resources), but also from the sensory and calming qualities of the resources themselves.

Eight-year-old **Jacob** was in a mainstream school when I started working with him therapeutically. In care, he had experienced a range of trauma and neglect, and a combination of parental addictions and absences had resulted in a lack of attachment. An extremely clever but hyper-vigilant child, he struggled to remain in class for lessons and was quick to temper, with destruction of the class environment commonplace. Spending more time out of his class than in it, he was at risk of exclusion. Time spent observing Jacob and discussions with teaching staff and carers at home identified priorities for action.

With boundaries volatile, and change often experienced as something negative and out of his control, it was important for Jacob to be able to experiment with and transform materials within the safe and non-judgmental environment of special time (exploration, structure and warmth).



Noticing his need to explore within safe boundaries, I initially provided containment (structure) through plastic table covers, the provision of containers and locating messy play over the lino floor.

Over several months, he was able to mix together sand, water, clay, glue and washing-up liquid, noticing how it changed in between sessions, choosing what to keep and what to discard, and ultimately transforming these materials. This often resulted in materials being kept in the numerous containers which I'd provided.

Several times, liquid overflowed these pots, flooding the floor in the process, but as Jacob had opportunities to experiment with the materials and develop a sense of relatedness to these and myself, he began to find ways of containing his own creations, a transition reflected in his ability to stay within his classroom to engage in learning too.

For this child and his chaotic, uncertain life, a lack of containment was scary and so it was important

to try to accommodate his need to express himself, develop mastery and gain sensory feedback while also safely containing him and accepting his 'mess'.

Exploration, structure and warmth went hand in hand with providing the sensory feedback he'd missed out on as a younger child and it was important to plan opportunities for these that did not introduce potential shame.

*“Children are naturally curious, sensory beings, hardwired to investigate”*

Gradually, I was also able to help transition the sensory benefits evident in his sessions to the classroom environment, as together we created a safe sensory den next to his desk to retreat to.

Once safely contained within his class, Jacob was better able to access his learning and move from a position of surviving to thriving in school. A transition made easier for this child and school, and countless others, by the focus on the four COMPASS points.

**Sue Gascoyne is author of *Messy Play in the Early Years*; she works throughout the UK and internationally as a trainer and writer on sensorial and therapeutic play provision for children across the ages**

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## AMPLIFY YOUR STAFF VOICE

Your staff likely have plenty of important things to say, writes Laura Williams – but are you doing enough to ensure their voices are heard?

**G**iving staff the ability to make their views known can help leaders make better decisions, and facilitate the process of taking the overall ‘temperature’ of an organisation. It also promotes employee engagement, making staff feel more valued. In times of change, turbulence or concern, staff input can serve to both inform and guide.

But what are the most effective ways of giving staff a voice, and what are the pros and cons of each?

feedback isn’t just welcomed but actively encouraged.

***Benefits:*** Instant feedback that can be discussed and acted upon as appropriate, as well as opportunities to resolve issues that might otherwise be left to fester.

***Caution:*** This relies on leaders and managers dealing with the feedback they receive in a professional way. If they aren’t equipped to do this, the process can become counter-productive.

### 2. Staff surveys

These are great for gaining insight into the mindset of your staff, but it’s important to set your objectives before designing a survey and ensure that you ask the right questions. Do you want an insight into your school’s culture, staff input regarding past or future changes, or are you seeking ideas for more general improvements?

***Benefits:*** The anonymity afforded by surveys can provide a useful whole-school snapshot of staff attitudes, which can then be benchmarked against future surveys.

***Caution:*** If you don’t publish the results of a survey or respond to its findings, staff will feel they aren’t being listened to and come to see the activity as a pointless exercise.

### 3. Suggestion box

Placing a suggestion box in the staff room can help generate feedback and ideas throughout the year. It maintains the anonymity of a survey, while enabling staff who feel more self-conscious about speaking up to feel

### 1. Meetings

Incorporating time in meetings for the sharing of staff feedback can provide leaders with up-to-the-minute information on how people feel about what’s going on, what’s working and what isn’t. Setting aside this time will demonstrate that such



more able to contribute.

**Benefits:** Can provide a confidential feedback route concerning any and all organisational issues.

**Caution:** Put the box somewhere that's accessible to all staff but also discreet. Where appropriate, create a process for responding to suggestions, perhaps via regular staff bulletins or INSET days.

#### 4. Wellbeing group

It doesn't have to be called this, but if you have a group of colleagues who are keen on promoting staff voice, forums of this type can provide valuable insights into your staff's thinking and the issues they're facing.

**Benefits:** Staff champions can facilitate powerful staff voice exercises that will provide you with quality feedback. Forums are also more informal than meetings or surveys, allowing staff to engage with broader discussions in a free and constructive way.

**Caution:** These groups ought to be independent, but efforts should be made to ensure that they represent as broad a cross-section of staff as possible.

#### 5. Exit interviews

Sometimes, no matter what you do, staff won't be willing to put their head above the parapet until they have one foot out of the door.

**Benefits:** When staff leave, ask about their views of the organisation but also their specific role – what worked, what didn't, what the organisation could do to improve things for their successor – to aid your recruitment and retention process.

**Caution:** See that the people undertaking your exit interviews are as neutral as possible. Ideally, you'll want one regular person to conduct them, such as an SBM. Where this isn't appropriate, select a colleague that the departing member of staff will feel comfortable talking to.

*Laura Williams is a former MAT chief operations officer and school business manager, and the founder of LJ Business Consultancy*

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## COMMON PITFALLS WITH ACADEMISATION

Kaley Foran from The Key offers some advice for ensuring academisation goes as smoothly as possible...

**B**e clear about why you're converting  
Make sure you have a clear idea of the purpose behind your

school's conversion. Identify what you want to change and where you see yourself heading once you become an academy. If your school's existing governance hasn't reached this position, it's less likely that the application will be accepted by the DfE.

If you're looking to join a MAT, be clear as to how the change will affect your school and whether there are certain decisions that in future will be made by the MAT, rather than the school alone. Will there be an expectation to adopt particular MAT policies, and if so, how will these differ from those you have in place presently?

#### Research your options

Even if your school is set to become a sponsored academy, you can still let the DfE know of your preferred outcome. Research other potential sponsors and MATs and communicate your preferred option to your regional schools commissioner. Conducting your own research can give you a sense of ownership over the process and reduce the risk of ending up in a MAT that isn't a good match.

#### Question your governance

A MAT can try to please all parties by ensuring each school has representation on its board of trustees, but expanding the board as and when the MAT grows won't be a feasible model of governance in the long run.

Be honest with each other and acknowledge that the board will ultimately be responsible for all schools in the MAT. This may mean that local

governing bodies will have less power in comparison to a maintained school's governing body.

#### Address complex issues early

Establish early on which, if any, LA services you want to buy back after conversion, and decide which services you'll need to purchase elsewhere or manage centrally as soon as you can. Also work out when your payroll contract will end – once the school has undergone conversion it will become a different legal entity, thus ending your current contract. If not dealt with in advance, this could result in staff not being paid.


Doing such legwork at the start of the process will help minimise distractions once the academy has opened and can avoid unnecessary complications later down the line.

#### Don't let the process become a distraction

The conversion process can sometimes become overwhelming and risk distracting school leaders from their vital daily duties. To avoid this, delegate different conversion responsibilities fairly between the headteacher, SLT, SBM and other senior staff.

**Kaley Foran is a lead content editor at The Key; thanks to associate education experts Graeme Hornsby, Mark Trusson, Tiffany Beck and Keith Clover for their contributions to this guidance**

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# What to do when a colleague starts to cry

So you're having a difficult conversation and the other person breaks down in tears. How should you respond?

**W**hen someone cries in a difficult conversation, it's certainly awkward. In my experience, most of us will

be unsure as to what to do and feel guilty because we've apparently driven them to tears. People may cry in such situations for various reasons:

- They're upset at what they're hearing
- From the unexpected shock of hearing what they're hearing
- They've never been challenged or talked to about this before
- It's a learned behaviour or strategy for ending conversations (consciously or not).
- The issue is finally out in the open and fully acknowledged

I'm sure you can think of more.

## Laying the groundwork

If we act guilty, annoyed ('They always cry!') or surprised when the other person cries, we'll often hurry to end the conversation. Choosing to end the conversation isn't a preferred option of mine, however, since it essentially tells someone that if they cry, the conversation will stop. That's not a message you want to give, or a behaviour you want to reinforce.

Instead, give them some tissues and let them 'cry it out'. Not out of spite or cruelty, but so that they can have some space in the conversation to get their emotion out. If appropriate, gently ask if they would like to share what it is that's made them cry. Offer to retrieve some tissues or water – this will give you both a bit of space by taking you out of the room for a few moments, while demonstrating a deep level of care.

The latter set of responses will accomplish two things. First, they lay

the groundwork for a more useful conversation once the person is ready, since you've already accomplished the hard part by raising the issue in the first place. Stick with it, and things will only get easier from there.

Secondly, you won't be creating or reinforcing negative associations between them crying and the outcome of your interactions ('If you cry, this conversation will stop.') If their crying is so bad that communication become all but impossible, perhaps offer to postpone the meeting. Only do this

once you've sat and held the space for a while, and can be sure that there's no way of continuing the conversation here and now.

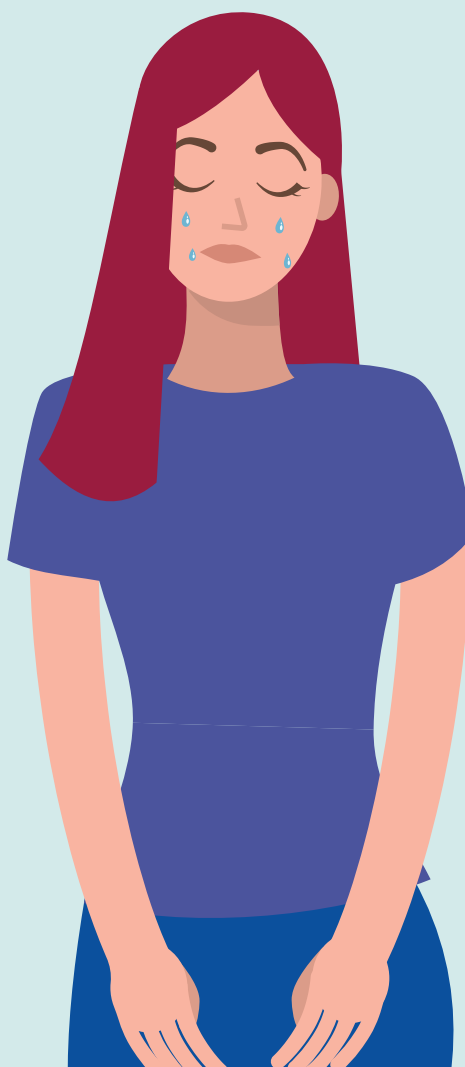
## In control

If you do offer to postpone the meeting, be sure to arrange a date and time. If they're too fragile to do so there and then, provide a time frame such as 'Before the end of the week'. I've purposefully used the word 'offer', as they should be the ones to choose – continue now, or resume within the time frame suggested? This way, you're letting them play a part in shaping what happens next, thus giving them a greater feeling of control and participation.

It can be uncomfortable, but we should be okay with crying. That's not to say that you should be coldly indifferent, but rather accepting of it as something that simply happens. Try to convey the soothing message that 'It's okay – we can work through this.' It's often the case that crying can, in fact, be the best release for a person, allowing you to help them move forward the issue responsible for their tears in the first instance.

**Sonia Gill is founder of the consultancy Heads Up, which specialises in making schools outstanding; the themes discussed here can be explored further in Heads Up's own 'choose your own adventure' book for headteachers – see [tinyurl.com/hu-cyoa](http://tinyurl.com/hu-cyoa) for more details**

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# DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

## *(and how to avoid it)*

Could your school be discriminating against disabled pupils without realising? Lesley Mifsud examines what the statutory obligations do and don't cover...

**T**he Equality Act 2010 guidance for Schools states that a person has a disability if, "They have a physical or mental impairment which has a long term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

A school therefore mustn't discriminate against a disabled pupil in relation to admissions, how their education is provided, exclusion, any other disadvantage, denial of opportunity or choice. That provision of education includes all school activities, spanning assessments and internal exams, behaviour/discipline management and use of school facilities, as well as any extracurricular and leisure activities, after-school and homework clubs, sports activities and school trips.

Schools have a responsibility for ensuring that disabled pupils can access internal examinations, but it's also unlawful for qualification bodies to discriminate against pupils taking formal examinations. As such, there are various ways in which pupils can be supported in their exams through measures such as granting them additional time, making a scribe available or enabling them to use assistive technology.

## UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION

Children may experience five types of disability discrimination at school – direct disability discrimination; indirect disability discrimination; discrimination arising from disability; failure to make reasonable adjustments; and harassment and victimisation.

Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than others because of their disability. This can be a form of discrimination based on perception, through treating a pupil less

favourably because they're mistakenly thought to be disabled. For instance, an autistic pupil being excluded from a school trip because the school believes that they won't be able to join in the activities.

Direct discrimination will always be unlawful. Those schools with a selective admissions policy, such as grammar schools, can select pupils based on ability or aptitude, so long as they comply with their duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils during the assessment process.

Indirect disability discrimination arises when a school policy or practice is applied in the same way to everyone, but puts pupils with a disability at a disadvantage. The only exception is when the policy or practice can be justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, such as the health, safety and welfare of pupils.

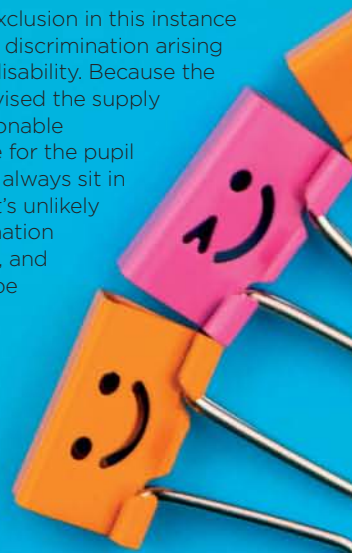
For example, a school may operate a 'three strikes' policy which states that if a pupil breaks school rules three times, he or she will automatically be suspended. Some disabled pupils may break rules without realising, or due to distress as a result of having their needs unmet. Applying such policies without any flexibility may well lead to indirect disability discrimination.

## 'LEGITIMATE AIMS'

Discrimination arising from disability will occur if a person is treated unfavourably because of something to do with their disability, and if the response – such as exclusion – can't be justified as a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'. 'Legitimate aims' in this instance may include ensuring the safety of pupils and staff, but the school would need to demonstrate that their response is proportionate.

Since exclusion can lead to social isolation, increased anxiety and depression, the parents of a disabled pupil might well argue that a more proportionate response would be to develop a better understanding of the child's disability; demonstrate empathy and ensure the child's needs are met. The school could also provide appropriate support, work on reducing the pupil's anxieties and make any necessary reasonable adjustments. It wouldn't constitute discrimination if the school were unaware that the pupil was disabled.

For example, let's imagine a disabled pupil is excluded from the classroom for flapping his arms at a supply teacher, the teacher having been alarmed by what they perceived to be threatening behaviour. It then emerges that the pupil was distressed, and had flapped his arms because the supply teacher told him they were about to do an activity which meant he couldn't sit in his usual seat. Since the pupil's reaction was connected to him being disabled, exclusion in this instance would amount to discrimination arising from the pupil's disability. Because the school hadn't advised the supply teacher of a reasonable adjustment made for the pupil – allowing him to always sit in the same seat – it's unlikely that the discrimination could be justified, and would therefore be unlawful.





## ADDRESSING DISADVANTAGE

Reasonable adjustments are changes made to ensure that disabled pupils can participate in their education and enjoy all the facilities that a school provides.

Schools have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage compared to their non-disabled peers. This applies to all provisions, criteria and practices, and indeed every aspect of a school's daily operations – exclusion and discipline policies, physical features (such as entrances and exits), toilets, lighting, flooring and furniture, auxiliary aids and services (such as the provision of supportive equipment or specialist staff).

Reasonable adjustments for an autistic child might involve allowing them to wear ear defenders, or a slightly modified school uniform to accommodate sensory sensitivities. They may be able to start and finish lessons at slightly different times in order to avoid busy and crowded corridors, or access alternative arrangements during assemblies, sports days and other whole school events.

Other pupils may require the use of a 'quiet' area or separate work station throughout the day, and many disabled pupils will need some form of support if they're to fully take part in school trips. It's unlawful for schools to charge money when making a reasonable adjustment.

When contemplating reasonable adjustments, schools should consider

whether pupils are at a substantial disadvantage. Are they falling behind with schoolwork? Could this disadvantage be addressed by arranging for one-to-one support or specialist teaching? Would taking these steps be reasonable?

Previously, a loophole in the Equality Act meant that schools didn't have to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children when they had a 'tendency to physical abuse' – even if the issue in

question was caused by a lack of appropriate support. This loophole no longer applies, however, with the result that allowances must be made for behaviours stemming from disabled pupils' needs not being met.

## DEFINING 'REASONABLE'

The term 'reasonable' isn't actually defined in the Act, but there are a

number of factors that schools may well need to take into account. Among these are the extent to which a reasonable adjustment can overcome a form of disadvantage, and the level to which a pupil is currently being supported through existing SEN legislation.

Weighed against these will be the resources the school currently has, the costs and practicality of making the adjustment, and any ways in which the pupil will suffer if the reasonable adjustment isn't made. To that, you can also add the need to consider health and safety requirements, maintain academic standards and observe the interests of other current and prospective pupils.

To make reasonable adjustments, schools won't necessarily have to alter or remove any physical aspects of their premises, but they absolutely have a general duty to plan better access for their pupils wherever possible. Schools have a statutory duty to provide copies of their accessibility plan to parents and other stakeholders upon request, and should look to update their plans every three years.



**Lesley Mifsud is head access auditor and CEO at EA Audits**

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# “It wasn’t me – it was the school”

An anonymous teacher shares his experiences of working in a toxic environment

I always knew teaching was the career for me, and when I first stepped into the classroom, I felt like I’d come home. Book scrutinies and learning walks generated glowing comments. I was a young and ambitious teacher, and within three years had been promoted to SLT.

However, behind the scenes, I was falling apart. I wasn’t sleeping. I was getting chest pains and started blacking out. Under pressure from my wife I went to the doctor, hoping for a quick cure. Instead, I was diagnosed with work-related anxiety and signed off work. I realised I had to make a change.

## DECEPTIVE APPEARANCES

On paper, the school where I completed my NQT year was highly successful and had a glowing Ofsted report. The pupils were hard-working and the books looked fantastic. But cracks soon began to appear – literally.

My classroom wasn’t fit for purpose, with ongoing issues that weren’t resolved for over a year (and only following a complaint by a parent). When Ofsted arrived, I was briefed to say that the situation had happened recently and was temporary. Hours before the inspection, a member of staff left and never returned. We were told not to contact her.

The inspectors were positive and leadership was judged to be outstanding. Staff were brought together at the end of the inspection and brusquely told they could have done better. We all silently left school, exhausted and in tears.



wife I’d look for work at another school. When I told the headteacher, she told me she could make sure I never worked again.

My self-confidence plummeted even further, and I performed badly in my first two interviews. On the morning of my third interview, I resolved that I’d leave teaching if I didn’t get the job. Now in a more relaxed frame of mind, I actually enjoyed the teaching observation and during the interview, realised that

## LOW MORALE

Staff would constantly discuss leaving, but lacked the confidence to actually make the leap. When one teacher announced she’d got a job at another school, the headteacher stormed around the corridors shouting and screaming.

A culture of one-upmanship and blame was fostered, with everyone seemingly out for themselves. Although I consistently received good feedback following observations, I became increasingly uncomfortable and began looking for other jobs. When I told the headteacher this, I was offered a promotion. Despite my misgivings, I decided I couldn’t turn it down.

I was told on day one that my new role was to ‘catch people out.’ Teachers would arrive in the morning and find their books had been scrutinised in their absence. It wasn’t uncommon to find teachers crying about feedback they’d been given.

## PLUMMETING CONFIDENCE

I stopped sleeping, and my insomnia heightened my sense of insecurity. Being signed off work by the doctor forced me to re-evaluate my life, and I promised my

I’d acquired excellent management experience under challenging circumstances.

I was offered the job that evening.

## OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

My new headteacher was constantly encouraging and supportive, and transparent about what he wanted. Staff were loyal to the school and pulled together as a team. The staff room was packed with happy, smiling teachers at lunch time, and staff regularly commented on how lucky they felt to work there.

Overnight, my chest pains, insomnia and panic attacks disappeared. I felt as though a cloud had lifted – but also frustrated at not having got out sooner. I suddenly had more energy, with friends and family commenting that I was less irritable. I came to realise that I’d been completely overwhelmed, despite progressing well in my career.

The effect of working in a toxic climate had made me feel worthless and hopeless, but I now had renewed energy and felt relaxed and confident in class. I’d come so close to leaving teaching but it turns out it wasn’t me – it was the school.

# ARE TWO HEADS BETTER THAN ONE?

Paula Ayliffe and Sarah Stepney describe how they went about developing a successful system of co-headship

**T**he previous headteacher of Mayfield Primary School, Jas Hill, retired in July 2018 after nearly 25 years in post. Three years prior to that, one of us, Sarah Stepney, had arrived as a new deputy head, joining assistant head Paula Ayliffe. We shared an office, and soon realised that we both wanted the same things for Mayfield's community. For the next four years, the three of us duly worked together on achieving our shared aims.

Both of us were aware of Jas' plans to retire; she had confided in us both well in advance of informing the rest of the school. Over coffee one morning, one of us jokingly suggested to the other that we should do the job of headteacher together – but then instantly, we both exclaimed, 'Yes, we should!' At around the same time, the two of us were due to speak at a conference in Edinburgh alongside Jas, and we opted to extend the trip in order to properly consider a joint application.

Our advertisement for the headship of Mayfield went live the following January. We asked the governors whether they might consider a joint application, and were told they would prefer single applications – but that they would allow a joint presentation at the end of the interviews if we both successfully made it through to the final stages.

We ultimately did, and duly gave a joint presentation outlining our vision for Mayfield. Both of us had previously told the interview panel that we'd accept the job as individuals, but were secretly, desperately hoping they'd offer the job to both of us. And that's exactly what they did.

## HALF AND HALF

Contracts were subsequently drawn up which were unique. We were each to be half head and half deputy, making us both full time school staff. We started the job(s) in September 2018 and have just

finished our first year. We've encountered many challenges along the way, but are both even more enthusiastic now for our shared roles than when we were first appointed. We thought we'd carefully divvy up the different aspects of the job, and to a certain extent we've been successful.

Sarah has a passion for the curriculum and learning environments, whilst Paula enjoys more the process of appraisal and overseeing the provision of CPD. In the main, however, it tends to be the case that whoever answers the phone or gets to an email first will then see the relevant task through to the end.

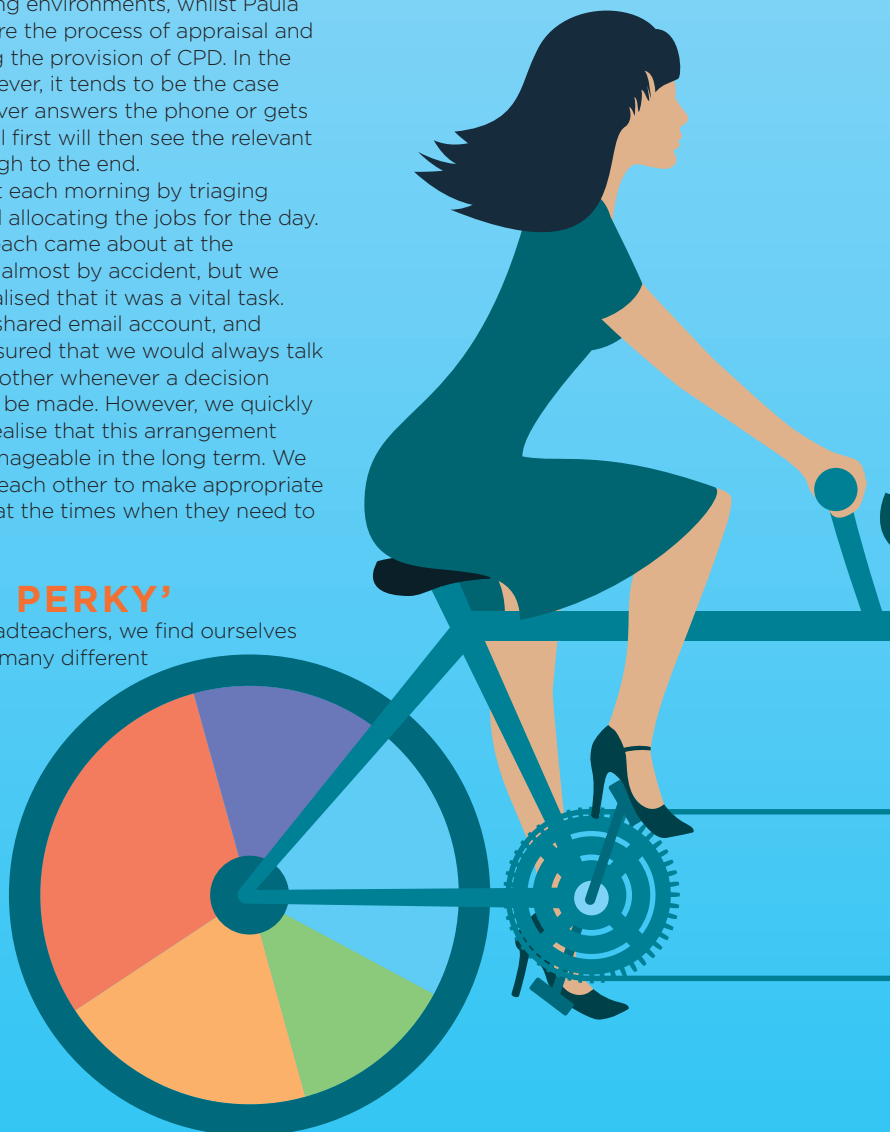
We start each morning by triaging emails and allocating the jobs for the day. This approach came about at the beginning almost by accident, but we quickly realised that it was a vital task. We use a shared email account, and initially ensured that we would always talk with each other whenever a decision needed to be made. However, we quickly came to realise that this arrangement wasn't manageable in the long term. We now trust each other to make appropriate decisions at the times when they need to be made.

## 'TOO PERKY'

Like all headteachers, we find ourselves attending many different

meetings. Early on, we detected high levels of anxiety among some members of staff, and saw that they would use these meetings with us to share various stresses and problems. We would hear comments that we were 'too perky' and that 'it wouldn't last'.

What both of us have realised since then is that we have each other –





someone else with whom we can share our concerns and stresses at all times, whenever and wherever they might occur. We can easily close the office door and share the strain because there's no hierarchy involved. We essentially regard each other in the same way, and the trust between us is paramount.

When things come along that are tricky, we're resolved to continue with the plans we've developed. Were either of us to work in this role on our own, we know that we wouldn't have been able to continue with certain projects in the same way, and that this would be wrong, since we know that the path we've set the school on is the right one.

## TIME TO ADJUST

It has taken the staff and parents a while to adjust to our new positions. Many remember Paula as the school's

“We’ve encountered many challenges along the way, but are both even more enthusiastic now for our shared roles than when we were first appointed”

reception teacher, and continue to ask for her advice as if she were still spending much of her time in the Foundation Stage. Some then suddenly remember, and consider these questions as somehow not appropriate – but we reassure them that on the contrary, they're entirely appropriate and encouraged them to continue.

Personal contact with our families is something that we both prioritise. Both of us also continue to maintain a presence in the classroom, each teaching approximately one day a week – something that will continue into next year as we strive to minimise costs. We were hopeful of recruiting an assistant head, but so far that's not been possible. We have, however, elevated the status of our wonderful school business manager. She's our financial expert, and therefore in the best position to manage and lead the fabric of the school.

As we look ahead to 2019-20 we have a clear plan; we know where we want to take the school. Surveys and interviews carried out by our governors have indicated that parents and staff are overwhelmingly with us. One parent recently stopped Paula in the street

## 5 CO-HEADSHIP TIPS

1. Have a shared vision and ethos.
2. Trust each other, and agree that the outcomes of decisions – good or bad, whoever makes them – belong to both of you.
3. Share an email account and triage emails daily (but only once daily!)
4. Ensure that the school community sees you as a team that communicates well and shares all responsibilities.
5. Go for long walks together – they provide good opportunities to talk through plans and check that things are on track.

and said, “You know, at first I thought this arrangement was ridiculous. You can't run a country with two Prime Ministers – how on earth are you going to run a school? People are going to play one off against the other!”

“But I was wrong. You two are the epitome of equitability! I can see the trust you have between you, and the trust that the parents and children have for you. The school is in very safe hands.”

We've also heard how a member of staff commented to one of our teachers, “It's good having two heads – there's always someone to talk to who can make a decision.”

So, after a very busy year, we've continued to be 'perky'. We've started our journey together implementing outdoor learning – all classes spend an afternoon out of the classroom each week, whatever the weather – and the 'Spiral of Inquiry' model developed by Helen Timperley, Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert (see [tinyurl.com/psm-soi](http://tinyurl.com/psm-soi)) across the whole school. We remain absolutely determined to do the very best we can, side by side.



**Paula Ayliffe (left) and Sarah Stepney (right) are co-**

**headteachers at Mayfield Primary School, Cambridge**

# CLOSE THE GENDER PAY GAP

Men and women aren't being paid the same for doing identical jobs, says Gary Webb – and without meaningful cultural change, the problem's likely to persist...

**R**eporting around the gender pay gap has highlighted a persistent bias against women in the upper echelons of numerous business sectors. Women don't tend to dominate company boards, so it follows that women operating at the highest levels of the private sector often don't get the pay they deserve.

But in primary school education, where more than 85% of staff are women, there can't be a gender pay gap – right? Not necessarily...

Across the education sector as a whole, women are currently paid 18.4% less than men. What's going on? How can 14% of primary school teachers earn more, on average, than all the rest? Well, the truth is that for the most part, they actually don't.

Primary schools are somewhat unique in the education sector, in that female *teachers* are paid more than their male counterparts. Problems start to arise, however, when we look at *leadership* roles. There exists a pay gap between the average salaries of male and female primary school headteachers of around £2,800.

## LEADERSHIP ROLES

In state-funded primary and nursery schools only 14% of teachers are men, but they make up 27% of all headteachers. Despite holding a 73% majority of headship posts, pay discrepancies for women in said posts are larger than in other sectors.

Age compounds the issue. According to analysis by the National Foundation for Educational Research, the average age for a headteacher in England is 50 (see [tinyurl.com/nfer-ht-retention](http://tinyurl.com/nfer-ht-retention)). The average salary for female headteachers in their 50s at state-funded schools works out as £11,300 lower, compared to their male counterparts. It's reflected in other age brackets, too – female headteachers under 40 earn £5,400 less than their male equivalents, while those in their 40s earn £7,700 less and those aged 60 and over earn £13,500 less.

Education sector leaders should therefore consider the risks, opportunities and barriers involved in promoting equal opportunities for women across primary education. Stakeholders need to be engaged and encouraged to promote unbiased gender views. Leadership teams should denounce the normalisation of gender inequality, and set about systematically tackling any related disparities.

This can be achieved by doing the following:

- Ensuring that decision-makers have equality training
- Being open to flexible working and de-stigmatising parental leave
- Ensuring that gender bias plays no part in hiring and promotion decisions
- Promoting a culture of meritocracy
- Monitoring and regulating pay decisions – particularly at academy CEO and headship levels

## GENDER-NEUTRAL CULTURE

Diversifying your decision-making strata and providing equality training to all key stakeholders will have positive knock-on effects throughout the organisation. Encouraging and promoting a gender neutral working environment is just the first step towards changing a culture to one that isn't biased in terms of gender.

Part-time working has long been commonplace throughout the profession, yet despite this, more modern approaches to flexible working have struggled to gain traction. Yes, controlling a classroom of children via a video call is neither safe nor practical – but teaching staff holding additional responsibilities in other areas don't necessarily need to be present in the classroom, or sometimes even on school premises, to carry out certain parts of their job.

Embracing more flexible ways of working can be good for staff morale, while helping to overcome the stigma attached to other entitlements, such as paternity leave.

How vacancies are advertised has also played a role in the earning disparities between male and female headteachers, so give careful thought as to how your job adverts are worded. Research





## THE BENEFITS OF CLOSING THE GAP

1. Boosts to morale and productivity
2. Improved headteacher retention
3. Attract higher quality talent
4. Teaching environments that are more stable and consistent

## NEXT STEPS

1. Increase transparency and fairness concerning pay at all levels
2. De-stigmatise parental leave
3. Make hiring practices gender neutral
4. Educate, encourage and promote a gender-fair culture
5. Review all hiring and promotion decisions

published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (see [tinyurl.com/psych-job-ads](http://tinyurl.com/psych-job-ads)) has previously shown that adjectives such 'competitive' and 'determined' can sometimes discourage women from applying for a role, while words like 'collaborative' and 'cooperative' tend to attract more female applicants than male.

Other helpful actions include reviewing your interview policies, anonymising CVs and making use of use blind evaluation processes. These will allow you to judge prospective teachers and heads on their experience and merit, without succumbing to any forms of bias.

However, it would be unreasonable to expect schools to put in place a freeze on new hires and promotions until the culture is changed. It should be possible to implement such policies in a structured but fairly rapid way, so that a new and consistent approach to the school's hiring and pay decisions can be put in place as soon as possible. The process might still take time, but it's important to ensure that oversight during the transition remains unbiased

## HELPFUL FOR EVERYONE

It's the responsibility of all primary school employers, be they LAs or trusts, to

reverse the gender pay gap. Access to fair pay progression and opportunities for promotion should be neither determined nor influenced by an individual's gender.

Moreover, pursuing a gender-equal policy within a primary school environment can produce long-lasting benefits for staff and pupils alike. Fair and equal pay will go a long way towards improving headteacher retention rates. Given the ever-greater prominence of media reporting and social media discourse surrounding gender equality and pay issues, it's something that's now a key consideration for job applicants. Being transparent and fair with your pay offer should therefore help you attract a talent pool of high calibre candidates.

The end result will be a happier and more satisfied staff cohort and a more positive classroom environment for pupils – after all, happy teachers typically make for happy pupils. But positive cultural change of this type usually needs to come from the top.

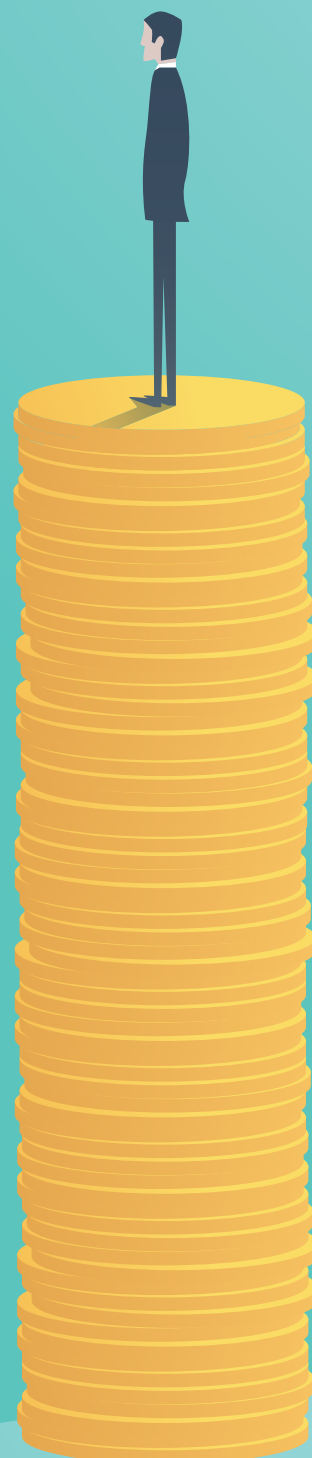
## AN END TO PAY DISCRIMINATION?

A 2017 survey on pay progression among NEU members found that a third of teachers eligible for pay progression had been denied it. Why? Because they had been absent for all, or part of the 2016-17 school year due to pregnancy or maternity leave. Among female teachers denied overall progression, more than half reported being specifically told that it was due to such absences. This isn't just bad policy – it's illegal discrimination.

The picture of employment within the education sector currently resembles a pyramid, with low paid women at the bottom, supporting a small number of male CEOs and headteachers. This is the model that needs to be changed.

It's now up to primary leaders and decision makers to review their structures, systems and cultures, tackle gender bias and work harder at retaining their talented teaching professionals. Most importantly of all, they must demonstrate to women across the sector that they are valued. There need to be changes in culture, policies and approaches to recruitment at both staff and board level.

The gender pay gap in education won't disappear overnight, but hopefully our education institutions are prepared to address this disparity – for everyone's benefit. All being well, by next year we should be seeing clear signs of the gender pay gap closing.



“Only 14% of teachers are men, but they make up 27% of headteachers”



**Gary Webb marketing and communications director at FMP Global – a leading global provider of payroll and HR services**

# Let us know your thoughts

**FREE GIFT**  
for every entry\*



Here at PSM, we want to make the best magazine possible. Our hope is that by getting to know more about you, we can create a title that reflects and responds to the most pressing topics and issues affecting school leaders and school business professionals right now. This is therefore your chance to tell about who you are,

what you do, what's important to you and what we can do to make each issue an even more informative and enjoyable read. Simply visit **primaryleaders.com/readersurvey** and fill out the online form. We look forward to hearing from you!

We've teamed up with STAEDTLER to give away a triplus fineliner pen to the first 400 survey respondents. The fineliner has a superfine, metal-clad tip and produces line widths of approximately 0.3mm using water-based ink. It's Dry Safe ink, so the pen can be left uncapped for days at a time without drying out.

NOTE: offer limited to blue ink triplus fineliner pens only



**STAEDTLER**

\*Please refer online for full terms and conditions



# 4 REASONS TO TRY... Kids Club HQ

Take charge of your school clubs like never before, with the aid of this powerful administrative assistant

## 1 EASY TO USE

Kids Club HQ provides schools with a slick and powerful administration system specifically designed for school clubs, which can handle all your club booking, invoicing and communication needs. It has the potential to revolutionise your admin processes, putting all the functionality you need at your fingertips.



## 2 ONLINE BOOKING

Parents benefit from a simple online booking process that does away with repeated form-filling and assorted rigmarole. Emergency contact details, medical info and consents can all be captured easily. Once registered with an account, parents can update their details with important information as and when, thus keeping you in the loop.

## 3 AUTOMATED INVOICING

Instead of manually creating invoices for parents, these can be automatically generated and sent out via email. Automated reminders for outstanding payments will help keep your accounts up to date and reduce time spent chasing parents. The 'Credit Control' view further lets you keep an eye on who owes what.

## 4 AUTOMATIC REGISTERS

Registers are automatically updated as soon as a booking is placed or when any changes are made. They can then be viewed online in an instant, or else exported to Excel for later printing or offline use. You can also do away with paper registers completely, by allowing parents to sign their children in or out via a tablet.

### Contact:

[hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk](mailto:hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk)  
[kidsclubhq.co.uk/psm](https://kidsclubhq.co.uk/psm)

## At a glance

- + An intuitive platform that can handle all your club booking and invoicing needs
- + Automated invoicing and overdue payment reminders keep accounts up to date
- + Schools like yours rely on Kids Club HQ to keep on top of the admin for their clubs

## BOOKING AND ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM for Before & After School Clubs

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

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 the club and admin staff.

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

[www.kidsclubhq.co.uk/psm](https://www.kidsclubhq.co.uk/psm)



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Phone: 0118 3216671

# 4 REASONS TO TRY... uHoo Air Monitors

Graham Mills, Director of AirProfiling Ltd. discusses how uHoo Air Monitors can reveal the school's indoor air quality

## 1 KNOW THE AIR THE CHILDREN BREATHE

Indoor air quality can be 5 times worse than outdoor air. Few schools know if the school's indoor air quality is healthy. Polluted air has a direct impact on children's physical development, especially vital organs – lungs, heart, brain, liver. uHoo Indoor Air Monitors will reveal all you need to know.

## 2 CHILDREN LEARN BETTER WITH GOOD AIR

Cognitive function and performance is greatly reduced by poor quality air and may contribute to erratic, even temporarily challenging behaviour. With uHoo monitors, you can identify the spaces which might be suffering from poor air quality – vital information which empowers you to start taking remedial action.

## 3 UHOO'S GOLDMINE OF INFORMATION

uHoo delivers detailed information across NINE parameters including Nitrogen Dioxide and particulate matter PM2.5 – two of the UK's most prevalent and hazardous pollutants in schools. uHoo's air quality data is presented on a feature-packed online management dashboard, parameter by parameter, minute-by-minute, hourly averages and monthly maxima and minima.

## 4 CASE STUDY: ST. MARY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, CHISWICK

Adjacent to the A4, St Mary's is famous for a brilliant clean-air campaign acclaimed by the national media, parents, the community and Sadiq Khan. St. Mary's found that uHoo proved to be an invaluable tool, confirming shocking indoor air pollution. uHoo then revealed the astonishing effect of their remedial actions.



### Contact:

Graham Mills, Managing Director  
T: 01636 555 007 / M: 07850 503 076  
W: [uhooair.co.uk](http://uhooair.co.uk)  
E: [sales@uhooair.co.uk](mailto:sales@uhooair.co.uk)

## At a glance

- + uHoo – the best first step to understanding your school's indoor air quality; concessionary pricing
- + uHoo – fast to install; easy to move around the school; share the data with staff
- + uHoo – the best – monitors NINE parameters including Nitrogen Dioxide NO2 and particulate matter PM2

## Give Every Child the Chance to Smile

Raise £150 to support Smile Train and help cover the costs of cleft treatment for a child in need.

Find out ways how your school can get involved by visiting [smiletrain.org.uk/school](http://smiletrain.org.uk/school) or contacting [ukinfo@smiletrain.org](mailto:ukinfo@smiletrain.org).

Join us in changing the world one smile at a time.





## WATCH WHAT YOUR TEACHERS PAY FOR

When teachers feel compelled to buy resources with their own money, should leaders step in?



As schools command ever less spending power, school leaders inevitably find themselves in the position of having to reduce expenditure on resources and supplies. Many teachers have consequently found that resources they'd like to make available to children in their class simply can't be funded.

What impact does this have? Teachers are increasingly putting their hands in their pockets and self-funding numerous items, preferring that over seeing their classes go without. As a school leader, how can you therefore be sure as to what exactly your staff are paying for? Over the course of multiple responses I received online, teachers cited regularly spending amounts ranging from £10 to £100 per month on supplementing their schools' budgets. More commonly purchased items include cooking and science resources, books, spare PE kits and classroom furniture.

### PEAK PERIODS

The spending teachers feel compelled to make increases dramatically when changing year group or preparing to implement a new curriculum. These are times when they can no longer rely on the stock of resources they've acquired over previous years, and are often facing the prospect of starting again from scratch. Teachers in this position should be provided with clear expectations, budget guidelines and easy reimbursement methods.

That way, they'll make more informed decisions around what they plan to teach and the possibility of them claiming back funds for items they purchase.

### PLANNING SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscription-based planning and resource sites can save teachers time, but many are in the habit of spending upwards of £10 per month to access them. I've heard one teacher who uses such facilities justify their expenditure on the basis of the time they've saved: "I would rather



pay for a subscription and have more time with my family at the weekend.” This is a common theme that emerged during my research.

If you know that your staff subscribe to resource sites, and are aware of one being especially popular, it may be worth considering whether a school subscription be viable.

## TREATS AND GIFTS

These are those ‘added extras’ that many teachers lay on for their classes – popcorn and a movie for excellent behaviour, or end of term presents as they move on to another class. Does your school have a policy regarding these types of purchases? If not, consider drafting one. Should one teacher buy gifts for their class without fail, it may place undue pressure on others to follow suit. If a situation then arises whereby some decide to opt out of this altogether, there’s the risk of inequity setting in across the school.

## SPENDING AUDIT

Given current budgetary challenges, school leaders could be partly forgiven for failing to recognise problematic spending on the part of their colleagues, but it’s not possible to appreciate the full extent of the issue without investigating it further. As teacher Ruth McElroy recently commented to me online, “I’ve definitely spent thousands, and it’s very rare that there’s an offer to repay anything. We’re discouraged from doing this, but only in words. If the resources aren’t there, what are we supposed to do?”

An audit of staff spending can open up some useful dialogue with teaching colleagues, many of whom may be feeling increasingly pressured and resentful at having to plug budgetary gaps with their own funds. The situation is neatly summed up by teacher Sarah Robertshaw – “I’ve increasingly come to the view that if we continue providing resources we need out of our own money, the difficulties caused by school budget cuts will continue to be hidden.”

It’s worth carefully considering how we approach the resourcing of our classrooms. After all, in what other sectors are frontline staff expected to pay for items necessary to deliver their core service?

*Lucy Starbuck Braidley is a primary school teacher and subject leader for English and PE*



## PARENT COUNCILS AND YOUR SCHOOL'S FINANCES

Bear in mind that parents can help to both raise funds, and pinpoint where those funds may be most needed...

**W**hat can schools do to establish better links with the families in their community – particularly now, when funding constraints are putting even the most parent-friendly schools under pressure?

One positive step can be to engage mums and dads as partners in education via a Parent Council, thus enabling schools to be more accountable to the families they serve in three key ways:

### 1 INFORMATION GATHERING

PTAs typically organise events aimed at bringing the school community together and raise funds for smaller projects and extras, whereas Parent Councils provide a forum through which parents can engage with school leadership teams on matters that affect them and their children directly. They can be consulted on policies and improvement plans, and have their contributions taken into account and be considered by governing bodies.

### 2 FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

Parent Councils can be an effective channel through which to share difficult discussions around funding and ensure mums and dads are aware of the challenges facing their school. The process can also work in the other direction, with Parent Councils sometimes helping school leaders better understand the pressures within their communities, and encouraging collaborations with parents on ways of alleviating the financial burdens faced by many.

### 3 COLLABORATION ON PROJECTS

Parent Councils can be instrumental in setting up, or informing parents about school campaigns aimed at delivering major projects, which for government funding may be insufficient or unavailable. Such

activities might include establishing a taskforce to approach local businesses and find sponsors for an ICT upgrade, or working with SBMs to identify grant funding opportunities for new classroom furniture or an upgrade to the school's PE facilities. You might also be able to identify opportunities for letting out the school's assets, such as the sports hall for local community use, in order to fund building repair works. As well as realising new opportunities, Parent Councils can help school leaders become more attuned to the social pressures faced by the families in their school, and more sensitive to the contexts in which those requests for additional parental contributions may be being made.

When schools and parents work in partnership, the results can be transformative. With sufficient commitment from leadership and support from the school's business managers, you'll soon see a positive process of engagement start to emerge. At Parentkind, we're currently consulting on our upcoming 'Blueprint for parent-friendly schools' – a framework which schools will be able to use to enhance or develop their efforts in this area. Parent Councils are a good starting point for effective two-way communication, and a good way of establishing a positive, shared school ethos.

**Ruth Lowe is external affairs manager at Parentkind – the leading PTA membership organisation, which provides training and support to teachers, governors and parents for building successful home-school relationships**

 @Parentkind  
 [parentkind.org.uk](http://parentkind.org.uk)

# Keep track of your running costs

Sue Gawman presents some advice on how to stay on top of your school's regular outgoings

A school business manager's role is complex and challenging daily juggling act of jobs that need doing and things that need to be remembered. Without a robust monitoring system in place, keeping track of deadlines and contract end dates can be difficult.

One possible option is to buy a software application that will help you log and keep track of those future dates and events. There are a whole host of options available, with many mirroring the approaches you'd find in a good paper-based system – but with funding levels increasingly an issue for many, it may be that you need to find a more cost effective solution.

Your tracking solution should form part of a system that works effectively for both you and your setting, but consider what would happen if you weren't there. How intuitive is your filing system? Could the vital information contained in your school's administrative and financial records be easily retrieved and understood by your colleagues?

## Rolling over

Whatever tracking solution you use, be sure to regularly review all of the maintenance contracts and recurring costs your school is signed up to, so that you can be certain you're achieving continued value for money. There's nothing more frustrating than missing a renewal window and being 'rolled over' into another contract period without any renegotiation. Allowing contracts to simply renew by themselves can result in you

paying higher costs without any noticeable service improvements.

I personally use a mix of different systems according to what I need to track. For health and safety maintenance, regular checks and contract renewals I'll use a wall calendar chart, as this provides all staff with a visible reminder of when important inspections will be taking place, and which contracts are nearing their end. Missing these can result in serious incidents and expensive claims, so it's vital that the dates in question are clear and obvious to the rest of the team in case I'm absent for a period of time.

For other system checks and contract renewals I'll use a well formulated spreadsheet with key information, listing types of service, company names, the purpose of each agreement and the relevant duration and expiry dates. This spreadsheet will also include

details of contract responsibilities and values, payment terms and required notice periods.

## Product, Purpose, Price

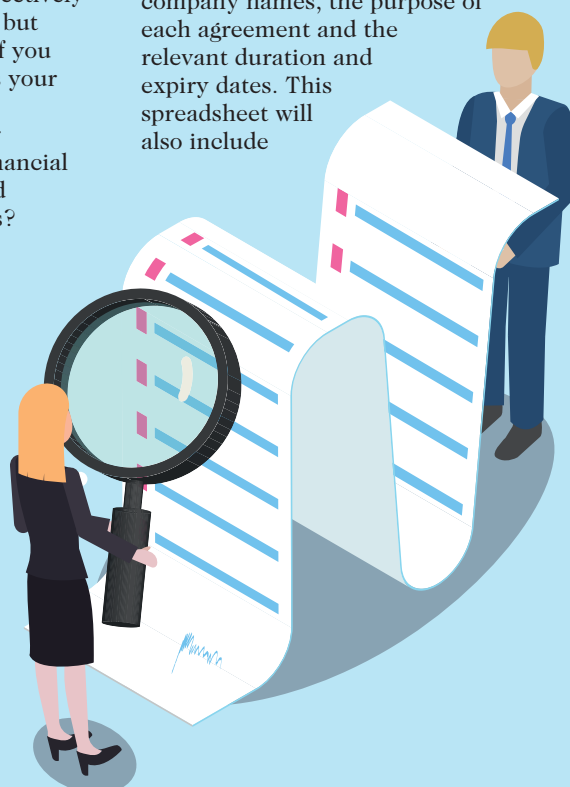
I'll then use this information to set expiry date notifications via the school's electronic calendar system, allowing enough time for the benefits of different services to be reviewed and alternative quotes to be obtained if a service is still required. The purpose of every contract should always be fully understood, and alternative solutions be given due consideration. Many schools and businesses have previously signed up to contracts that weren't really needed – remember, 'Product, Purpose, Price.'

As part of a renewal process, consider also whether you might be able to secure a better deal via a Schools' Buying Hub. Seeking support from experts can sometimes help ensure that the services in question are fully compliant with necessary procurement rules and regulations.

Ongoing good contract management helps to ensure that any available savings and/or efficiencies continue to be achieved, even after a contract is signed. Effective contract management will also help to maintain a positive relationship with a supplier, who can fully explain the terms and conditions of a contract and also ensure that what's promised during the tender process is actually delivered.

**Sue Gawman is a school business manager based at Tavistock Primary and Nursery School and a school resource management adviser**

 @DevonSBL





# HOW TO DEAL WITH A DEFICIT DILEMMA

Stuart Fern outlines the steps that SBMs should take when faced with negative numbers on their balance sheet...

**E**ven if your school's finances are in the red, there's no reason for them to be unmanageable. Here, I'll look at how to assess your situation as it currently stands, and then explain how to devise a workable plan that will let you fulfil your medium and long-term financial obligations, whilst still allowing you to deliver the pupil outcomes and daily operations your school should pride itself on.

Deficits can hit any school at any time, and for different reasons. They may be the result of demographic changes in your local area and the funding shortfalls that can accompany them, unforeseen staffing issues, or even the school roof blowing off!

A diligent SBM will tend to take their school going into a position of deficit personally, but please remember one thing – it's not your fault!

Your role now is to ensure that the school's decision makers – namely SLT and the governors – have to hand all the facts, figures and information they'll need to understand what's happened to put the books into deficit, make informed decisions, scenario plan and ultimately resolve the school's deficit dilemma. Beginning with the first and most important tool of all...

## THE BUDGET REVIEW

This will tell you how your school has got to where it is. You'll have as a minimum your three-year budget plan (potentially a five-year one), which should have been regularly reviewed and scenario tested. You now need to do that reviewing again, and quickly.

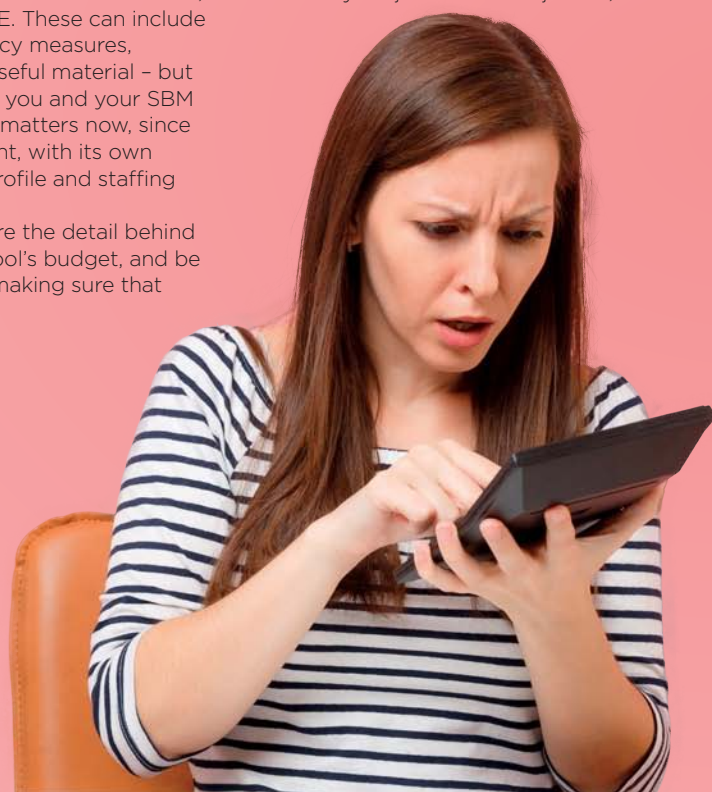
There are many guidelines, sources of advice and resources out there for schools in relation to their financial health, especially from the DfE. These can include health checks, efficiency measures, checklists and other useful material – but at a time of deficit, it's you and your SBM knowledge that really matters now, since every school is different, with its own unique expenditure, profile and staffing structure.

You'll need to explore the detail behind every line of your school's budget, and be especially mindful of making sure that

current spending is factored in; some cost centres will already be on track to overspend, meaning that changes in your spending may only achieve partial savings this year.

## STAFFING EXPENDITURE

This is your biggest area of spend, and the one where the most difference can be made. Remember to review and challenge all areas – your job is to be objective, and



to perform an advisory role for those making the decisions.

Be sure to focus on roles, not people. Look specifically at what roles are needed, not at who is deemed to always perform the best. Identify any temporary contracts, and consider what savings could be made now and in the future if those contracts aren't extended.

Review any impending resignations or contracts nearing completion, and think creatively about how those posts could be covered with existing staff, without the need for 'backfill'. Any staffing restructure will be expensive and amount to a medium term project in itself. It's vital to ensure that once the school's budget is back in surplus, your new staffing structure is effectively futureproofed and won't simply push the school back into deficit over the coming years. Always tie back to the three- and five-year forecast and your School Improvement Plan, and judge any staffing decisions on their value, impact and potential savings.

## PRIORITISE YOUR SPENDING

If you can identify the services you buy in light of their 'educational benefit', it will help you build a solid case for keeping them. However, be mindful that some services may not appear directly related to education, while still having a positive effect on pupil outcomes and whole school performance metrics. It's your SBM knowledge that's needed here to make those connections.

Watch out for any penalty clauses attached to stopping services early. Forensically list all of the school's contracts and agreements, and pass this

on to the SLT for review and recommissioning.

When drawing up your new budget plan, beware of reducing your 'fixed cost' centres by too much. Your utilities costs are likely to be higher in each subsequent year, so don't set them at a level in your new budget that can't be realistically achieved. What might look like a saving now may well become an overspend in a tight budget later down the line.

Remember that unplanned expenditures will always happen – new health and safety requirements, for example – and that you need to make allowances for them. Tackle unplanned expenditure on a case by case basis, and review each expenditure request from a whole school viewpoint. What one colleague sees as 'essential' may, in reality, not be needed elsewhere.

With regards to capital spending, any planned projects yet to commence will have to be reviewed in light of your deficit, with serious consideration given as to whether to proceed with them. This may entail a 'now or never' decision from your SLT.

## DON'T BLAME ME!

The deficit may have been caused by a decline in the funding your school receives. If that's the case, take the following course of action:

**1** Assign whatever funding remains available solely to curriculum activities that underpin school performance. Your wider and extracurricular activities may be at risk, but they'll need adding to a list that SLT will eventually have to make a decision on.

**2** Examine all income generated by your school right down to the micro level. Will this income really cover the costs of the clubs the school runs and the visits it organises? Or will the fees charged for these need to increase?

**3** Ensure that your debtors are chased and pay what they owe, at both parent and LA level.

*A diligent SBM will tend to take their school going into a position of deficit personally, but please remember one thing – it's not your fault!*

As noted at the start, the deficit isn't of your own making, but is everyone's problem to solve. The process of taking a long, hard look at how your resources are being used doesn't always have to be a negative one. Remember that in school business management, nothing ever stays the same – a thorough budget review and reforecasting, supported by well informed, knowledge-based scenarios, will be the key to solving your deficit.

Yours is the only role that ever gets to see the whole picture, from the finances behind how the school operates, to the pupils' outcomes. Always align your budget with the school improvement plan, challenge all areas of expenditure, and always plan for the unplanned.

You can never relax, though. If you're able to achieve a surplus in one year, you may find that further cuts and reductions are needed in order to prevent a further deficit in future. The earlier such decisions can be made, the earlier they can take start taking effect.



**Stuart Fern is finance director at One Education, specialising in business processes,**

**data as information and leading growing organisations through periods of change and development**

# LET'S ALL PULL TOGETHER

When it comes to paying for transport, CPD and the like, several budgets can be better than one, writes Sue Birchall...

**A**t this point, primary schools in England have largely survived a long period of austerity measures. We may not have come out smiling, exactly, but the situation has at least encouraged some of us to pursue more creative budgeting methods and think 'outside the box'.

The academisation drive that's accompanied this period of austerity was originally premised on enabling schools to more effectively share best practice, pool their resources and create efficiencies. But how practical actually is it for primary schools to pool their resources in this way?

From the outset, it should be recognised that collective initiatives in no way make up for the shortfall in funding that all schools are facing, and will likely continue to over the coming years. They should be entered into with a degree of caution; if a collaboration is formalised and/or takes place within a MAT, political and other agendas may result in the project not being beneficial to all. However, true collaboration pursued with the right approach and aims can be successful for both your finances and outcomes.

## FIRST STEPS

Any initiative which brings together unrelated parties needs careful input and planning from all involved. Use a business planning approach, set out desired outcomes, establish a timeline and key performance indicators, and devise a robust monitoring approach – that way, you can ensure the collaboration will be well managed and its aims achievable.

Take, for example, a group of primary schools who all require a minibus for transporting their pupils to swimming lessons. Individually, they can't afford to run their own – but when approached as a collaborative project, this becomes financially viable. First, however, some key decisions need to be made around where the bus will be kept, how it will be shared, who's responsible for its maintenance and ensuring that it's available for all parties to use when required.

Let's assume these considerations get sorted, and that the schools collectively approach the local swimming baths and agree a schedule which allows the bus to be shared. The housing and maintenance tasks have been agreed, and all schools have come to an arrangement whereby they can use it for their respective lessons.

## ASSESSING THE RISK

The next step is risk management. At this point, all parties will look at the KPIs and assess what risks are attached to their involvement in the arrangement. For instance,

what's the contingency plan in the event of the bus breaking down? Key to this are the decisions reached regarding the partners' shared responsibility and issues relating to the cost of ownership and shortfalls due to user error.

Say school 1 has a student who proceeds to damage the bus to such an extent that it's rendered unusable. School 2 consequently has to pay for private bus hire in order to cover an urgent transport need. In this instance, who should end up paying for what? It's therefore important to put prior work into ensuring a blame culture can't exist between the schools involved.

The final step is to protect the sustainability and longevity of the agreement – and one way of doing that is to ensure that the terms agreed between you and your partners are fully understood and confirmed at the outset.

Returning to our minibus example, let's say several schools club together to lease a vehicle, but one school later decides to pull out, citing financial concerns. This won't be sufficient grounds for all parties to end their contract with the vehicle provider. Instead, the remaining schools will have to fulfil the terms of the contract between them,





however financially challenging that may now be. This is a simplified example, but it highlights what can happen when entering into collaborations that haven't been properly set up.

## COMMON AIMS

A more positive example is one of the secondary schools I work in, which is currently engaged in a collaborative project with a group of local primary schools focused around distributing good practice, running joint training and sharing resources – the latter including everything from minibus access, to putting in place service level agreements for ICT, finance and business management. The aim is not for the secondary school to make money out of the arrangement, but to open up the resources it has and make them available to other schools who would otherwise be unable to afford them.

The school is now planning to build on the project by hosting termly meetings for support staff, sharing CPD and opening up its grounds – which include a lakeside shore – for the primary schools to use as forest schools. In my view, this is true collaboration; rather than competing against other schools, we

recognise that we all have the same aims and objectives and seek to make the most effective use we can of the public money we receive.

More formalised collaborations, of the sort generally built by federations or MATs, will have a written set of criteria and outcomes and often be focused on using economies of scale to achieve cost

efficiencies. (though to be fair, this something maintained schools can do too). Collaborations of this kind will commonly involve centralising services such as finance, HR and site management, taking control of contracts and service level agreements, and negotiating as a larger entity.

This can result in significant efficiencies and savings if done properly, but it can also take away the autonomy and ability of certain

schools to purchase locally. In some cases, it may even mean that participating schools have to compromise on what they actually get out of their group purchases, causing ill feeling among the schools involved.

## NATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

If you like the idea of inter-school collaboration, but either can't or prefer

not to pursue it at a local level, what other options do you have? Buying collaboratives have been around in education for a while, and can provide schools with the opportunity to purchase items as part of a larger buying initiative. I've previously used commercial companies to buy ICT items – they will tender for a number of schools, who then all get to benefit from the company's economy of scale purchasing rates.

The DfE has since taken up the mantle, creating the Crown Procurement Service to help schools with their purchasing and procurement. Whilst not a 'collaboration' in the truest sense of the word, it still gives schools the chance to create efficiencies and savings, and is thus a credible alternative.

As a school business manager, collaborations are a key tool in my ongoing efforts to ensure the schools I work with are using their money to the best advantage of the students. Exercise a note of caution when entering into them, and understand thoroughly all aspects of what you're getting into – but in general, collaborations are an excellent way of spreading good practice and pursuing new opportunities.



**Sue Birchall is a consultant, speaker, writer, trainer and business manager**

**at The Malling School, Kent**

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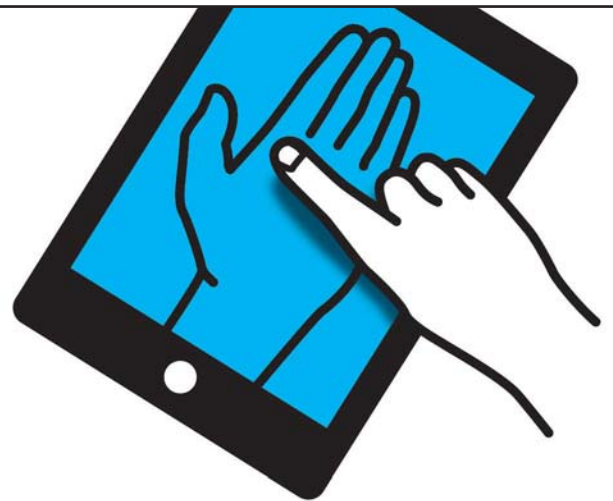
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# How to buy... PE Equipment

VISIT: [ESPO.ORG](http://ESPO.ORG) FOLLOW: @EASTERNSHIRES



*Sort through the suppliers and find the best way of sourcing those essential PE standbys with these pointers from ESPO procurement officer, Sam Nutting...*

## PURPOSE

Watching my eight-year-old son and four-year-old daughter vegging out in the living room brings into focus how lazy a parent I can be. My wife and I try our best to ensure the kids have a healthy and balanced diet and actively encourage them to play outside. We fork out for swimming lessons, go on the odd nature walk, and upon moving into our new house, spent a painful two and a half hours putting together a trampoline for the back garden.

However, the sedentary 21st century lifestyle we lead, with all its digital distractions and time consuming professional and personal pressures, make this a constant challenge. Schools and other such institutions therefore play a vital role in children's physical development. The physical and mental health benefits of PE are indisputable – 30 minutes of exercise four or five times a week can increase focus and foster the development of executive functioning skills. But if schools are to manage this, it's important that they have access to the necessary equipment.

## NEEDS

The first step when buying anything is to identify need. What PE equipment do the pupils in your school actually require? There are many different activities they can do, be it individually or as part of a team, and it can be difficult deciding on what activities will benefit them the most. The ESPO Sports Discovery Brochure (see [tinyurl.com/espo-sdb](http://tinyurl.com/espo-sdb)) is a great way of exploring the options available to you. It's easy to navigate, with equipment divided into clearly defined sections, including one for Primary PE.

Due to the varied nature of PE and sports equipment, it's difficult to provide a definitive answer as to what the life expectancy of such products should be. Factors influencing the working life of items include how frequently they're used, whether they're being properly used for their intended purpose and how they're stored and cared for.

Storage ought to be a key consideration when purchasing PE equipment, and could be a deciding factor when identifying suitable products.

## SOLUTIONS

Having identified your needs, you can then specify those items that will best meet them. Ensure that the items are of good quality and explore the most effective ways of attaining value for money. An example of the latter could involve purchasing a set of equipment that covers a range of different activities.

These are challenging times, with budgets getting ever more restrictive. So achieving value for money will be a priority. Analyse what's available on the market, explore what your options are and be sure to compare different offerings not just in terms of pricing, but on the quality of service that will be provided.

Buying through a leading public sector purchasing organisation such as ESPO will provide you with the assurance that you're getting a good price – one of ESPO's driving principles being to provide best value for money to our customers – and peace of mind that the purchases you make will be compliant with all required regulations and standards.



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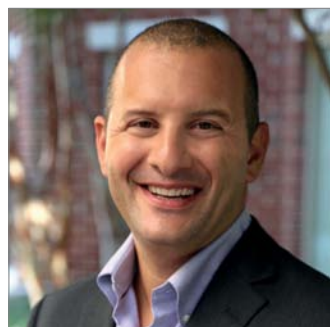
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Get great advice from fellow leaders sent direct to your inbox by signing up to our weekly newsletter. Topics so far have included how to rethink your catering, and why heads need to stop micromanaging and start leading.



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# 5 REASONS TO TRY... garden4me

Vivien Globe, director of garden4me, explains how the company's self-watering planters can open up and support a world of learning for children



## 30 SECOND BRIEFING

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### 1 SELF-WATERING

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### 2 OUTDOOR LEARNING

garden4me raised planters make for the perfect 'outdoor classroom'. As well as the fun and excitement of being outdoors, gardening in our raised planters provides the perfect opportunity for children to be creative, work as part of a team, practice communicating and develop their social skills with friends and teachers, while learning about things they may not previously have known. Learning to plant seeds and watching them grow and develop is a great way for children to learn about their environment and how it works.

### 3 FOOD CULTIVATION

Surveys suggest that children think their fruit and vegetables arrive in packets from the supermarket and aren't aware that they can grow their



own. The importance of understanding the positive nutritional, as well as environmental, benefits of growing your own food can't be underestimated in helping to shape our children's knowledge of the world they live in.

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### 5 SUPPORTING THE ENVIRONMENT

If there were no bees there would be no jam or ketchup. Bees play an essential role in pollinating the plants we grow for food, like fruit and tomatoes, but their population is in serious decline. Encourage and educate children to help by planting a 'bee friendly' garden with flowers that will attract not just bees, but also butterflies and other pollinators. You'll be surprised at how many flowers you can grow in a garden4me raised planter, and children will enjoy observing the subsequent insect activity close up.

## KEY POINTS

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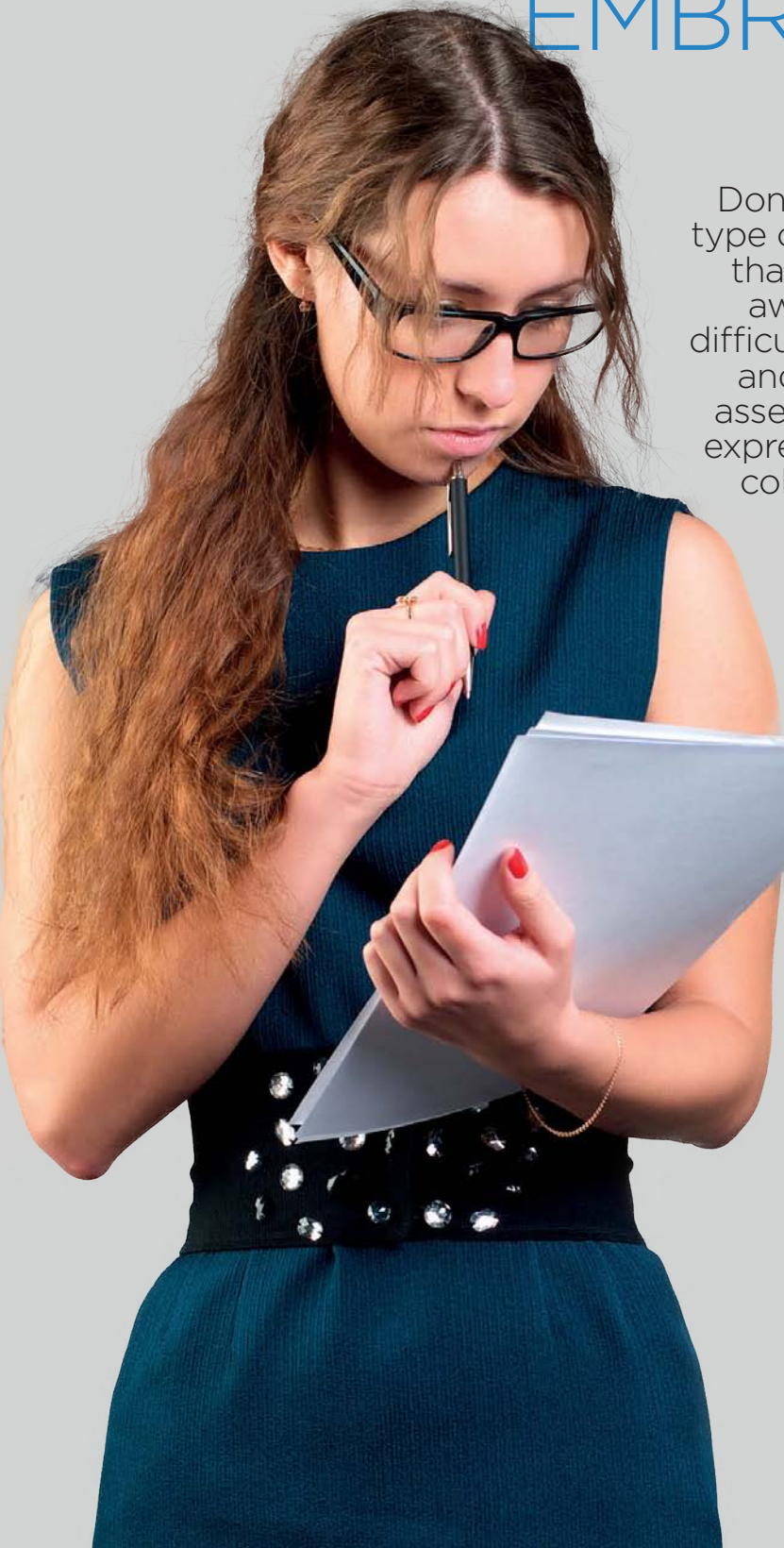
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## EMBRACE STAFF FEEDBACK



Don't be the type of leader that shrinks away from difficult truths and honest assessments expressed by colleagues, says Jill Berry...

**L**eaders need to model the behaviour they hope to see in others. If we expect those we lead to accept our advice graciously – to be receptive, responsive and positive, and prepared to use the information constructively in order to move forward in their practice – it's important that we adopt the same approach when feedback is offered to us.

Confident leaders actively seek feedback, knowing that, for any leader, the most dangerous thing is to be surrounded by those who don't tell you the truth. We all need champions and challengers, and we should listen carefully to what others say – especially when they offer something we don't want to hear.

If we're not willing to confront difficult truths, become overly defensive and even disposed to 'shoot the messenger', we can be sure that in time, those we lead will be reluctant to be honest with us.

### TUNING IN

A new leader can't 'impose' a vision on the team or school they move to lead. They inherit a great deal from their predecessor, and from the history of the context they're stepping into. They will, of course, make their mark, and over time put their own stamp on the role, but in the early days they need to tune into the context and build on the legacy. Seeking and respecting the views of those who know the school well is invaluable; you need their insights and their experience, but you also want to generate 'buy in', so that those you lead are committed to, and invested in, making things even better under your leadership.

So ask questions. Record the answers. Summarise what you've learnt and use this information to move forward. You'll be making better, more informed decisions, but also sending out an important message about how you value the opinions and expertise of those alongside whom you'll be working.

Encouraging a culture of continuous review and improvement should enable you to build on experience to secure further success. After every significant annual school event, consider asking all those involved, while the event is fresh in their minds, to record and pass to you their thoughts about what went particularly well, together with suggestions for how the event could perhaps be even better in the future. Show your appreciation; keep those notes safe and refer to them in your planning the following year.

## STATE OF PLAY

If you want to assess someone's strengths as a leader and identify how they could further develop their skills, you need to ask those they lead. Analysis and synthesis of the collated information can lead to a balanced, useful summary of the current state of play and clarify the leader's thinking about how they could focus their efforts in the year ahead.

It may be difficult for a leader to ask for this feedback directly, but using a third party to gather, filter and interpret the information can lead to an accurate, constructive and helpful review. The leader needs to ensure they act on what emerges from the process, so that those who fed into it know that they were listened to and their views respected.

Gathering feedback is worthwhile and can be illuminating, but the process will only work if you're sufficiently confident in seeking it out – especially when that feedback may be critical – and can show that you're receptive to, and appreciative of it.

*Jill Berry is a leadership consultant, author and former headteacher*



## MAKE YOUR MARK

After assuming headship, it may take time for your decisions and priorities to filter through – but can this be accelerated, without alienating colleagues?

**A**s an experienced headteacher I've overseen many whole school changes. It's a process that's far from easy, and by no means would I suggest that I have all the answers. However, for those new to headship, I'd offer the following principles as useful starting points in helping you bring about change in as quick and efficient a way as possible.

### 1. Operate with a genuine purpose

A new headship often calls for brave leadership. One way of doing this is to initially appear to sit back – far from doing nothing, this is time to be spent watching, observing and noticing. It's vital to not go in like the proverbial bull in a china shop; instead, take a considered approach based on what you see, and fit this to your own philosophy of education. Make every change matter. If you're operating with a genuine purpose, rather than changing for the sake of change, you'll bring people with you. This then becomes a core powerful catalyst for school improvement.

### 2. We're all in this together

Schools are about people. First and foremost the young people who attend each day, but they're also about the staff, whether they be teachers, support teams, administrators, site staff and your catering team. Each has a key role in the running of the school and in learners' lives. Schools are also about parents – key partners in children's education – and about community. Recognising this, and building on the unique and individual community strengths that surround a school, is critical in securing continued improvement. Relationships are everything. Get them right, and you can affect change quickly without distancing or alienating staff in the process.

### 3. Establish the direction of travel

Work with the school community in articulating a shared vision. Be clear about the steer you're putting on that as a leader, but use it as an opportunity to build a shared sense of ownership and buy-in. Experience tells me that it's far easier to affect whole school change if everyone has a sense of clarity about what's changing, why, and how it will be achieved. Let your team see that you trust them to have their say and then deliver.

### 4. Focus on communication

If you want to affect whole school change quickly, you need everyone on side and singing from the same hymn sheet. Simple things, such as active listening, consistent messaging and inviting feedback, are all really important, and remember that your communication can always be better – never think that you've 'cracked it'.

### 5. Develop others

Be clear with all partners about your beliefs. Build a vision, realise the wider goals you're aiming for and bring the best people with you. Make them better still through appraisal, coaching, CPD and high expectations. Never be afraid of helping people become better at something than you. Integrity, trust and belief are infectious – once you have them, they'll grow quickly in others. And that's a powerful place from which to build lasting changes in your school.

**Maxim Kelly is the executive headteacher of two schools in the Isle of Man (Dhoon School and Laxey School) which form the Laxey / Dhoon Federation**

 @maximjkelly

 maximheadteacher.wordpress.com



# “I was reported to Ofsted for encouraging terrorism”

Heads are expected to lead from the front and take the hits, writes Mike Fairclough – but they also need to pick themselves up and carry on...

**W**arriors and warhorses span the horizon, as a reluctant leader stands alone on the battlefield, sword in hand. We watch as he sighs heavily, exhausted from his last confrontation. And yet, though the odds are stacked against him, our battle-worn hero summons all the energy and determination he can muster and readies for the fight...

Readers who saw *Game of Thrones*’ face-off between Jon Snow and Ramsay Bolton may have found themselves identifying with the former’s predicament. In ancient history, it was the leader and ruler who occupied the most vulnerable position in battle, at the front and centre of their army. Today, this unenviable role has parallels in the job performed by headteachers, particularly when they’re up against it.

I’ve faced my fair share of challenges. My SATs progress scores have been below the national average, with everyone from County to inspectors demanding immediate answers. An angry parent once wrote to my Board of Governors calling for my resignation. Staff disputes have involved heated exchanges with union reps. I was reported to Ofsted for encouraging terrorism, following a TV show where I took my pupils clay pigeon shooting. One national newspaper reported that I’d slaughtered someone’s pet pig, while another claimed I’d taken my Y3 children hunting.

## Taking stock

My own approach when dealing with such situations is to first take stock and ask myself some serious questions.

What’s actually happening here? What does the spread of possible eventualities look like, from worst case scenario to the best? How can I steer events in the direction of the most favourable outcome?

I then look for my allies, as it’s often when life gets difficult that we see clearly who our real friends and supporters are.

Those feelings of loneliness can be alleviated by sharing our thoughts with colleagues we can trust.

It’s then a case of weathering the storm, for which we need resilience. Resilience is cultivated

through experiencing adversity; the more we rise to a particular challenge, the more resilient we become. Every challenge can be seen as an opportunity for us to grow stronger, however uncomfortable it might feel at the time.

## Self-care

I also remember to do two important things. The first is to look after myself. Sometimes, when things are bad, our appetite goes and we forget to eat. We get into bad habits, like not drinking enough water, overloading with coffee and not getting enough sleep. These will only magnify the problem at hand and make us feel worse. We can’t problem solve without adequate sleep, food and water.

The second thing I do is look for the positive. There will always be something in our lives that we can say is okay. Even something very small can sustain us through the dark times.

Jon Snow ultimately won his epic battle against the evil Bolton. Jon’s initial feeling of hopelessness was replaced by a resolve to never give up and fight for what he believed in. Unexpected allies subsequently joined forces with him and the tide turned in his favour.

As headteachers, we’ll always be at the forefront of our battles. However, if we look after ourselves, accept support from others and never stop believing, we’ll ultimately be triumphant. And those battle scars will only make us more resilient for the next time.

**Mike Fairclough is the Headteacher at West Rise Junior School**



# BECOME A BETTER MIDDLE LEADER

Be sensitive to both your own and your colleagues' performance, and you'll have a better chance of becoming the middle leader you want to be, says Kevin Lister...

In my view, the leadership of teaching and the curriculum should not be an exercise in 'do as I say' or 'do as I do'. It should be far more about offering help and support.

Over the years I've encountered many people who think that a head of department must be the best teacher of that subject, or that to be an effective senior leader you must be an outstanding classroom practitioner. I don't really subscribe to these views. Just as a great football manager doesn't need to be the best footballer, an effective – or even great – leader doesn't need to be the best teacher.

To lead effectively you need to have credibility within your team, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you must be demonstrably better than them. The task of school leaders is primarily to ensure that there are systems and structures in place to support the teachers in the classrooms. If teaching is made easier by the right support structures, then the core task for teachers becomes that of making learning as effective as possible for their students.

It's easy for school leaders to focus too directly on the students, bypassing or neglecting the needs of the teachers. This is probably because there is often little or no training for middle leaders on how to lead or manage. In his book *Out of the Crisis*\*, the American industrial theorist W. Edwards Deming highlighted the need for supervision to focus on supporting the 'next in line' customer. By Deming's definition, in a factory the next in line customer is the person one station down from you in the production line, not the actual consumer who buys the car. If you pass an issue on to the person who's next in line, you harm their ability to complete their job correctly, and therefore the issue is exacerbated.

Supervision on the factory floor works by making sure that the line workers each

do their individual jobs properly, not by checking the quality of the car at the end. Doing the jobs properly all the way down the line ensures a good outcome.

## PERSONAL IMPACT

For school leaders, the next in line customers are the teaching staff we supervise, not the students. When we focus explicitly on the students, we forget the needs of the staff. If the staff are supported in their needs, doing the right things well and in the right way, then the resulting outcomes for the students should be good.

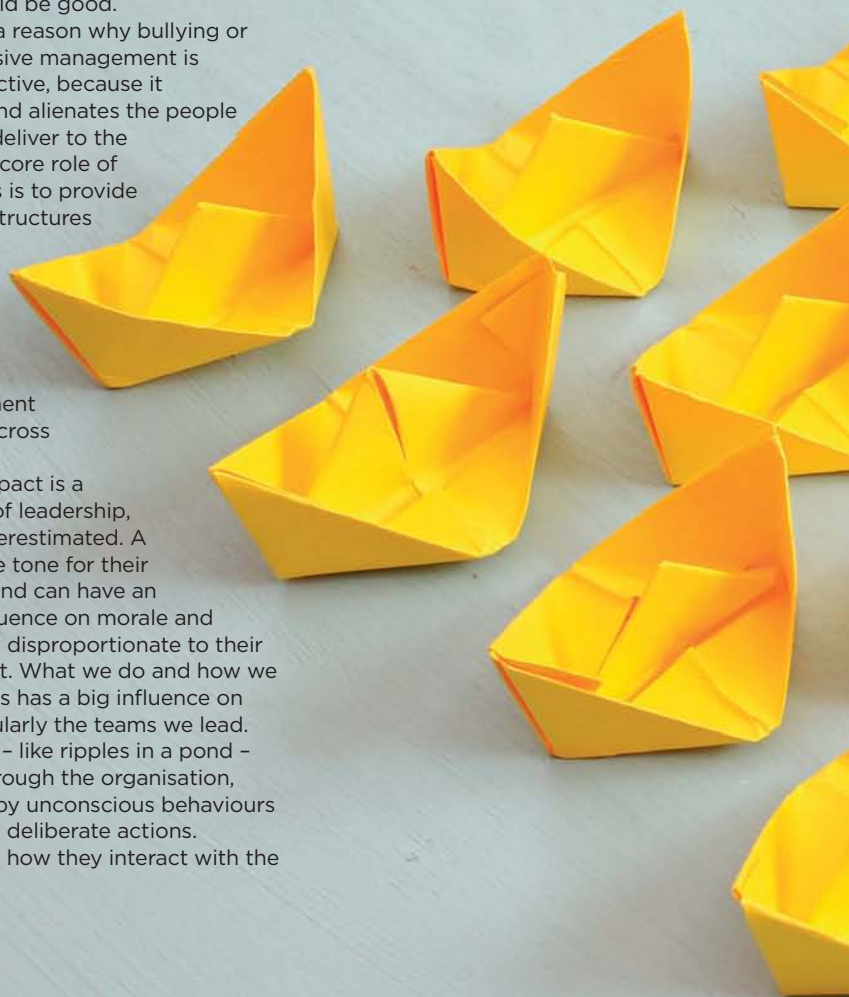
This is also a reason why bullying or overly aggressive management is counterproductive, because it demoralises and alienates the people who need to deliver to the students. The core role of school leaders is to provide systems and structures that facilitate, encourage and celebrate the processes of self-reflection and self-improvement for teachers across the school.

Personal impact is a massive part of leadership, but often underestimated. A leader sets the tone for their organisation and can have an enormous influence on morale and attitude, often disproportionate to their apparent remit. What we do and how we carry ourselves has a big influence on others, particularly the teams we lead. This influence – like ripples in a pond – will radiate through the organisation, often caused by unconscious behaviours as much as by deliberate actions. Depending on how they interact with the

ripples other leaders create, they can either reinforce, detract from, neutralise or completely undermine the intended messages.

## MIDDLE LEADERS

For middle leaders there can be a conflict due to the dual role of being both the leader of the team and also the voice of that team to the leadership. Often, middle leaders will naturally align to one of these positions, but seeing or presenting yourself from only one of these perspectives can





detract from the impact you have within your team or within the wider leadership. At times you'll need to choose the more difficult of the two roles, to ensure that the right messages are delivered and received in the intended way.

Leadership happens at all levels, and it's easy to get into the clichés of 'can-do attitude', 'self-starter' or 'team player'. However, there's something useful at the root of these clichés. I'd encourage you to reflect on the following questions to consider the impact you're having in your teams, and whether this is what you want or intend.

In the teams you're part of, are you a source of energy or an energy sink? If you don't provide a source of energy for the department, who does? I'm not suggesting that you always have to be the most energetic person; we all have our ups and downs. However, if your general demeanour is low energy, then it should not be a surprise if the rest of your team follow suit.

Are you outwardly more or less optimistic than the others in your teams? Teams need reassurance that the work they're doing is likely to be successful. This requires a dose of optimism – not the mindless kind that ignores reality, but a healthy optimism that the future holds better things. If you genuinely don't think this is true, are you doing the right things?

Do you actively manage the morale in the teams you lead? If you don't, who does? Unmanaged morale is uncontrolled and left to chance. If morale is not where you want it to be, find out why and make changes to improve it.

## COUNTERING NEGATIVITY

When issues arise, do you dwell on past events and apportion blame, or do you seek a solution? Understanding why something has happened is important so that it's not repeated, but nobody benefits from lengthy recriminations or scapegoating. Seek to draw a line under a situation and find a way to move forward.

If you're not the champion for your team, then who will fill that role? While negative things may happen – and all teams have weaknesses – sometimes these are best discussed quietly with those involved, with positive positions shared more widely. Do you criticise or question other leaders in private or in public? There's a time and a place for this type of thing. Consider who can overhear you and the message that this sends. An impressionable junior member of staff hearing their line manager being criticised by another head of department or a senior leader is likely to feel more negative about the next task that individual asks them to do.

Do you challenge negativity or seek ways to improve morale whenever negativity is encountered? Obviously, this has to be tempered with reality. We can't all be positive all of the time, and there's a time and a place for acknowledging negativity. However, negativity that's allowed to fester can spread, to the detriment of the wider organisation. Try to establish a route forward that counteracts the negativity and leads towards a more positive future.

Your answers to these questions will shape the way in which others see you. It will determine whether they see you as a source of help or not. Fundamentally, it will determine whether they want to work with you or not.

## SELF-REFLECTION

Consider the following questions and answer them as honestly as you can:

- Would you be inspired by someone who behaves exactly like you do? (i.e. exactly as you do now, not as you might like to, pretend to or aspire to.)
- Would you be proud to be in a team led by someone who behaves exactly like you?
- Which of your current behaviours would you find most annoying if you were leading yourself?
- Could you change your behaviours to improve the impact that you have?


It is common in 360° leadership reviews to get feedback from a range of people who work for you, alongside you and who supervise you. Sometimes this is a good way of getting honest answers to these questions when it is difficult to be that honest with yourself.



**Kevin Lister is a senior assistant headteacher at an academy in Warwickshire. This**

**article is based on an edited extract from his book *Teach Like You Imagined It: Finding the Right Balance*, which is available now, published by Crown House Publishing.**

 @ListerKev

 kevs-variability-thoughts.blogspot.com

\*W. Edwards Deming, *Out of the Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000 [1982])

# LOSE THE LEARNING WALKS

Jeremy Hannay explains why time consuming monitoring and effective scrutiny don't amount to the same thing...

**H**ave you ever been to a Michelin-starred restaurant? They'll typically prepare food using innovative cooking techniques and serve exquisite dishes that are filled with flavour. You know what I don't notice, or even look for, in such establishments? That green sticker in the window or on the wall that displays the restaurant's hygiene rating. It'll barely even register on my mind.

Now, consider my local chippy. Fish & chips, pizza, Indian curries and fried chicken, all available from the one shop. In places like this, that hygiene sticker will be the first thing I look for. Odd, isn't it – when I'm uncertain about quality and don't entirely trust the service being provided, I'll seek reassurance from an official body.

The monitoring and scrutiny we undergo as schools essentially provides us with hygiene stickers for education providers. To extend that logic, if we want our teachers and schools to be Michelin-starred equivalents, we have to look far beyond the basics.

## CLEAR REASONS

In order to dissect how we can monitor and scrutinize more effectively, we need to be clear as to why we're carrying out this monitoring and scrutiny in the first place:

### 1. It's about performance.

I feel that if I don't keep my eye on what's happening, performance will decline or derail.

### 2. Its about consistency.

I personally feel that if we're not checking up on teachers, they'll deviate from the 'game plan'.

### 3. Its about standards.

A teacher may be doing their very best and following our instructional programme to the letter, but their best may still not be good enough.

### 4. It's about CPD.

I feel that when I intimately know what teachers are doing, I can plan better CPD for them.

I don't think anyone would argue that performance, consistencies, standards and development are bad goals. However, my hope is that we can start asking ourselves whether there might be a better form of monitoring that puts our education professionals front and centre, rather than at the edge..

## NO POLICY REQUIRED

Issues with performance and consistency become far less challenging when a school's instructional programme is clear. For example, we use 'anchor charts' at our school. These are sheets of A1 paper that record key learning, created with the children during lessons and subsequently hung on washing lines in the classrooms. It's impossible to visit Three Bridges and not be immediately struck by this obvious visual indicator of just how consistent our learning is.

However, we don't have an anchor chart policy. Nor I have ever conducted a learning walk and fed back to teachers about the quality of the anchor charts in their classrooms. What we currently do with anchor charts came out of a collaboratively designed, intentional and instructional approach we devised some years ago. Yet all staff now do it – even those colleagues who weren't around when the anchor charts idea was originally introduced. Often, the things we're looking for in terms of consistency

don't require a policy or playbook.

How do they staff know where the staffroom is? They follow the crowd. It's important to them that they eat collectively, so they'll watch closely and follow others' lead. When something doesn't take hold, the thing to do is ask why.

## SKILL AND WILL

Typically, when there are inconsistencies in the implementation of a new approach or development it'll be because it's us, the leadership, that needs to change, rather than them.

The roots of inconsistencies can usually be traced to one or more of the following:

- The teachers find it a waste of time.
- It's never been clearly explained and agreed.
- It was a solution to a problem that doesn't exist any more.
- The time to impact ratio is off (consider marking – it's something one can spend hours on, while getting very little in return).

When it comes to standards, there's often a key question to consider concerning 'skill' or 'will'. A lack of skill can often be fixed with the right support in place, but a lack of will is harder to address.

In the latter case, I'll often imagine myself in a scenario where the staff in question have tenure under the US/ Canadian academic career structure and effectively can't be fired, no matter what. It's a thought exercise that changes my perspective in a useful way. I start thinking more about push and pull factors. How can I get them to come with us?



## RISE TOGETHER

My default position is that we rise together. Instead of time-consuming lesson observation techniques, I prefer to use 'micro-views' and two-minute 'lesson looks'. If an instructional program has been presented clearly, then you'll know immediately upon entering a lesson what success looks like.

In just two minutes, you can still listen to teaching, quickly talk to a child and look at a table of books. It doesn't take much more than that. There's no need for a notepad, clipboard or laptop – just a brief, friendly visit. If you register that things are problematic, you can attend to

“There's no need for a notepad, clipboard or laptop – just a brief, friendly visit.”

the situation with the aid of a 'behind the scenes' document aimed at supporting the teacher's development – at pace, but with humanity and humility.

CPD should rarely be reactive. Strong leaders will know their staff, be able to anticipate when new developments are likely to cause a struggle, and effectively gauge where that struggle will be for people that are new. If we're constantly responding to what's wrong, we'll never move forward. Instead we'll be stuck, endlessly chasing our tails. Go into things with the expectation that certain concepts, strategies and approaches will be more challenging, and plan this in. Don't wait for things to go wrong and then try to recover.

Maintain multiple streams of development – some streams for new staff, for example, and others for more experienced colleagues. Involve as many people as you can in your school and staff support, not just those with senior titles. Know your strengths, and develop those areas marked by struggle.

## DRIVING STANDARDS

**Powerful mechanisms that can really build consistency and improve performance include...**

- Self-referral
- Professional growth partners
- Opportunities for coaching conversations
- Organised research lessons
- Lesson study
- Teacher research groups

## LOWER THE STAKES

In racing, drivers don't slow down when they see a crash but instead hit the accelerator. Mid-level leaders can support and broker CPD that's appropriate for meeting today's challenges, but we also need to keep our hand on the heart of the school and our eyes to the sky.

When decisions are made collectively between teachers and leaders around a school's basic expectations, you'll find that the need for compliance monitoring and scrutiny becomes all but obsolete. Books, planning, environments and displays all start to become routine. If you've been able to create a culture where teachers have a genuine voice, you'll see their commitment soar.

With no need for close, corporate-style monitoring, you'll soon see that teachers are their own biggest critics. Give them a low (or no) stakes opportunity to learn, improve and grow and watch them take off.



**Jeremy Hannay is the headteacher of Three Bridges Primary School**

 @HannayJeremy

 [noordinaryclassroom.home.blog](http://noordinaryclassroom.home.blog)

# SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS OF PERSUASION

Each day can present a number of scenarios that test a headteacher's persuasion skills – how good are yours, and how might you improve them?

**L**et's be clear. I'm not going to try and persuade you that there's merit in acting like a high street geezer, asking passers-by if they "Wanna buy a watch?" No – there's a fine art to persuasion that has nothing to do with buying dodgy goods. Well, most of the time, at least...

Instead, what I'm going to attempt here is look at where we can use tools other than the 'charismatic leader' model. It's been some time since scholars have researched the myth/reality behind the charismatic leader with the same feverish intent we saw in the early 2000s.

## THREE APPROACHES

Indeed, a core aim of the original headteacher's qualification was to provide individuals with tools that extended beyond raw charisma. Systems were seen as a robust strategy for driving standards forward. In part, this has proved to be the case – but if we're looking at persuading somebody towards your own way of thinking, I'd suggest considering the following three approaches:

- Data
- Apology
- Nudge

Just as it has everywhere else, technology has changed the school system and driven certain aspects of it forward. When used carefully, technology can certainly be a useful persuasion tool, since the key to persuasion is immediacy. Can you grab core facts when you need them?

In a school environment, the time

available for this can be limited, yet the right data will be invaluable when trying to coax someone into agreeing with your point of view. Take attendance, for example – it's the legal duty of parents to ensure their child attends school, and a limiting judgement when being inspected.

At the time of writing, the national average for attendance is 95.8%, with persistent absence standing at 15.5%. That's your first key fact. Core to the art of persuasion is knowing your subject. Pupils falling below 90% attendance convert to persistent absentees. They can obviously move out of this category once their attendance increases, but this is where you need to know your data. Meeting with a parent and not having the child's and local/national attendance data at your fingertips puts you at an immediate disadvantage.

At this point I have to raise a critical eyebrow at some of the information systems used by the majority of schools. Approximately 90% of schools are currently using systems to manage their school data that are grossly out of sync with modern technology. SIMS, as used by over 80% of schools, hasn't received an update for many years. Its long-promised successor, SIMS 8 (AKA SIMSOnline), was meant to launch last year but appears to have been delayed indefinitely.

SIMS is heavily reliant on a complicated report process. Indeed, I've heard one head remark that they had to write down each step they took to prepare a relatively straightforward report, because the sequence was so hard to remember. The same can be said of the second biggest provider in this space, Integris. It recently received a minor update, but remains built around a complex

system of multiple 'bolt-ons' that can result in data being inadvertently duplicated or even over-written.

Schools are gradually becoming wise to this, and are increasingly turning to swifter online systems such as Arbor, Cedar, BromCom and others. The difference is night and day. At a time when school leaders have never been more pressured, the ability to access critical information in a timely way is more important than ever. Being able to enter a meeting with a fistful of facts to hand not only gives you confidence, but can have an immediate calming effect on the meeting itself.

In certain situations, data can do all the persuasive heavy lifting for you, to the extent that all you have to do is knock the ball into the net. A good data system should be able to clearly indicate the times of day when incidents have occurred, allow for instant comparisons of one child's behaviour against the school or cohort, highlight attendance trends and perform any number of other data tasks that you can draw on and use



to prepare yourself for meetings. The days of deciphering behaviour books and trying to glean attendance data from an impenetrable MIS ought to be over.

## A SIMPLE 'SORRY'

Allowing data to serve as your 'persuasion muscle' can relieve heads of a great deal of anxiety, though the health warning I should issue here is to not use it as an aggressive tactic. The art of persuasion involves creating a 'win-win' atmosphere, which can only be achieved by listening and retaining an air of calm. It's neither conducive, nor attractive, to become defensive.

That applies always, even at the end of term. You and your colleagues might be at your most fatigued, and may have a meeting due with a parent who's raised a frivolous complaint. The mere fact that the parent has set aside time to meet with you deserves your professional engagement. If you're at fault, then address the issue and don't just offer excuses.

An apology can ultimately pave the way forward for resolution by clearing an argument. Making excuses will only serve to dilute an apology. It might seem like a natural position to take, but if your ultimate aim is to persuade a family towards your way of thinking, then a

## IN BRIEF

Persuasion is an art. There may be examples of charismatic headteachers driving forward their vision through sheer force of personality, but the reality is that these are rare, and individuals concerned often risk being found out if they don't have their facts right.

Politicians might be able to get away with that by 'brazening it out', but school leaders can't. What I've outlined here are three routes leaders can take in pursuit of their ultimate aim of persuading someone else that they are wrong and the school is right.

simple, unequivocal 'sorry' can clear their concerns, letting you then get on with the main business of the meeting. It's a humble approach that can drive forward your argument.

## THE NUDGE

Finally, there's the nudge. To understand 'nudge', you have to appreciate that persuasion is a dance and that you have to keep time with your partner. You won't win many arguments by merely forcing your position; challenging exchanges should feel like a partnership, albeit one in which you're ultimately leading and carefully manoeuvring your partner forward.

Nudge considers small changes – suggestions which, if taken over time and in their entirety, will enable others to reach a position that goes against that which they may have originally held. As a headteacher, you'll have a plan for your school and its environment, including what is taught. How you deliver this plan should be carefully considered. Aim to build on existing achievements, even if these might be initially thin on the ground. This will help you engage with the community and make them feel part of the plan, even as they're being nudged towards your vision.

Persuasion might come easily to those with the gift of the gab, but they can easily be found out if the data or school ethos doesn't back them up. And never be too proud to clear the air – a simple apology harms nobody, and can reward you with a parent possessing restored dignity and faith in the school.



**Anthony David is an executive headteacher**



# TRANSFORM YOUR LEADERSHIP

Action Learning can not only make your leadership more effective, but also make you feel better, writes Katherine Powell...

**B**eing an executive or senior leader at a school, federation or MAT can be an exhilarating, but enormously challenging gig. I've been there myself – from assistant head, to headteacher, to executive head and eventually Director of Education at a MAT, I've loved (nearly!) every moment of being able to change children's and young people's lives, as well as getting to develop and empower my teams to become the best forms of themselves.

But being a leader is a huge responsibility. You're ultimately being paid to make the very best decisions you can for those in your care, which comes with the obligation to ensure that you're in the best possible physical and mental shape to do so.

Schools are, rightly, incredibly vibrant and busy environments. As a leader, you walk the corridors, set the standards and invest time daily in the children, young people and adults in your care. Too often, however, leaders find themselves grappling with pressing challenges and big ideas of the moment during their own time.

One headteacher recently described this thought process to me as like having a 'popcorn brain': a mind that's always on go, churning over challenges, problems and next steps during moments when, as a human being, you should be switching off (in the shower, cooking the dinner, watching television, when sleeping) and conserving your mental energies for those important decisions.

How, then, can you find the 'head space' within the working day to resolve those urgent problems, reflect on your understanding, build resilience and drive yourself forward? In this area, one form of professional development stands head and shoulders above the rest – Action Learning.

I expect some readers will be familiar with the concept of Action Learning sets. A group of six to eight leaders from across a range of different schools

comes together, supported by an expert facilitator, to solve complex, real-life leadership problems. Critically, these will be individuals with the same hierarchical position, who therefore jointly understand the role and its responsibilities.

Meeting together every six weeks in a venue away from distractions, they will form a trusting, non-judgemental and confidential coaching space. Taking it in turns, they present the biggest leadership issue they're grappling with, and the group uses questioning, with the facilitator's support, to help the individual find a way forward. Each leader will then ultimately walk away with actions, solutions and an increased sense of working wellness.

Sounds simple, right? Yet there are a number of factors that make this approach an extremely powerful one for increasing the resilience, greatness and overall impact of leaders.

## 1. LEADERSHIP IS AN ART

Consider some of the world's greatest artists, such as Rembrandt, Michelangelo and Van Gogh. One thing they all have in common is that they transformed themselves over time – not by measuring themselves against their single greatest public success, but against their inner desire to be the best forms of themselves. Action Learning provides an opportunity for leaders step outside of their problems and examine them through different eyes. Via the challenges presented by members and leadership models offered by the facilitator, members learn lifelong strategies for looking at leadership problems and turning them into solutions. The groups are places in which to

think, rather than be told; a place where members can refine and define the kind of leaders they want to be.

## 2. IMPOSTER? WHERE?

How often in your leadership career have you lain awake wondering what to do about that one problem that just won't resolve itself? As Freud put it, the nature of human beings is that at some point they'll ask themselves whether the problem was their fault, if they could have dealt with it better, or worse, if they even have the capacity to fix it.

Whether this sense of imposter syndrome lasts for a fleeting second or what feels like a lifetime, it won't see you operating at your best. Action Learning uses principles of positive psychology, derived from the work of Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (see [tinyurl.com/psm-pp2000](http://tinyurl.com/psm-pp2000)), to enable group members to unlearn self-destructive behaviours and instead learn strategies for focusing on objective solutions.

## 3. YOU CAN PUT YOUR ARMOUR DOWN

We live in a competitive world where it's not good enough to be average, and where everyone is striving to be the best. That's a tough gig for any leader, and we





all need the chance put down our armour – that steely exterior that prevents others from seeing the things we’re grappling with. In an Action Learning set, members will commit to giving each other objective, solution-focused challenge and support. There’s no judgement, no competition and no winners. It’s a confidential and safe space outside of home where you can be who you really are.

## 4. RESTORE RESILIENCE

In her 2018 book *Dare to Lead*, research professor Brené Brown states that leaders must “Learn to rise”; that when things get tough or leaders make mistakes, they should have the ability to get back up and continue onwards with their vision and mission. In practice, of course, this isn’t an easy skill to develop. While some leaders may get up and get on quite happily, self-doubt can remain in place for many, to the point where it becomes limiting.

Through Action Learning, group members will soon learn that the type of things which keep them awake at night are also things that give others restless nights too. In that moment of realisation it becomes easier to rise, since you can rationalise that you’re not alone.

## 5. DRIVE OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Action Learning set group members are a focused bunch. No one has any time to waste – they’re in the room to find solutions and move forward, and don’t want to be involved in CPD that lacks punch. Via careful coaching of each individual dilemma, the group will enable each other to look at their challenges with six different pairs of eyes. Magic happens – where previously you may

have only seen one or two potential options, now a range of possibilities and choices reveal themselves. Leaders realise that there’s more than one way of moving forward. What’s more, between sessions they now have a network of trusted peers that they can call on for advice.

## 6. PAY IT FORWARD

Action Learning can transform how you lead your teams. Before becoming a member, you’ll have been a giver of answers. As a leader, you’ll have developed an encyclopaedic understanding of how to tackle any school- or MAT-level scenario, and imparted this wisdom to your team as and when required. Through Action Learning, however, you’ll internalise a set of rich coaching skills that can help change the way you speak to and empower your team, eventually enabling them to become the best forms of themselves in turn.

For 15 years I’ve been facilitating Action Learning groups with the specific aim of helping to develop the leadership skills, behaviours and styles of senior and executive leaders. The opportunity to open up and share (often common) experiences in the presence of a skilled facilitator is both powerful and transformational. Action Learning can’t make you a great leader, but it can greatly increase your potential to become one.



**Katherine Powell is a leadership consultant, Action Learning facilitator**

**and executive coach**

## THE PRINCIPLES OF ACTION LEARNING SETS

1. New behaviours ‘stick’ when we quickly transfer what we learn into practice.
2. We learn best when the learning links to our real-life situations.
3. Professional development has a greater impact on performance when we chose to become involved in it, and it’s personalised to us.
4. Applying coaching strategies in the workplace helps empower the thinking and behaviours of team members in our care.
5. Everyone wants to get something done, thus making walking away with actions and solutions central to the exercise.
6. The wellbeing benefits of Action Learning include increased self-awareness, greater confidence, a willingness to take the initiative and a sense of not being alone.



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Pupil Asset's 100% cloud-based system means that schools don't require any specialist hardware or servers to run or use it – you can simply access it from any device, any time, anywhere.

It really is a new way of seeing your school.

**Learn more by emailing [sales@pupilasset.com](mailto:sales@pupilasset.com) or visiting [pupilasset.com](http://pupilasset.com)**

### MEET THE SUPPLIER



#### Stella Mead

Stella Mead has worked in education support for over 20 years and overseen Pupil Asset

tracking solutions through many DfE changes. Stella currently supports our central MAT teams in developing the sustainable and effective assessment solutions that feature in Pupil Asset

# WriteWell

A book-based handwriting scheme for reception to Y6 that offers plenty of support

- A whole-school scheme for developing pupils' handwriting from Reception to Y6
- A developmental approach to teaching of handwriting
- Movement-focused instruction
- Pupil books provide systematic practice of letters and joins
- Free online resources, including pattern sheets, writing mats and animations

Reviewed by: John Dabell

Every pupil should have the opportunity to develop a fluent, legible, consistent and speedy style of handwriting that can be adapted for various purposes and audiences. Handwriting is a way for children make written language their own, and an important expression of their identity – but without timely, systematic and consistent support, learning handwriting can feel like ploughing a field in the rain.

Enter WriteWell, produced by Schofield & Sims – a scintillating series of 11 pupil books and a teacher's handbook. Built on the foundations of effective practice developed by the National Handwriting Association, the teaching is based around eight 'S Factors' – Shape, Space, Size, Sitting, Stringing, Slant, Speed, Style – and four 'P checks', namely Posture, Pencil, Paper and Pressure.

The S Factors are grouped into four developmental stages, dividing the learning into discrete, manageable modules that are covered in fine detail in the teacher's guide. The latter covers a lot of ground, providing plenty of detail relating to its teaching model and how WriteWell should be used. There's assessment guidance, teaching tips, support for left-handers and a number of other resources. The bulk of the book consists of teaching notes for each developmental stage, covering everything you need to know – how to

use the pupil books; how to introduce pattering; letter formation; and a set of impressive formation charts, detailing essential mechanics and common difficulties.

The pupil books are a real triumph, having been designed to minimise cognitive load via carefully crafted, on point practice opportunities. The activities they contain are structured as a sequence of teaching units gradually ramping up in difficulty, alongside challenge tasks for showcasing their progress.

In the early books, Nibs the Monkey is on hand to help children learn about letter families and formation patterns, with every book following a 'Try it, practise it, apply it' route to mastery in a number of realistic contexts.

There's a distinct shortage of professional development centred on handwriting within the wider profession, along with a general lack of understanding about the skills that underpin sustained writing development. Happily, WriteWell can also function as a CPD resource in its own right, informing teaching methods and improving provision across the primary phase.

WriteWell is a worthy contribution to the body of knowledge concerning the learning of handwriting, as well as being an affordable, easy to implement teaching resource.



**PSM**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## VERDICT

- ✓ A highly compelling handwriting course
- ✓ Intelligently structured as a series of clear, cumulative steps
- ✓ Promotes writing readiness and develops good handwriting habits
- ✓ Builds and develops fluency, stamina and cognitive automaticity
- ✓ Contributes to children's holistic development

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a flexible means of teaching handwriting in a developmentally-responsive and integrated way, so that children can write clearly, confidently and speedily

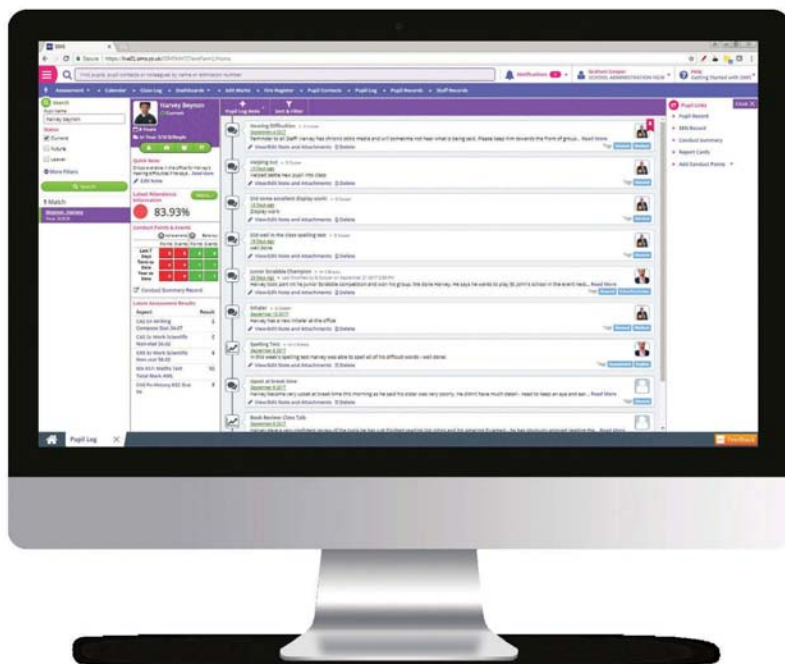
To learn more, visit  
[schofieldandsims.co.uk](http://schofieldandsims.co.uk)  
or follow @SchofieldSims

# SIMS Primary

A redeveloped management information system that produces intelligent and integrated data insights for teachers

- Designed to help busy teachers complete tasks easily
- Provides razor-sharp analytics to help you make informed decisions
- Updates and backs up automatically to the cloud
- In-built flexible assessment system for easy attainment and progress tracking

Reviewed by: John Dabell



Is it possible to get excited about management information systems? I didn't think it was until I toured the latest version of SIMS from Capita. It's got a whole new look and yes, it's actually very exciting. Its predecessor was good, but this is a great leap forward and a dynamic evolution.

The interface of SIMS Primary has changed for the better. It's bright, colourful, interactive and matches the vibrancy and energy of primary schools. It's modern, advanced and fit for the way schools operate today.

The terms 'user-friendly' and 'intuitive' get bandied around quite a lot, but SIMS Primary has nailed it. The site is easy on the eye and a pleasure to navigate because it has been exceptionally well designed.

Although it packs a lot of information in, you don't drown or get bogged down in complexities. You won't need to go hunting for the information you need because it presents itself to you through bright, colourful and engaging signposts.

Everything you need to do as a class teacher is in one place, with highly accessible information points for effective classroom management including calendar, class log, pupil log, contacts, records, register,

assessment, dashboards and more.

I love the new pupil log screen, as this lets you see all the information about every child in your class using notes in a Twitter-feed style timeline format. This is a masterstroke, because here you can record a variety of comments, pin them for importance, add attachments and very quickly build up a narrative picture of each child's life in school. It feels familiar and encourages you to interact and add data.

Another new feature is the class log. Here, you can see your whole class in a single screen – and not just names, but photos too. What's clever about this feature is that filters enable you to see who's who in terms of birthday, FSM, SEND, pupil premium, medical information and important notes. Click on a photo to enter into the register and award positive points in an instant.

SIMS Primary will save you time and help you manage it like a workload wizard. It proves that management information systems don't have to be boring. It's a dedicated data analyst that could quite possibly be your new best school friend.



## VERDICT

- ✓ Explore rich real-time information
- ✓ User-friendly
- ✓ Clean, colourful, engaging and fresh
- ✓ Helps teachers focus on key information and make effective use of it
- ✓ Slick, professional and available on multiple devices

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for a contemporary and powerful MIS tool that drives improvement and progress and makes data management interactive, purposeful and instructive

To learn more, contact  
0800 170 1220 or visit  
[simsnextgeneration.co.uk](http://simsnextgeneration.co.uk)



# First News Education

A quality KS2 news resource for helping develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of wider issues outside the classroom

- The UK's only weekly full colour newspaper for children aged 7-14
- Class-friendly news resources for advancing pupils' core literacy levels
- Award-winning online interactive learning platform
- Activity Sheets filled with comprehensions, quizzes, puzzles and debates
- A dynamic resource with its finger on the news pulse



Reviewed by: John Dabell

Since its inception in 2006, First News has moved with the times, adding layers of new and exciting features. This is a resource with special attractions, one that can act as a real driver for the critical reading of news stories.

The First News printed newspaper is packed with rich nuggets of news, alongside a collection of fun and feisty features that will slip effortlessly into any reading and literacy programme. From quick news, big news, home news and world news, to special reports, animal features, science bulletins, interviews, book reviews, puzzles, sport, entertainment, games, quirky news and more – First News buzzes with life and packs a punch. There's even a regularly-aired two-minute video news roundup, First News Today, that's professionally produced by Sky.

First News doesn't shirk the big global issues. Instead, it tackles them head-on, giving short shrift to fake news in the process, and providing children with the means to become canny and critical news consumers.

First News also has its very own digital offering – a personalised enrichment learning platform called the iHub – that contains weekly interactive

comprehension quizzes, vocabulary puzzles, polls and debates based on First News stories. The activities can be customised to individual readers according to their reading level, as assigned by the teacher. Activities can then be selected by teachers or via an automated option, whereby the iHub does the choosing itself and will even do the marking of multiple choice questions for you.

The comprehension activities show the total words read, time taken and points earned. What I particularly love about the iHub is that its 'news gallery' feature enables children to craft and create their own news feeds out of content that excites them and play at being editors. There's some top notch weekly content too, which is available as a series of printable PDF Activity Sheets and can similarly be tailored to suit different reading levels.

When it comes to the news, children need to be in the know, up to date and in control. First News is engaging, empowering and inspiring, providing children with the tools and the confidence to go with it. It's the Roger Federer of news resources – a real class act, jam-packed with information, insight and intrigue.

**PSM**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## VERDICT

- ✓ Fresh, relevant and beautifully written
- ✓ Helps children dive into the detail of news stories and become critical thinkers
- ✓ Flexible resources for fuelling an interest in current affairs
- ✓ A colourful and clever print/digital offering that's smart and serious, while also being fun and entertaining

## UPGRADE IF...

...you're looking to help children become news-savvy and media smart, while developing their evaluation skills and enabling them to grow into informed world citizens.

For a budget of £1,150 (excl. VAT) your school can opt for 12 copies of the First News newspaper and up to 140 iHub pupil logins; for a free 30-day trial, visit [schools.firstnews.co.uk/explore](https://schools.firstnews.co.uk/explore)

# CLASSMATES® stationery

An own-brand range of affordable stationery from Hope Education

- Classroom stationery essentials for the budget-conscious
- Unadorned stationery for inclusive use
- Utilitarian and straightforward products
- A huge selection of resources

Reviewed by: John Dabell



This is the time of the year when you find out who knows the difference between 'stationary' and 'stationery'. It's also the time of the year when you know who can shop like a ninja.

Tight budgets and being frugal doesn't just mean saving money, but spending your money wisely. It can be tempting to go for the bottom-end of cheap, but that will likely result in you actually spending more in the long run. Poor quality items don't tend to last.

We need to choose our tools carefully and consider those two big factors when making our purchasing decisions – affordability and quality. It's easy to cut corners, but happily you don't have to when it's possible to buy decent quality at low prices.

The CLASSMATES® collection of stationery resources from Hope Education offers plenty of choice at very reasonable prices. If you're looking for a class supply of assorted colouring pencils for under £20, you can't really go wrong with a box of 288 to keep you going. How about 144 HB hexagonal shaft pencils that will come in handy for general classroom use for just £7.19? You're definitely going to need some ballpoint pens – here you can pick up 50 for £3.99.

I've always tended to upgrade when it comes to things like gluesticks and dry-wipe markers, since bitter experience has taught me that the glue won't always stick and the markers will soon dry up. But these CLASSMATES® resources are surprisingly good, and haven't disappointed or let me down yet.

For someone who's a self-proclaimed stationery junkie that gets a kick out of going to certain retail outlets, I'm impressed with these CLASSMATES® supplies, and would recommend them as a smart choice. They'll see to it that you spend your budget intelligently, representing as they do the very opposite of fashion-fad novelty stationery that's both costly and unnecessary.

In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens writes that "There was something very comfortable in having plenty of stationery." Well, he wouldn't be disappointed by the CLASSMATES® collection.

In these cash-strapped, deficit-driven and frugal times, it's reassuring to know that teachers needn't spend hundreds a year on classroom supplies themselves – not when there are resources such as these that are well within budget of every school. This is what CLASSMATES® are really for.

**PSM**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## VERDICT

- ✓ Superb value for money and fantastic quality
- ✓ Suitable for all budgets
- ✓ Functional, serving their purpose in understated style
- ✓ Helps steer clear of classroom battle lines drawn on the stationery front...

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking for durable, high quality 'own-brand' stationery resources that represent exceptional value for money. CLASSMATES® is a budget-friendly option with bags of choice that will keep classrooms happy.

Visit:  
[hope-education.co.uk/classmates](http://hope-education.co.uk/classmates)



# TOP OF THE CLASS

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## 1 MUSIC FOR ALL

Drums for Schools' collaborative 'learning by playing' approach makes it possible for every school to deliver high quality music education to each and every pupil, whilst at the same time developing physical, mental and emotional life skills. Our award-winning teaching packs combine top quality instruments with comprehensive teaching support, giving your team everything they need to run

effective classes, clubs and community projects. The teaching approach is so intuitive – and our teaching support so good – that any teacher can lead their class from basics to first performance in just a term of lessons, with no musical background required.

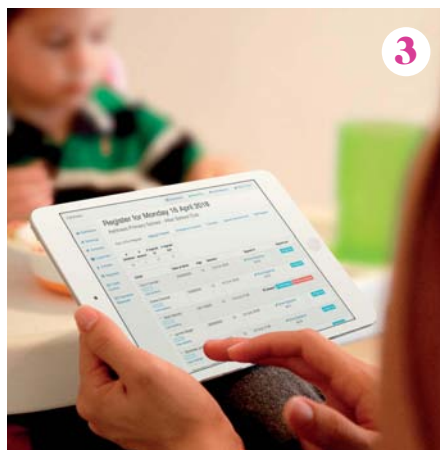
[drumsforschools.com](http://drumsforschools.com)



## 2 LEARNING BUILT AROUND NEWS

More than 9,000 schools use First News Education to advance their students' core reading, writing, oracy and news literacy skills through a foundation of weekly news. The *First News* newspaper gives children an accessible and engaging way of growing their knowledge of the world and building their confidence in discussing news. Alongside the newspaper, Activity Sheets and the online iHub deliver weekly reading activities based on exploring the latest news stories, provided in three levels to support teachers in developing students' global understanding and the essential skills they'll need for subsequent success. Free tasters are available at

[schools.firstnews.co.uk/explore](http://schools.firstnews.co.uk/explore)



3

## 4 PORTABLE SECURITY

DoorJammer and Lockdown are powerful, portable door security devices that prevent unwanted entry. The patented design redirects external force against the door into the ground, acting as a quick-fit barricade. DoorJammer's light and compact shape empowers travellers with the ability to secure a room anywhere they go, while Lockdown can be instantly deployed during threatening scenarios in schools and public buildings, creating 'safe rooms' for occupants and deterring entry attempts.

With over a quarter of a million units sold globally, multiple awards, international TV appearances including *Dragon's Den* and viral social media exposure, DoorJammer has fast become a favoured door safety solution throughout the world.

For more details, contact 01424 429 641 or [saleseu@door-jammer.com](mailto:saleseu@door-jammer.com)  
[door-jammer.com](http://door-jammer.com)



## 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. Automatic invoicing and payment reminders, along with up to date registers, mean that schools like yours can save lots of time previously spent on various administrative tasks. For more details, contact [hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk](mailto:hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk).  
[kidsclubhq.co.uk](http://kidsclubhq.co.uk)



## 5 SPREAD THE WORD

Term dates, parents' evening, policies, procedures and more – whether it's updating parents on important information for the year ahead, or welcoming new parents to the school community, there's plenty to share at the start of the year.

Used by over 5,000 schools and 4 million parents, ParentMail is the UK's favourite parental engagement platform. With a free mobile app for parents and a flexible, user-friendly online platform for managing messaging, forms, events and more, ParentMail saves time and money for busy office teams. [parentmail.co.uk](http://parentmail.co.uk)





# Ask the Expert

**Maddy Barnes** talks us through the role that *The Week Junior* has played in improving English outcomes at one Manchester primary school



**Maddy Barnes** is an assistant headteacher, year 6 teacher and English lead at Sacred Heart Catholic Primary in Manchester

## How have you used *The Week Junior* in your school?

I've used copies of the magazine as my guided reading text in various ways for children of different reading abilities. For those in whom we wanted to encourage reading in greater depth, we gave them 30 minutes to read the magazine independently in silence (whilst I worked with a different group). Immediately after, they were asked to select an article they'd particularly enjoyed or disliked, summarise the general gist and prepare to answer questions about it. The more often we did the exercise, the better they became at pre-empting the questions in their summaries.



For average readers, I selected up to three double-page spreads for them to read independently. Together, we then discussed the overall thrust of each article and any vocabulary issues, before modelling SATs-style questions relating to those articles on a flipchart and having the children answer them. With less able readers, I read a single article to them and again modelled SATs-style questions. I tried choosing three articles ranging in difficulty – easier, medium and hard – to mirror the demands of the test and build the pupils' confidence.

## Has it affected the way you teach literacy?

It's definitely impacted on our vocabulary teaching, challenging pupils to learn new words and work out what they mean. They're now better able to read articles about unknown topics and summarise their contents, while also gaining a better understanding of true journalistic writing.

## How do pupils benefit from being more aware of current affairs?

In our catchment area the children don't always get a very balanced view of current affairs. What *The Week Junior* can do is offer a non-biased approach to news reporting, which is something every child should be entitled to. In areas like ours we have a duty to ensure they can benefit from such material in a non-

pressurised way, and *The Week Junior* does this perfectly.

## What impact has using *The Week Junior* had on your pupils' attainment, results or progress?

We had 35% more 'greater depth' readers this year, having used the magazine in the way described above. It gave them a renewed interest in reading, and for our reluctant readers in particular, brought back a sense of purpose and pleasure when it comes to reading. They all particularly enjoyed a set of Royal Family caricatures that appeared in one edition- it felt a bit naughty, while still being age-appropriate for our children!

## Would you recommend *The Week Junior* to other schools?

Yes, definitely. The resource represents good value for money, and feels and works like a real magazine. We don't know what topics will be included on the reading tests in any given year, but this resource is the perfect tool for encouraging children to read about unknown topics with confidence.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more and enquire about subscribing to *The Week Junior*, contact 0330 333 9494 or visit [schools.theweekjunior.co.uk](https://schools.theweekjunior.co.uk)

# “THE POWERS THAT BE NEED TO LISTEN”

If schools will be required to impose an unfunded comprehensive pay increase, expect the consequences to be serious, warns Kate Owbridge...

*“I was much further out than you thought and not waving but drowning.”*  
– **Stevie Smith, ‘Not Waving but Drowning’**

A 2.75% pay increase? I’ll believe it when I see it.

Last year the pay increase varied according to different pay scales (main, upper, leadership) and had the effect of narrowing the gap between each one. Where will be the financial incentive for talented individuals within the profession to ‘climb the ladder’ if that keeps happening?

On hearing news of incoming salary increases, my first reaction always used to be one of “Yay – how much will I get?” But in recent years, it’s more often been, “Will it be funded?” Because if it’s not, we at Ashdown Primary and many other schools across the country will be well and truly stuffed.

## THE WRONG WAY ROUND

My school is two form entry, situated on a split site. Around 10% of our pupils qualify for Pupil Premium, which means we won’t match any of the criteria

needed to access additional grant funding. What’s more, we currently have an approximate 60/40 split between upper pay scale and main pay scale teachers, which – financially, at least – is the wrong way round. Of course, that proportion of MPS employees continues to steadily grow year on year, and we’re not going to be shedding any UPS teachers to compensate.

My teachers are great. They all deserve what they’re paid, or more. My TAs are also great, but we’re struggling as it is to afford the TA hours. We presently have no class TAs with us during the afternoons, only one per year group for Y3 to Y6 and one per class for Y1 and Y2. Our only cohort group to have full-time TA support is EYFS, because of the statutory supervision requirements.

Otherwise, we’ve had to repeatedly cut TA intervention time through people leaving and not replacing them once they’re gone. It’s still the case that every time someone leaves, we’ll look carefully at whether we should replace them or not. We’ve had no significant building spend for the last four years. We use old computers, just one class has access to a set of tablets, and only half of our teachers have been assigned their own laptops.

## WE DESERVE MORE

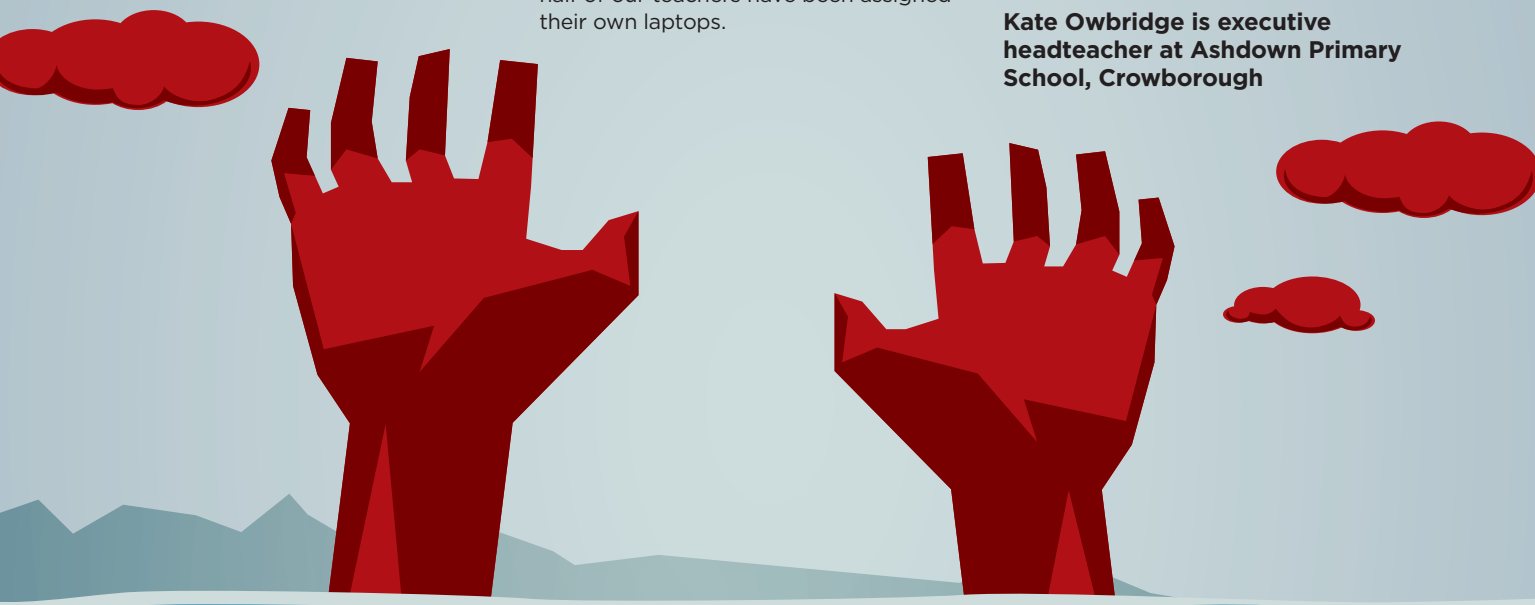
Our history budget for this year is £120 – for approximately 400 children. Our budget for consumables across all year groups is £12k. We let out both of our sites and our swimming pool as often as we can. We pack our KS2 classes with as many children as apply to be on roll.

The simple truth is that if this pay award – and any others in future – aren’t funded, then we’ll be making intervention TAs redundant, closely followed by class TAs, to free up the money we need to meet the increases. We’ll also be cutting staff CPD.

Teachers won’t want to work in a school where CPD isn’t forthcoming; where they’ll be expected to do everything themselves, and where the equipment they use is old and knackered. Those existing teachers who decide to stay, despite the difficulties, will soon start to feel the same way.

They deserve more. Our community deserves more. Our children deserve more. The powers that be need to listen, believe us and change course. Because this funding squeeze has been going on too long and it needs to stop.

**Kate Owbridge is executive headteacher at Ashdown Primary School, Crowborough**





# THE WEEK Junior SCHOOLS

## Extend learning

## beyond the curriculum

Perfect  
for KS2

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Ensure your pupils know what's going on in the world with a subscription to *The Week Junior*.

- ✓ Enrich learning and improve general knowledge
- ✓ Develop critical thinking skills
- ✓ Improve vocabulary skills with rich and varied language
- ✓ Encourage discussion and improve oracy skills



*The Week Junior* bridges the gap between children's newspapers and adult newspapers. It stimulates high-quality conversations, and is a perfect vehicle to teach comprehension strategies to all children.

**Maddy Barnes, English Consultant, Assistant Head Teacher**



## Claim your FREE copy of *The Week Junior*

Visit [schools.theweekjunior.co.uk/TPF](https://schools.theweekjunior.co.uk/TPF)

or call 0330 333 9495 and quote code: **P19WJSTF**

### Terms & conditions

This offer is only available to educational establishments within the UK and is not valid in conjunction with any other offer. To claim your free copy of *The Week Junior* please place your order with us before 30th September 2019. There is no cash alternative. Please quote code P19WJSTF for the offer to be applied.



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