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Assuming you're reading these words within a month of me writing them (which I did on 21st June, for what it's worth), there's a good chance that you'll still be waiting to hear who'll succeed Theresa May as Prime Minister.

The spectacle of a highly publicised leadership contest running over a series of weeks can't help but invite a certain type of scrutiny by those with a professional interest in taking charge of things and managing people. How might these potential PMs cope with overseeing a school staffing budget that's taken a battering (p66), providing comfort and support to a colleague grieving the loss of a loved one (p58) or ... retrieving an runaway hen (p54)? Michael Gove will at least be familiar with the terminology.

Whoever ends up getting the gig will find themselves having to confront decisions, pressures and dilemmas the rest of us can scarcely even conceive of. Now, sure, the demands placed on headteachers might not be directly comparable in terms of national import to those placed on the head of a government – but you don't have to go far to find school leaders who'll tell you that the pressures they now face are of a different magnitude compared to what their predecessors grappled with in years gone by. In this very issue, Steve Munby offers a blunt appraisal of England's schools accountability system (p6), while Jeremy Hannay makes a compelling case for reinventing our understanding and expectations of schools accountability from the ground up (p14).

From my current vantage point, Jeremy Hunt or Boris Johnson may well be subject to the accountability of the country's ballot boxes in due course. How one or the other's decisions will affect school leaders in the meantime, however, remains to be seen...

Enjoy the issue,

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Primary School



From the  
makers of  
*Teach Primary*

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# “The English education system is the most extreme in the world”

Steve Munby tells us why school leaders who want to do better should stop trying to be perfect

## **You’ve just published a new book called *Imperfect Leadership* – why write it now, and why that title?**

I wanted to reflect on my own leadership journey, from when I began as chief executive of the National College for School Leadership in 2005, to when I left the Education Development Trust in 2017. But the main point of writing it is that I’d become fed up of reading and hearing about ‘perfect leaders’ who always get things right, and are simply fabulous at what they do. Frankly, I’ve never met a perfect leader, and think the concept itself is a bad one. If we all think we have to be perfect, it’ll make us physically and mentally ill. We won’t delegate to our teams, but instead try to do everything by ourselves.

It’s called *Imperfect Leadership* because it’s a book about mistakes, things that went wrong and things that worried me as a leader. It’s my attempt to be honest about all that, while at the same time acknowledging the successes I had.

## **That notion of the ‘perfect leader’ seems closely related the concept of the ‘super heads’ sometimes called upon to turn schools round. In your view, is that a harmful model?**

A reluctance to admit to weaknesses is still a big part of the culture in many schools, and I see this notion of the ‘hero leader’ as overly strong. It presents a particular issue for people wanting to step up to leadership, and for women. Recent research has shown that women are less likely to apply for a post if they think there are some aspects of the role they can’t do, whereas men will be more likely to ‘have a go’. This idea that you have to be able to ‘do it all’ before you can step up is really bad news, but it’s pervasive throughout the system.

## **What would be your answer to those who might criticise the idea of celebrating ‘imperfect leaders’ as embracing mediocrity?**

I want celebrate imperfect leadership, but also I believe that leaders need to learn

from their mistakes. If you keep making the same mistakes repeatedly, you won’t be a good leader – but recognising and admitting when you’ve made a mistake is something that’s honest and real. People will forgive a mistake, but they hate cover-ups and blame culture.

## **What would your advice be to school leaders having to balance the short-term pressures and long-term performance expectations that come with the role?**

If your school was rated Inadequate in its last Ofsted inspection, or is somehow really struggling, then you’ve simply got to look at the short term because otherwise there might not even be a long term. In that situation you’ve got to focus on the next year, or the next 18 months. Unless you turn things round and start demonstrate a difference, there won’t necessarily be an opportunity to look at the long-term picture.

That said, it takes years to get a school to where you want it to be, not months. There was some research published a couple of years ago by the Centre for High Performance at Kingston University, on the difference between ‘surgeon leaders’ and ‘architect leaders’. A surgeon leader focuses only on the accountability system, gets short-term wins and shows little engagement with staff or children. They’ll just ensure they secure the results they need during inspections, without looking at the long-term picture.

Architect leaders, on the other hand, focus on both the short- and the long-term. They’ll consider the consistency of systems, but also the people who are in them. They might not get quick results, but they’ll succeed in building long-term sustainability. I’d much rather be an architect than a surgeon.

## **Having been very open in the book about the mistakes you’ve made, do you observe a reticence on the part of other leaders to do the same themselves?**

As a leader, you already feel very vulnerable. If your school then isn’t seen

as high performing and doing brilliantly, you’ll be reluctant to admit not knowing things, when you obviously don’t. Added pressures from the government and the media can make you determined to be less open still.

In the book I stress the importance of asking for help. We have to debunk this notion that we’re meant to know everything, while maintaining an inscrutable public profile, keeping all our problems to ourselves and carrying on regardless, as if everything’s going brilliantly. It’s not healthy, and it won’t help us deliver the school leadership we need for the future.

## **Under what kind of accountability framework could that candour and honesty be more easily expressed?**

In terms of accountability, I feel the English education system is the most extreme in the world. I know of no other system where headteachers and principals are more vulnerable due to exam results or inspection ratings. Nowhere else are they more likely to be







dismissed if they do badly, or be celebrated and promoted by doing well.

I'm not against inspections or testing, but I am against the high stakes nature of both. There's a whole variety of things that the English system could and should be doing to reduce the high stakes nature of our current accountability model.

**What education developments or reforms would you like to see take place over the next year?**

What I think ought to happen is the formulating of a proactive approach to reducing high stakes accountability and a greater focus on capacity building. There should also be a commitment from the government and state to provide a form of leadership development, in a way that it's backed off from for the last five or six years.

Especially at a time of austerity, it's hard to argue that a school should spend its budget on developing its deputy so that they can go on to become a headteacher or principal somewhere else.

That's why it's the state's job.

I know of no other system in the world that's developing, rapidly progressing or performing well in which the state doesn't see a role for itself in investing in the development of school leaders. Just as the National College for School Leadership was closing down, Scottish and Welsh equivalents were opening up. Similar agencies are now opening across Australia and elsewhere in the world. I'd hope that a new government would recognise that it's time to start investing in the development of school leaders.

**What practical things can schools, MATs and LAs be doing to attract and develop new school leaders?**

A compelling narrative matters. MATs and schools have to make the stories they tell about the future exciting. They need to enthuse people and present them with something they want to be part of, rather than just saying 'We're going to get better test results' or 'We're going to get a better Ofsted rating.'

Second, we know that people learn to be leaders not by going on a course, but by stepping up to the role and being given the chance to lead with help. Identify opportunities in your organisation for people to advance into leadership, even if it's just a temporary or unpaid role.

Those stepping up will need to receive regular feedback from a peer, mentor, line manager or colleague, and be exposed to leadership in context. Those in MATs may get the chance to see various leaders in different contexts at other schools. Offer your would-be leaders opportunities to be mentored, to take part in work shadowing and job swaps and visit other settings, and encourage them to discuss their observations in a focused way with feedback.

***Imperfect Leadership - A Book For Leaders Who Know They Don't Know It All* is available now, published by Crown House**

 [@steve\\_munby](https://twitter.com/@steve_munby)

## CAREER TIMELINE

1980

**Begins work as a secondary history teacher in Birmingham**

1989

**Joins Oldham LEA as a school advisor and inspector**

2000

**Appointed director of education at Knowsley Borough Council**

2005

**Becomes chief executive of the National College for School Leadership**

2010

**Awarded a CBE for services to leadership in schools and children's services**

2012

**Appointed chief executive of the Education Development Trust (formerly the Centre for British Teachers)**



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# THE PSM GUIDE TO... School Improvement

## THE TIME-SAVING SECRETS OF YOUR MIS

Richard Harley offers some advice for those schools looking to get the most out of their management information system...

**T**he management information systems used in schools have become fundamental to how they operate, helping them save time by reducing their administrative burdens. Modern MISs are typically quicker and easier to use than ever before, but the specific ways in which a school uses its MIS for data management purposes can boost this

time-saving potential even further.

MISs tend to be highly intuitive, with many offering the facility to export up to a hundred different ready-made reports in just a few clicks. This approach to data exporting will help ensure that any member of staff, regardless of their data expertise, will be able to access pupil-level data when needed, without needing to go via the school office. Allowing multiple users across the school, MAT or governing board to access the MIS will let everyone see what's really going on, and can help drive efforts at collaborative improvement. Ensure that staff are trained in how to use the basic features of your MIS. Class lists, medicals, parental contact details and SEND data should all be readily available without hassle.

### USE ADDITIONAL MODULES

Your MIS may already include a range of pre-configured modules, thus avoiding the need to purchase extra functionality from elsewhere. Modules relating to assessment, behaviour, interventions, safeguarding and communications will often be available from, if not already included in, your existing licencing. These separate functions of your system can intelligently talk to each other, saving you the effort of generating separate reports and comparing them side by side. Check which modules you've purchased and ensure you're making the most of those you have.





## CONNECT USING MULTIPLE DEVICES

Modern MIS platforms can be accessed from a variety of mobile devices, without the need for any software installation or configuration. Giving staff the option to connect using different devices will save them having to make repeat visits to offices and classrooms, while also letting them obtain information from outside school premises, thus facilitating more flexible working patterns.

## DEPLOY ELECTRONIC REGISTERS

When configured appropriately, a MIS can help schools complete their morning registration processes in just 30 seconds, while simultaneously recording accurate, real-time attendance data and feeding it straight back to the office. Office staff can then instantly contact parents – via SMS, for example – to ensure that absences are followed up.

## MOVE TO THE CLOUD

Unlike legacy systems that require access to an on-site server, cloud-based MIS systems are remotely hosted and maintained. If your internet connection is up to the task, that makes them faster, more efficient, easier to use and more reliable. Moving your MIS to the cloud obviates the need for you to manage your own local backups, patches and updates, while saving on the upfront and continuing costs needed to keep a local server running.

Academy schools, MATs and free schools have the autonomy to choose the MIS provider that's right for them. As such, the market for MIS providers is quite competitive, with each offering new technologies, richer features and more efficient ways of working. Reviewing your current system and investigating other options via a proper procurement process will ensure that you're matched with a supplier that's right for your setting, saving you valuable time in the long run. Talking to other schools in your area, or schools with a similar profile can be a good starting point for recommendations.

*Richard Harley is CEO of the cloud-based MIS provider ScholarPack*

 @scholarpack  
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# WHY SCHOOLS SHOULD FEEL LIKE HOME

## How sensory-rich school environments can support mental health and optimise learning

**R**ecent scientific research shows that children learn best in sensory-rich classrooms. KS1 and Early Years environments are sensory-rich: full of colour, texture and sensory stimuli. However, as children ascend through primary and secondary school, there tends to be a significant scarcity of colour-rich walls, plants, fabric and sculpture, often replaced by desks in rows with bare walls and harsh lighting. Policymakers seem to believe that older children are in less need of sensory-rich environments. This contradicts recent enriched environment studies, which prove the vital benefits of sensory-rich environments for mind, brain and body at any age. Our failure to apply this knowledge to schools is detrimental to both pupils and staff.

What is meant 'enriched environments' (EEs), and why are they so vital? To qualify as 'enriched', environments must engage children and young people cognitively, physically, socially and on a sensory level, and they must be changed frequently – not just rely on the same old sandpit and toys.

EEs induce the genetic expression of important brain fertilisers known as neurotrophins that trigger brain growth, thus producing new brain cells in a process called neurogenesis. This takes place in the frontal lobes – the area of the brain focused on learning, planning, managing stress and social/emotional intelligence.

Neurogenesis triggered by enriched environments also occurs in the hippocampus, which is key for memory and vital for learning. One study saw rats placed in an EE with apparatus on which to run and climb, interesting food and plenty of social interaction. The Salk Institute of Biological Studies found that

"Two months later, the rats each had an extra 50,000 brain cells on both sides of their hippocampus." Following the experiment, the animals passed learning and memory tasks with flying colours.

When schools ensure that classrooms, halls and corridors are fitted with welcoming lighting, pleasing colours, soft fabrics, plants and sculptures, children's brains will produce optimal levels of the anti-anxiety chemical oxytocin, which can significantly reduce their stress levels. With high levels of child self-harm and almost 18,000 children under 12 prescribed anti-depressants, it's time we took a neurochemical approach to ensuring that schools are soothing environments.

One approach can be to introduce a system of cognitive tasks with sensory breaks, in a designated area of the classroom containing a variety of sensory stimuli. Through a card system, pupils who are working well can be given permission for a five minute break to de-stress and emotionally regulate – such breaks being essential aids to creativity and helping pupils re-focus.

Ignoring the impact of EEs on children's minds and bodies is tantamount to social, psychological and cognitive neglect. We should strive to provide EEs for all children, not just those in Early Years. We must ensure that the 10,000 to 12,000 hours of a child's school life take place in imaginative physical environments, and are fully enriched at every stage of their learning journey.

**Dr Margot Sunderland is a child psychologist and psychotherapist, and co-director of Trauma Informed Schools UK**

 traumainformedschools.co.uk



# Assess without limits

Teacher assessment certainly has its uses, says Tyrone Samuel – but to get a sense of the bigger picture, we need to make effective use of standardised assessments

**T**he reliability of in-year teacher assessment data across a school will often be the cause of much discussion – particularly among clusters and MATs trying to ensure consistency across multiple schools. Teacher assessment is subjective by its very nature, and can require considerable expertise to capture accurately.

Standardised assessments, however, can eliminate this subjectivity, while offering a number of other benefits. The clue's in the name – the development of these assessments will typically involve standardising them across a national sample group, thus allowing stakeholders at school level to compare their own pupils' performance against a national picture. Schools can then use these comparisons to generate age-related bands with which they can track progress.

## *Benefits and limitations*

One way of doing this is via progress matrices, and tracking age-related band movement from a previous term's assessment or statutory attainment group (EYFS or KS1, for example) compared to the age-related band they're in at that point in time. This is more useful than analysing a subtle increase or decrease in standardised scores, as it's often difficult to infer whether score movement is statistically significant.

It's worth noting, however, that transition matrices like these do come with limitations – one being the question of how to demonstrate accelerated progress for children who's starting point within a transition matrix is 'greater depth' or 'well above'.

A further benefit of standardised tests is that they can provide other useful assessment data, such as age-standardised scores and percentile ranks (compared to all pupils nationally), enabling schools to understand pupil performance at a much more granular level. That said, it's vital to take other pupil factors into account when using standardised assessments. The performance they measure obviously won't account for difficulties a child might face at home on the morning of the test, or a familiar adult who usually works with the child being away on the day the test is taken.

Another issue of standardised assessments can be that the content is often fixed year on year, with the result that teachers become familiar with the content. If the outcomes are then linked to performance management, this can raise the stakes and make the reliability of the test data more susceptible to volatility.

## *Meaningful data*

If used wisely, however, standardised assessments can help you easily analyse

question and topic performance trends in comparison to national samples and cluster averages. That can be hugely beneficial, particularly across a larger aggregated number of schools and cohorts – though it's worth noting that for the data to be meaningful, the assessments have to be aligned with the curriculum. The resulting information should generally reinforce teachers' understanding of what they already know about their pupils through normal classroom practice.

The wealth of benefits that standardised assessments can bring to your tracking is plain to see. Whilst it's important to consider wider contexts when using them, they're a great tool for supporting understanding of teacher assessment.

I believe that the latter most definitely still has a place in school-level assessments – just not necessarily when comparing across schools. After all, when done well by effective practitioners, will teacher assessments really tell them any more than what they see day to day in the classroom?

**Tyrone Samuel is an education data, systems and insight professional**

 @TyPrimaryData



# THIS YEAR'S SATS - WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

Are we expecting this year's KS2 SATs to tell us more than is reasonable? And have the nature of the test questions subtly shifted? Two Y6 teachers give us their take...

“Hey, secondary teachers – leave our SATs alone!”

**S**ATS came and went this year in much the same way as usual. As a Y6 teacher, I'm not going to pretend I didn't feel anxious – I did – because doing well matters to the school, and it matters to me. The children, on the other hand, were very relaxed, confident and did the best they could without any fuss. I was as proud of them as I am every other week.

In amongst the usual SATs chitchat on EduTwitter there was one comment that really stood out to me, from a secondary teacher complaining that SATs results were inflated and resulted in children being set unobtainable targets across GCSE subjects. My initial reaction was to bristle at the word 'inflated' – one which clearly insinuates a purposeful exaggeration of attainment, something deceitful and underhand; and worse still in this context, something that didn't serve the children we teach.

Since the tests are done in strictly controlled and monitored circumstances, against unseen, externally marked papers, the charge of inflated results doesn't really seem fair. Upon further investigation, it seemed the teacher's comments were based on the fact that many children are given booster sessions in small groups and revise topics in the run-up to the tests, and that as such, their results aren't a true reflection of what they can achieve without this support.

In one sense, I'm guilty as charged – less with respect to small group work, what with budgets stretched as they are, but I do raise my hands to revising key topics after Easter and doing some preparation work in taking the test. Who wouldn't? Certainly not a secondary school sending borderline pupils into their

GCSEs. Are those results 'inflated' too? And what if children exceed their SATs-based targets at GCSE – do those same schools shake their heads at primaries 'deflating' their SATs results? I think not.

On reflection, perhaps the real issue isn't whether the results are inflated, but whether the score a child gets in their SATs is a reliable base from which to predict their history or geography GCSE grade five years hence.

SATs are, at best, a snapshot in time. They can't possibly predict the kaleidoscope of experience that will happen over the following years and the many factors that we know influence a child's learning, both in and out of school. They can only accurately represent what happened during a one-hour test window on a single morning in May. In most cases, I find they generally represent the attainment I've seen across the year – but they cannot, and must not, be used to

predict what will happen in the future. We owe children more than that.

Of course we prepare children for taking their SATs. They're a high stakes accountability measure that require 10- and 11-year-olds to demonstrate what they've learnt over a four-year period in a very short window of time. Within that scenario, I'm really not sure what else primaries are expected to do.

During transition meetings I've been surprised by the minimal amount of information requested by secondary schools. Perhaps if they tapped into the wealth of non-statistical information we have about children, came in and looked at their books even, then they'd soon see that there's a much richer basis on which they can formulate their targets. For now, however, that remains a distant dream!

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



“The 2019 KS2 SATs data may prove disappointing. Here’s why...”

In the immediate aftermath of the KS2 SATs, my colleagues seemed to think the questions were fair – broadly similar, if not slightly harder than the previous year. Once the marks are totalled and the questions are evened out, they may well be correct. However, these SATs papers saw a change in the nature of the questioning that provided a greater cognitive challenge. To answer such questions correctly in future will require an evolution of the way we teach the children.

*Note: at the time of writing it's not been possible to revisit the papers – the examples cited here are done so from memory*

## REASONING AND ARITHMETIC

To me, the biggest shift compared to previous years could be seen in both maths reasoning papers, which introduced questions more akin to Mensa puzzles than anything directly attributable to the maths curriculum.

The most obvious example was a question requiring children to make two



cuts along gridlines to form two differently sized squares and a rectangle. While invigilating, I saw numerous children spend around five minutes of their test time puzzling out this one mark question. I’ve tested the same question on multiple adults since, and few were able to solve it any quicker. Many children – who had expected to answer everything on the paper correctly – couldn’t visualise what the question was asking and subsequently ran out of time at the end of the paper.

This question, and several others like it, required children to be practised in taking time to notice things and playing with questions; with taking an indirect approach towards a solution. There’s no way in which a teacher could have directly prepared children for questions like this. If, in future, we can expect to see children facing more SATs problems that are visual, and which surprise them with contexts they’re unfamiliar with, then the teaching they receive will have to change.

A number of colleagues told me that the arithmetic paper went largely as expected. Personally, however, I found that it seemed designed to produce errors, rather than test what the children could do. ‘101 x 1000’ produces an answer resembling binary code – let’s see how many children left a ‘1’ or a ‘0’ out of place in that otherwise simple question.

## GRAMMAR AND READING

The biggest difference with this year’s grammar, punctuation and spelling paper was the number of questions requiring children to write out their answers. Multiple choice questions enable children

to see the correct answer in front of them and be reminded of the relevant grammatical term; this year they had to write their answers from scratch more often than they have in the past.

This year’s reading paper, meanwhile, was the usual tale of three texts. The first, about the closure of a playground, was easily relatable to the children. They understood it and the questions were sensible. The third was a densely written – and frankly dull – short story. My impression was that 40 minutes into the test, few would have been able to adequately concentrate on this final section, including me! It seems that teaching stamina for reading in future may well be essential.

The second text was a non-fiction piece about bees with a highly structured layout, clearly signposting where children would find the answers. This should have made things easy, yet there were few classic ‘find and retrieve’ questions. Instead, there were multiple questions requiring a degree of inference or prior knowledge of bees and plants. My EAL children, who usually thrive in the non-fiction section, were flummoxed. My immediate concern was whether they had done well enough in the first section to carry them on to a passing score – time will tell.

My conclusion? I believe very few children will achieve the kind of scores recorded when the 2018 paper was taken, and am therefore preparing the leadership team at my school for this year’s data to be disappointing...

**Louis Walker is a primary school teacher based in Essex**





# “WE NEED TO BE SOIL PEOPLE”

England's accountability system obsessively monitors our seeds of learning, while ignoring the soil that sustains them, says Jeremy Hannay

I have a confession. It might sound crazy, but it's true – I don't own a landline phone, and I don't know my home phone number. I have one ... I *think*? But I've not owned a landline handset in years. There are holes in the wall intended to enable this form of telecommunication from my home to yours, but I've never used them. Though I have considered swapping out the panel for one with USB slots.

If I had said this 25 years ago, it wouldn't compute. No one would believe that life was possible, safe, or even practical without a home phone. It was the most convenient way to communicate. In the 1990s, landline phones were items that every home had, and likely couldn't have lived without. Enter the homes of people under 30 today, and most of them won't have one either. How is this possible? How could something so integral, so impactful and so necessary become obsolete?

The reality is that items become functionally obsolete when they can no longer adequately perform the function for which they were created. Rewind 25 to 30 years, back to the peak of the landline phone, and you'll discover that at around the same time we saw the invention and initiation of another antiquated idea – high stakes inspection branded as school improvement.

## LACK OF AGENCY

England's education system has been a leader in the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), which seeks the improvement of educational outcomes for all children and is often characterised by good intentions. However, these are ultimately let down by an over-reliance on narrow performance data, prescriptive control and compliance measures, and a dependence on high stakes enforcement – namely corporate-flavoured support programmes, capability procedures and job insecurity.

Schools themselves now enact similar programmes of quality assurance.

Witness the constant observation, monitoring and scrutiny of teachers. Their marking, planning and professional work, combined with inflexible accountabilities to pupil performance data. The education headlines read, *'Teachers unhappy about excessive workload,'* but they obscure the fact that these workload demands and problems with wellbeing are merely symptoms of much deeper problems that stem from overwhelming lack of trust, support, development and professional agency. Those are the real killers.

The literature examining professional performance over the last three decades is absolutely clear. Fear and anxiety, micromanagement, over-engineering, distrust and unpredictability amount to a recipe for disaster in any organisation. The system designed to improve our schools and provide assurances to the public is precisely what's holding us back.

## REAL COLLABORATION

#IncredibleSchools will discuss education more organically, and see their role as being to both nurture the seed and provide the richest soil. They'll focus their energies on ensuring that the wider profession is nurtured and helped to grow and develop, rather than on consistent and constant measuring.

Professional Learning Communities and small school clusters in Canada. Finland's national network of innovation. Large-scale lesson study, open lessons and teacher research groups in Singapore. These countries understand something deeper about educational change; nothing that raises results today but destroys the potential of its people tomorrow is relevant.

In England, we've become obsessed with the seeds. We monitor them, measure them,

weigh them, inspect them, and have managed to over-engineer them at the expense of the soil. Successful nations – successful schools – support their seeds by taking care of the soil. We need to be soil people.

The idea that schools will only improve if they're monitored and inspected is obsolete, and the same applies to teachers. The greatest systems in the world focus on bringing schools together, and so do the greatest schools. Skilfully supported collaborative endeavours are often at the heart of



sustainable system and school improvement. Real collaboration is about harnessing that innate desire for all children to succeed by linking struggling schools with more successful ones, and providing the same opportunities for our teachers – without judgement.

This isn't blue sky thinking. Entire systems use this approach without any inspectorate, any league tables, any scrutiny, monitoring or constant observation. And they do better.

## GLOBAL LESSONS

There are different models used by systems and schools around the globe in top performing jurisdictions. In Canada, the Spirals of Enquiry model has demonstrated impressive sustainable school improvement results. In Asia, lesson study is used as a regular model of collaborative work, investigating learners and learning, while refining practice from

the middle. At school level, this involves co-constructing pedagogy and practice between school leaders and teachers, with an emphasis on collaborative approaches to refining, reviewing and improving practice.

Top performing systems and schools don't manage the performance of their staff, but rather nurture it. There's a strong evidence base that supports self-directed teacher learning through projects like the Teacher Learning and Leadership Programme. Via this approach, schools support teachers in developing lines of enquiry about the development of the school and their own practice. They have professional growth partners, are connected to research and practice and are provided with opportunities to reflect and discuss their learning, its impact on them and their pupils.

Schools are complex. Leaders and teachers must regularly make complex decisions with an almost infinite number of variables, and sometimes things will go wrong. The very best systems will support their schools and educators, providing them with extensive and intentional programmes and pathways for development. They will then give those schools and educators agency, decisional capital and time to decide. There's no prescription – only trust.

## TEAM FOCUS

Great systems and schools won't fixate on the bottom and top performers, but rather concentrate on the entire group. In a culture of trust you'll see teachers supporting, enquiring with, developing and challenging one another, and schools doing the same. Great systems and schools are interested in everyone improving, together, because excellence in education ultimately comes from a system of great schools and a series of great teachers.

“The system designed to improve our schools and assure the public is precisely what's holding us back”

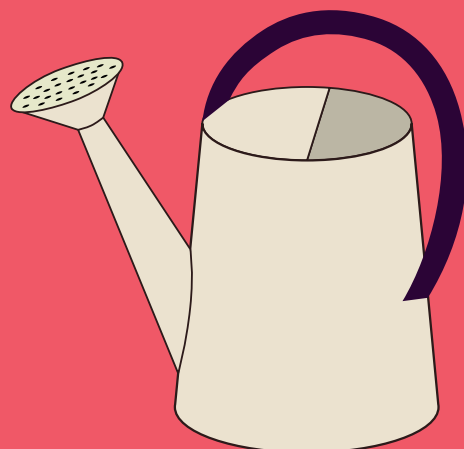
The landline telephone was an incredible invention. It changed the way our world connected. It brought us closer together. And now it's obsolete.

The culture of schools inspection as schools improvement was a solution to problems of the past. The decision isn't between the way it is now and the way it was before - the world has changed. The decision we have now is do we awkwardly continue to rub sticks together in an attempt to make fire, petulantly shouting at onlookers when 'it works' as they awkwardly put their lighters back in their pockets? Or do we put our sticks down, stand up, brush ourselves off, and humbly ask for help? A better way is possible.



**Jeremy Hannay is the headteacher of Three Bridges Primary School and currently devising a new model of system-driven accountability and collaborative networking for schools; for more details, search #IncredibleSchools on Twitter**

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# How can ReallySchool help save time in the classroom?

We hear how one convenient and easy-to-use app can reduce teachers' workloads and enable comprehensive tracking of early years and primary school pupils' daily learning

## What is ReallySchool?

ReallySchool is a tablet-based app that helps teachers gather evidence of skills acquisition in the EYFS, KS1 and KS2 classroom. Developed by NetSupport, a trusted provider of education IT solutions since 1989, ReallySchool makes the task of capturing observations and assessments simple and streamlined. Clear reports and progress timelines can be generated from pupils' data in just a few clicks, meaning teachers can see information about their class quickly and easily.

## Who is it for?

The ReallySchool app is for primary school teachers, TAs and early years practitioners; SLT and administrators can gain a whole-school overview via the ReallySchool desktop portal. Designed to be intuitive and user-friendly – similar to social media apps – it can be used immediately without training, making it accessible to all staff, including those who may feel that they lack IT skills. Everyone can therefore benefit from its time-saving tools.

## How can teachers capture learning and monitor progress?

Via their tablet device, teachers can capture children's learning with photos, videos or audio recordings. They can then add their own written or voice notes to observations as they occur, as well as see progress timelines and reports highlighting at a glance pupils who are expected, developing or emerging in their key skills. Alternatively, they can check where assessments may still be required, or whether there are any learning gaps that need to be addressed.

## What are the benefits for teachers?

ReallySchool is a brilliant time-saver. Its flexibility means teachers can assess against multiple criteria and frameworks built into ReallySchool for convenience, including (EYFS, pre-key stage standards, KS1/2, Greater Depth, Foundation Phase, P Scales, CoEL, ECaT and EYDJ). Staff can add or remove pupils on the fly; add extra



assessment criteria as they go; change the criteria mid-assessment; record whether activities are child-initiated or part of a guided group or adult-led, and much more!

## How is it good for students?

ReallySchool's comprehensive class reports and student assessment progress summaries allow teachers to see instantly which children have learning gaps, enabling them to then plan their lessons to ensure that every child has the chance to progress. To motivate students to do well, ReallySchool's student badges can be applied to a pupil's record to celebrate their success and these can be shared via the app with parents and guardians.

## What about parents?

With many schools struggling to engage parents, ReallySchool makes it easy to share children's progress directly to their parents' phones (via a parental version of the app) in order to encourage teacher-parent dialogue and greater parental involvement in children's learning. These communications can take the form of video and audio files, on which parents

and teachers can leave comments and observations. ReallySchool's 'student journals' feature is perfect for providing a subsequent progress overview at your next parents' evening.

## What do others think of ReallySchool?

Our customers' feedback has been outstanding. A representative from Dogsthorpe Infant School, for example, says, "I highly recommend ReallySchool. It's a fantastic product that has made a huge impact in the classroom."

**ReallySchool has also been chosen as a 2019 finalist in the Bett Awards, IT Europa Awards and Lincolnshire Technology and Innovation Awards, as well as being Highly Commended in the Education Resources Awards. It's great to know that it's making a real difference!**



**ReallySchool**

To find out more, visit [realschool.com/learn-more](https://realschool.com/learn-more)

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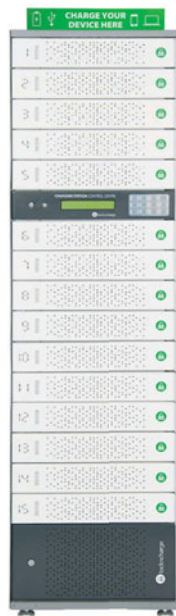
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# Buildings & Facilities

## CLEANING UP THE UNEXPECTED

Dedicated staff will typically have your school's general cleanliness covered, but what should you do in the event of sudden spills and accidents?

**W**hen cleaning primary school settings, controlling the transfer of infection is of utmost importance. All designated cleaning operatives should be specifically trained in deploying effective cleaning techniques to achieve this, along with ensuring that daily 'out of hours' cleaning procedures minimise the long-term effects of spills and soiling.

Most primary settings will schedule their out of hours operations so that the entire setting is cleaned in advance of the next day's activities. However, it may be necessary to fine tune these cleaning functions to ensure that incidents requiring an urgent response during the school day are dealt with safely, quickly and effectively, since many will require an immediate response if long-term effects are to be avoided. The chief focus here should be the prevention of bacteria transfer and the removal of risks to hygiene, followed by the minimising of damage and effects such as staining.

### PREPARATION IS KEY

In any primary setting you'll inevitably encounter a personal hygiene issue at some point. To reduce the chances of cross contamination and minimise the spread of bacteria and infection, bodily fluids should always be cleaned up immediately – waiting until the regular cleaning team arrives at the end of the day will carry potentially hazardous



consequences. As such, plan ahead by ensuring your school has procedures in place to help staff deal with such events. Schools should further ensure the ready availability of personal protective equipment, and see that this is deployed in all such incidents to safeguard the individual(s) carrying out the cleaning required.

Practical advice on how to clear up spillages should be clearly communicated to, and understood by, those staff most likely to be responding. Whether due to personal hygiene incidents or not, disposable paper towels or cloths should be used in the first instance. All spillages should be cleaned towards the middle of the spill – spreading fluids outwards will increase the size of the surface area affected.



Once the initial cleaning of residue is complete, personal hygiene incidents will necessitate the use of bacteria-combating products combining detergent and disinfectant, as per the manufacturer's instructions. Make sure that spillage kits with clear accompanying instructions are readily available, and always used in the event of blood spillages.

## PREVENTING DAMAGE

With spills that involve other substances, the priority will be to prevent stains or damage. After blotting the affected area with paper towels or cloths, wipe gently with warm soapy water and report the incident to your regular cleaning contractor for advice as soon as possible. The same procedure should be followed in the event of any semi-solid or grease spills; scrape the spilt substance towards the centre of the affected area, and remove residue using disposable cloths.

By following the steps above you can help reduce the long-term effects of spillages; your cleaning contractor should then be in a position to advise you on how the damage can be minimised, and what specific measures this might entail.

*Chan Mehta is managing director at The Cleaning Company*

 @Cleaning\_Co\_UK  
 [the-cleaning-company.com](http://the-cleaning-company.com)



## TIME TO GO SOLAR?

Why a recent change in renewable energy customer incentives could stymie the progress made in encouraging schools to install solar systems

**L**ast month found the Schools' Energy Co-operative in a celebratory mood, having seen Perivale Primary School in Ealing (pictured) become the 50th school to install a solar panel system with the organisation's assistance.

The not-for-profit scheme aims to help schools cut carbon emissions while generating clean solar energy, reducing their utility bills and potentially generating revenue. Under the Schools' Energy Co-operative model, the installation costs of each system are covered by Share Offers made to members of local communities and supporters of community energy generation via a process of crowdfunding.

Perivale Primary School's participation in the scheme came about through the efforts of local sustainability group Ealing Transition. Having worked alongside Ealing Council to identify suitable schools for the scheme, Ealing Transition subsequently partnered with the Schools' Energy Co-operative and participating schools, including Perivale Primary, to offer parents and residents the chance to invest in the solar panel schemes.

The Schools' Energy Co-operative's offer to schools usually consists of a deal whereby the school receives a 20-year fixed electricity charge of 9p/ kWh (compared to a typical rate of 12-13p). Should the panels then produce more energy than the school requires, the surplus is fed back to the National Grid, with any proceeds received by the Schools' Energy Co-operative profit-shared with the school and crowd-funding investors.

According to Mike Smyth, volunteer chair of the Schools' Energy Co-operative, "Installations not only save schools money

on their electricity bills, they importantly normalise green energy. Children see a practical example of how renewable energy works, and the topic becomes a school gates conversation for parents and grandparents, demystifying the energy sector and showing a way to help tackle the climate emergency at a local level."

However, the progress made by the scheme so far may be affected by the closure in March this year of the Feed-in Tariff – a form of government subsidy that would pay solar system users for the electricity they generated and any surplus electricity that could be exported back to the National Grid. Its replacement, the Smart Export Guarantee, is due to come into effect next year and will require energy companies with more than 150,000 customers to buy excess electricity generated from solar and other renewable energy sources. However, the payments will only apply to electricity exports, rather than all generation, and the tariffs offered will vary between providers. Users will also be required to have a smart meter installed before their exports can be tracked and paid for.

As Smyth notes, "Now only schools that fit a particular, narrow criteria in terms of geographical position and type of roof will be able to develop financially viable schemes. We, along with others in the community energy sector, are calling on government for the reinstatement of the Feed-in Tariff or an alternative policy solution that supports community organisations working to make publicly owned buildings more energy efficient and powered by renewable sources. It's a clear way to show young people we want to invest in a sustainable future for them."

 [schools-energy-coop.co.uk](http://schools-energy-coop.co.uk)

# Are you secure for summer?

The Master Locksmiths Association offers some security guidance to schools ahead of the summer holidays

**T**he summer holidays are an opportune time for thieves to target empty school buildings. As the leading trade association for the locksmithing industry, the Master Locksmiths Association (MLA) would advise all educational facilities to be prepared and vigilant to ensure their premises are protected over the upcoming summer break.

The way in which schools are often left empty for extended periods over the holidays makes them unfortunately subject to theft, vandalism and arson attacks. The best way of minimising such risks and attacks is to have appropriate planning and security measures in place well before the end of the summer term.

Following these simple steps will help to ensure your empty buildings are kept safe and secure:

## • LOCKS

All windows should be double-glazed, with security film applied where necessary, and fitted with appropriate locks that are in good working condition and meet your insurance requirements. All external doors should be fitted with independently tested and approved high security locks. Where applicable, all internal doors should be kept locked, with their access control systems active. This, in combination with ensuring that the gates onto the premises are also securely locked, will help prevent burglaries and provide additional peace of mind.

A local MLA-approved security expert will be able to specify the right solutions for keeping your site secure when not in use, and can advise on the best approach to ensuring ease of egress for escape routes when the building is in use. Entrapment areas – when spaces are fitted with the wrong type of security solutions – can have

devastating effects. The site's safety levels should always be paramount.

## • SOUND THE ALARM

As well as immediately alerting police to any issues in progress, alarms and security systems can also act as great visual deterrents. Ensure that your alarm is kept regularly maintained, and that the code is changed at least every six months.

## • SECURE STORAGE

High value items such as IT equipment and musical instruments shouldn't be visible from the outside, and empty packaging must be discretely disposed so that it doesn't entice opportunist criminals. Expensive items can be safely stored in a room with enhanced security features, or in specific secure storage well away from any prying eyes.

## • SECURE THE GROUNDS

Any fencing around the school site should be inspected to ensure that it's fully intact with no damaged bolts, hinges or handles, and with no potential access points that could work as a foothold for easy access to thieves.

## • TEND TO THE TREES

Large or overgrown trees and shrubbery can provide unnecessary cover for intruders. This aspect of security is often overlooked but can lead to blind spots on your CCTV coverage, leaving you susceptible to burglary.

**For further advice on bespoke security solutions, contact your local MLA-approved provider; details can be found via the MLA website**

 [locksmiths.co.uk](https://www.locksmiths.co.uk)

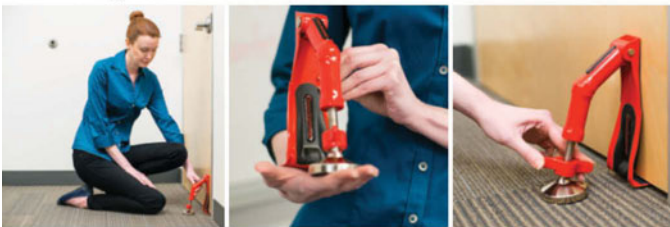


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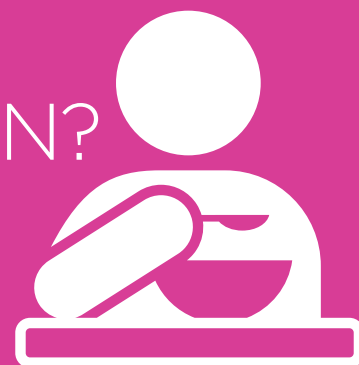
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# HOW ECO-FRIENDLY IS YOUR FOOD PREPARATION?

ESPO's Catherine Watson examines what schools can do to reduce their reliance on single-use plastics when it comes to their catering disposables



**B**arely a week goes by without a major news story highlighting the devastating effects of single-use plastic waste on the environment, so it's no surprise that reducing plastic usage is something now high on many schools' agendas. In fact, Education Secretary Damian Hinds recently urged all schools to ban single-use plastics by 2022 – and a great place to start is in your canteen.

ESPO's catalogue and Framework 45 for Catering Consumables (see [tinyurl.com/espo-framework-45](http://tinyurl.com/espo-framework-45)) offers schools a huge choice of compostable, recyclable and other eco-friendly products to help make the switch.

Clingfilm can be traded for catering foil, for example, while non-recyclable polystyrene containers can be swapped out for compostable alternatives. Compostable food packaging is made from plant-based materials, and can be broken down and returned to the earth as soil when appropriately disposed of in a commercial composting facility with the right combination of heat, microbes and moisture.

Remember, however, that it's not the plastic itself that's the problem, but rather where it's ending up. Recyclable plastics are a valuable resource that can be turned into new products when disposed of correctly – something that shouldn't be overlooked. Compostable or recyclable packaging that ends up in landfill won't offer any environmental benefits over traditional disposables. The key to ensuring your service is truly 'green' is to give due consideration to your school's waste management facilities.

You need to ascertain whether the disposal methods offered by your waste management provider will allow you to 'close the loop'. A closed loop system is one where waste materials are collected and diverted from landfill, through being transformed into new products, raw chemical materials or energy via the process of recycling or composting.

Waste management providers will tend to charge less for collections of compostable and recyclable waste compared with general waste destined for landfill, so there are financial as well as environmental benefits to be had from closing the loop in this way. The suppliers listed on ESPO's framework have all been tested for their ability to provide customers with tailored advice on the most suitable products for their service, based on the facilities available to them.

Finally, you'll need to maintain separate receptacles for recyclable, compostable and other waste and ensure everyone knows how to use them. They should be identified using clear signage and easily accessible by everyone. Contaminated materials may be rejected for recycling and instead flagged for incineration or landfill, so it's important to educate staff and pupils on the need to clean and dry items before putting them in recycling bins.

**Catherine Watson is a procurement officer at the professional buying organisation ESPO; for more information, email [food@espo.org](mailto:food@espo.org) quoting '45PSM'**

 [@easternshires](https://twitter.com/easternshires)  
 [espo.org](http://espo.org)

The Children's Future Food Inquiry has issued a report examining the level of access that disadvantaged children have to food, both at home and during the school day. Based on workshops involving young people, academic research and a national survey, the report highlights an inconsistent provision and uptake of free school meals, premium-priced healthy meal options in school cafeterias and a lack of access in some settings to free drinking water throughout the day.

[tinyurl.com/children-future-food](http://tinyurl.com/children-future-food)



The Soil Association has urged the DfE to introduce mandatory weekly meat-free 'plant-based protein days' at all schools. The call comes as the DfE reviews its School Food Standards guidance, which currently recommends that schools organise weekly 'meat-free' days, but doesn't make them compulsory. According to Rob Percival, head of policy for food and health at the Soil Association, "We know children would benefit nutritionally from eating more beans, pulses, and plant-based proteins and the climate would also benefit – we should all be eating less and better meat."

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





# Sound **ADVICE**

Shane Cryer examines how schools can make teachers and pupils more comfortable by paying attention to their buildings' acoustics

1

## **SPOT THE PROBLEM**

Noticeable reverberation, or echo, indicates that a room presents an acoustic challenge. So too does noise heard from other teaching spaces, noisy roads or nearby plant rooms. This can have an impact on pupils' learning and attainment, memory retention and behaviour, as well as teacher wellbeing in the form of headaches, vocal stress and other symptoms.

2

## **CHECK ROOM SIZES**

Reverberation naturally increases with room volume, with the result that larger rooms will need more in the way of acoustic treatment. Things get difficult in rooms with ceiling heights that exceed around 2.5m – a class 'A' suspended ceiling will help reduce room height and volume, while providing a better acoustic environment.

3

## **KNOW YOUR FINISHES**

Acoustic finishes are classified from 'A' to 'E'. Use only type 'A' absorptive finishes, as these are the most efficient. Government guidance for spaces used by pupils with SEND require low-frequency reverberation time to be controlled, so you'll also need some bass absorption – either hidden on top of the ceiling or behind acoustic wall panels.

4

## **CEILING ALTERNATIVES**

If it's not possible to install a suspended ceiling, consider using suspended horizontal acoustic rafts. These are very efficient in that both sides are absorptive, but they're not great at tackling low frequencies, necessitating some separate bass absorbing pads. These can be obtained in different shapes, such as clouds or circles, which could be good for early years.

5

## **SCHOOL HALLS**

Multi-purpose halls can be particularly challenging, presenting deafening sound levels at lunch times or frustrating parents unable to hear dialogue during the Christmas play. These and other issues can be remedied with acoustic wall panels fixed in the manner of giant picture frames, which can be made impact resistant and even screen printed with the school logo.

6

## **HOLES IN WALLS**

Drilled holes in walls and new cable runs can cause unwanted sound to travel. Avoid running services through classrooms and putting new power sockets back-to-back. If the cabling in question is unavoidable, ensure that any holes are properly sealed, or that attenuators are used in new ductwork.

7

## **CHECK BEFORE CHANGE OF USE**

The government guidance document, 'BB93 – Acoustic Design of Schools', sets out a series of acoustic standards that schools will need to abide by when looking to expand or refurbish parts of their estate. Be aware that it's always advisable to consult with external expertise before your plans are finalised and submitted.

8

## **FREE HELP**

Some expert help is available for free. Certain companies, including Ecophon, will be prepared to visit your school, offer advice, carry out reverberation calculations and produce practical, BB93-compliant costed design solutions at no cost or obligation to you.

9

## **SEND**

There are different standards in place for pupils who are sensitive to sound and may therefore require assisted learning – for example, those with a hearing impairment, ADHD or autism. To be truly inclusive, we must level the playing field by optimising classroom acoustics, though it's worth noting that children with SEND should generally be taught in smaller spaces.

10

## **NEW WALLS**

If possible, use dry-lined walls with insulation behind them, which will provide some useful bass absorption at no extra cost. The BB93 standard lets us include the effects of furniture and fittings when acoustically testing a learning space – remember that soft furnishings, thick curtains and bean bags can be useful classroom additions.



**Shane Cryer is Concept Developer – Education at Saint Gobain Ecophon**



@EcophonUK



ecophon.com/uk





## NOW HEAR THIS

*Shane Cryer outlines the ways in Pencoed Primary School in Bridgend serves as a model of great acoustics and 'deep learning'*

### INSPIRATION

It's hard to imagine a more pleasant vantage point than that enjoyed by the students at Bridgend's newest primary school. Tucked into the side of a gently sloping Welsh valley, Pencoed Primary School embodies the latest design elements encouraged by recent worldwide educational research, and includes both classrooms and 'deep learning' spaces.

'Innovative Learning Environments and Teacher Change' (ILETC) is an ongoing research programme coordinated by the University of Melbourne. It's a groundbreaking study that has identified some key design concepts, some of which have already seemed to increased attainment in English, maths and sciences by 10-15% at schools in the participating countries of Australia and New Zealand.

### FLEXIBILITY

The use of traditional teaching spaces alongside larger 'deep learning' spaces has proved a winning combination and served to inspire settings elsewhere, including Pencoed. "We know that the learning environment can dramatically affect the learning outcomes of pupils," explains Pencoed's headteacher, Suzanne Sarjeant. "The new school enables us to offer a truly flexible approach to learning, ensuring that we are able to meet the needs of all learners. The children love the adaptable learning spaces and use them for a range of purposes to supplement and extend their core tasks and provision."

Careful attention was paid to meeting the acoustic demands of Pencoed's large volume interior spaces, with acoustic wall panels utilised in a variety of interesting shapes and colours.

### BENEFITS

Further research carried out by Heriot-Watt University and the 2017 Essex Study (see [tinyurl.com/psm-essex-study](http://tinyurl.com/psm-essex-study)) has shown that applying acoustic conditions that support learning, particularly for those with SEN, benefits everyone. Students don't become as fatigued, their ability to memorise and focus increases and their behaviour improves. Teachers' stress levels are lowered, their vocal performance becomes less strained and they take fewer sick days.

Any classroom or hall can be transformed quickly and easily with the aid of acoustic rafts or wall panels, while the addition of bass absorbers can ensure that a classroom is SEN ready. It's possible to hear the difference for yourself though an edited video auralisation available via the Ecophon website.

## A WORD IN YOUR EAR

You can find out more about schools' obligations with regards to acoustics, and how to fulfil them, by perusing the following documents...

### BB93: Acoustic design of schools

As noted opposite, these are the official government guidelines setting out the minimum acoustic performance standards for school buildings. Under BB93, schools are required to monitor indoor ambient noise levels, sound transmission between spaces, the sonic impact of flooring, reverberation in sports areas and levels of sound absorption in corridors and other shared spaces. [tinyurl.com/psm-bb93](http://tinyurl.com/psm-bb93)



### Acoustics of Schools: a design guide

Further guidance and recommendations concerning acoustic

design within new and refurbished schools can be found within this 2015 document, jointly published by the

Institute of Acoustics and the Association of Noise Consultants.

Areas covered include designing rooms for speech, the basic principles of sound insulation and the acoustic modelling of open plan spaces.

[tinyurl.com/psm-aos](http://tinyurl.com/psm-aos)

## Acoustics in Schools



While principally aimed at NEU members, reps and local officers, this concise but informative document contains a range of practical

suggestions for teaching staff on how they can work effectively with the acoustic character of their classrooms, with a particular focus on how to avoid issues relating to vocal strain. [tinyurl.com/psm-neu-acoustics](http://tinyurl.com/psm-neu-acoustics)

For more information, visit [pencoedprimary.co.uk](http://pencoedprimary.co.uk)



# Are you improving your school this summer?

## **Ecophon provides the acoustic solutions for classrooms**



### **When planning a refurbishment or new build school project, the choice of the acoustics solution should be a critical part of the planning process.**

Improving the acoustics can lead to:

- Reduced noise levels in the classroom
- Lower stress levels and enhanced physical comfort
- Greater understanding of speech by pupils
- Improvements in retention of information
- Reduced voice problems for classroom teachers

### **Meeting the standards - BB93 a minimum**

All refurbishment and new build classrooms should comply with the acoustic performance standards for schools, known as BB93. Compliance with standards must be seen as the absolute minimum to ensure that a classroom is acoustically fit for purpose.

### **Create a calmer, more successful classroom?**

Without appropriate acoustic treatment, classrooms can become difficult, stressful places for teachers to teach and for pupils to learn. Noisy classrooms are especially challenging learning environments for children with special educational needs.

With over 50 years experience in designing and manufacturing acoustic ceilings, Saint-Gobain Ecophon offers a comprehensive range of classroom solutions.

More information about classroom acoustics and Ecophon's solutions can be found at [www.ecophon.co.uk/classroom/](http://www.ecophon.co.uk/classroom/)

For more information please call 01256 855280 or email [specification@ecophon.co.uk](mailto:specification@ecophon.co.uk)

# FIRST CLASS DELIVERY

From a Royal Mail sorting office to a 2,600 capacity through school, we examine the unusual journey taken by the building that now houses Northampton International Academy...



**TIM MARSTON**  
Headteacher,  
Northampton  
International  
Academy



**ROWAN PARNELL**  
Operations  
director,  
Architecture  
Initiative



All images © Luke Hayes and Will Scott

## INTENTION

**RP:** Back in 2013 we'd been working with Northamptonshire County Council on various primary school expansion projects. NCC's education department had succeeded in creating the primary places they needed in Northampton, but they knew that very soon they'd be having to address a huge demand for secondary places.

**TM:** Northampton International Academy opened in 2016 as a new free school, which would eventually be based in a new building constructed whilst the school grew in temporary accommodation. During the school's first year, this accommodation consisted of five traditional mobile classrooms that made up the secondary phase and one double-sized unit that housed the primary provision. The early years were placed within another primary school that was part of East Midlands Academy Trust like ourselves, which made for a very

comfortable process of growth.

**RP:** One day a project manager we were working for picked me up from Northampton station, and as we drove he pointed out of the window and asked 'What do you think about that?' It was a huge, derelict Royal Mail sorting office, so I said, 'What about it?' And he replied, 'Can you turn it into a school?' I said yes, and we were subsequently commissioned to do a feasibility study.

**TM:** I'd previously been a deputy head, making this my first headship. I joined the school in September 2017, just as we moved into very different accommodation that was similar to an airport terminal, since at that point we had around 800 students. Yet nothing could prepare us for when we moved into our new home in September 2018 – it's a very large building set up for around 2,600 pupils.

**RP:** The facility was originally opened in 1981 by Princess Diana, in one of her first public engagements after marrying Prince

Charles. At the time, it was a state-of-the-art postal service centre, but after an arson attack in 2003 they started to wind down operations and moved out completely a few years later.

Our initial site visit was horrible. The space was dark, full of pigeons, occupied by squatters and generally a pretty unpleasant place to enter, but the building itself was amazing. The spaces were huge – the building measures 60m wide by 100m – and the structure was clearly built to be robust and strong.

**TM:** There was a point early on when it was hoped the process could be accelerated so that the building would be ready for use in September 2017, but it soon became clear that we should start planning for a second year of temporary accommodation. That was good, however, as it allowed me to ensure the space would be finished off in alignment with what we wanted to open with the following year, as not every part of the building would be fully complete.



## IMPLEMENTATION

**RP:** When stood at the centre of the building you're 30 metres in from any external walls, so the first task was to examine how we could bring in light. We created large voids through the existing structure and introduced overhead roof lights to carry natural light throughout the building, to spaces that had probably never seen it before.

**TM:** Given that this was my first headship, I was conscious of the need to focus on what was going on in the school's temporary site. I couldn't really hit 'pause' until we moved into the new building, so I tried to keep out of the granular detail as the construction took shape.

**RB:** One issue that came up during the construction phase was when we discovered a series of secure safes. We didn't realise what they were at first, assuming they were partitions based on lines indicated in the building's 70s-era architectural plans, which we'd been given access to. The plans were hand-drawn and looked amazing, but we found discrepancies between what they showed and what we actually encountered on site. In the end, the safes proved almost impossible to remove, so we ended up leaving them in.

**TM:** We finally moved into the building a year after I became head, in September 2018. The temporary classrooms we'd occupied were then removed so that the playground could be built, which involved us having to remain largely indoors until February 2019.

**RB:** We placed a mezzanine floor around the building's perimeter, so that we could double stack the regular teaching classrooms. The double height spaces in the building were set aside for larger teaching spaces in the science and art departments and elsewhere, since they were the wrong shape for standard classrooms. The mezzanine floor allowed the regular teaching classrooms to receive natural light and ventilation, and there was a courtyard on the roof which we in-filled to create the sports hall.

**TM:** The primary slice of the building was originally intended to be long and thin, with our two year groups placed above each other on different floors. However, this physical separation didn't provide the sort of flow that we'd planned for. After a few weeks we moved the phase to classrooms that were next to each other on the same level, which made for a far more comfortable and cosy feeling in what's an otherwise very large space.

**RB:** Looking back at the Building Schools for the Future era, there was a big push for open classrooms and 'creative teaching' similar to the approach seen in universities. After many of the people involved in that moved on, we'd see people putting partitions back between spaces so that they could teach in more traditional classrooms. There's nothing wrong with either approach – but what was unique about the NIA project is that we had the opportunity to allow for both.

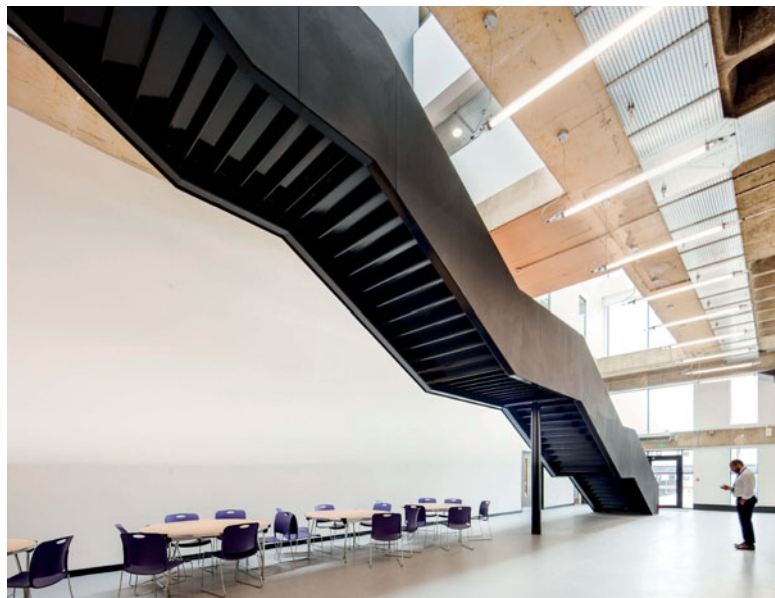
## IMPACT

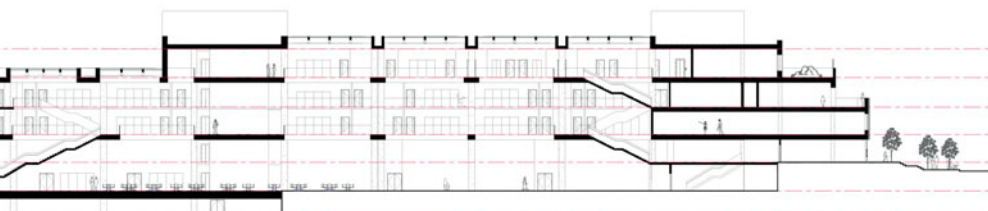
**RB:** It's the only school in Northamptonshire that doesn't have a 2.4-metre high fence at the front – instead, there's a shared public plaza. The project was conceived as part of a wider effort to regenerate the area, with the

school as the starting point. That's why a series of commercial spaces was planned for the front-facing areas of the building, though the school's presently in the process of repurposing them into education spaces.

**TM:** Due to a continuing shortage of school places in Northampton, particularly at secondary, we've taken occupancy of the 15% to 20% of the building originally held back for commercial space, which will be turned into learning environments in time for when we open again after summer.

**RB:** We submitted the building to the Royal Institute of British Architects Awards and it was great taking the judges round whilst all the kids were in there. Seeing how Tim's been using the interior spaces has been brilliant.





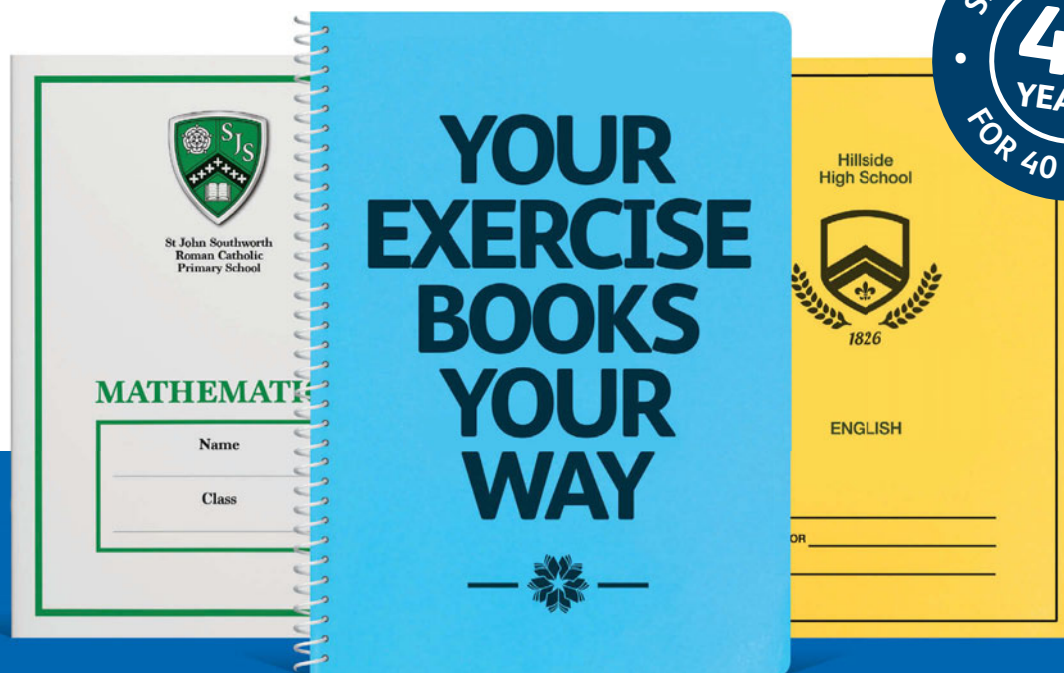
**TM:** If we go about things properly, our diverse city centre intake will have opportunities to access world class facilities. The local theatre actually comes here to rehearse, because our theatre space is so close to what they need. That's resulted in our kids getting to see Matthew Bourne's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* during its national tour. We've been able to start raising our cohort's aspirations to new levels.

**RB:** My favourite aspect of the building is the view you get all the way down the building from the atrium. It has these huge, grand vistas which, for someone who knows how it looked beforehand, are amazing to see. The building's not very old, and could have been demolished. We've given it a new lease of life, and hope that it's going to last a lot longer than was even planned for originally.

**TM:** The school already feels like a real part of the local community. It's not necessarily everybody's wish to have a school this size dropped into the middle of their surroundings, but so far things have been great. We've made a point of inviting in as many people as we can, as often as possible.

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## ARE YOU GETTING A GOOD DEAL ON YOUR BROADBAND?

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

**Y**our school's broadband connection obviously gets you internet access, but *how* does it get you that access? Here are the aspects of your service you should be looking at.

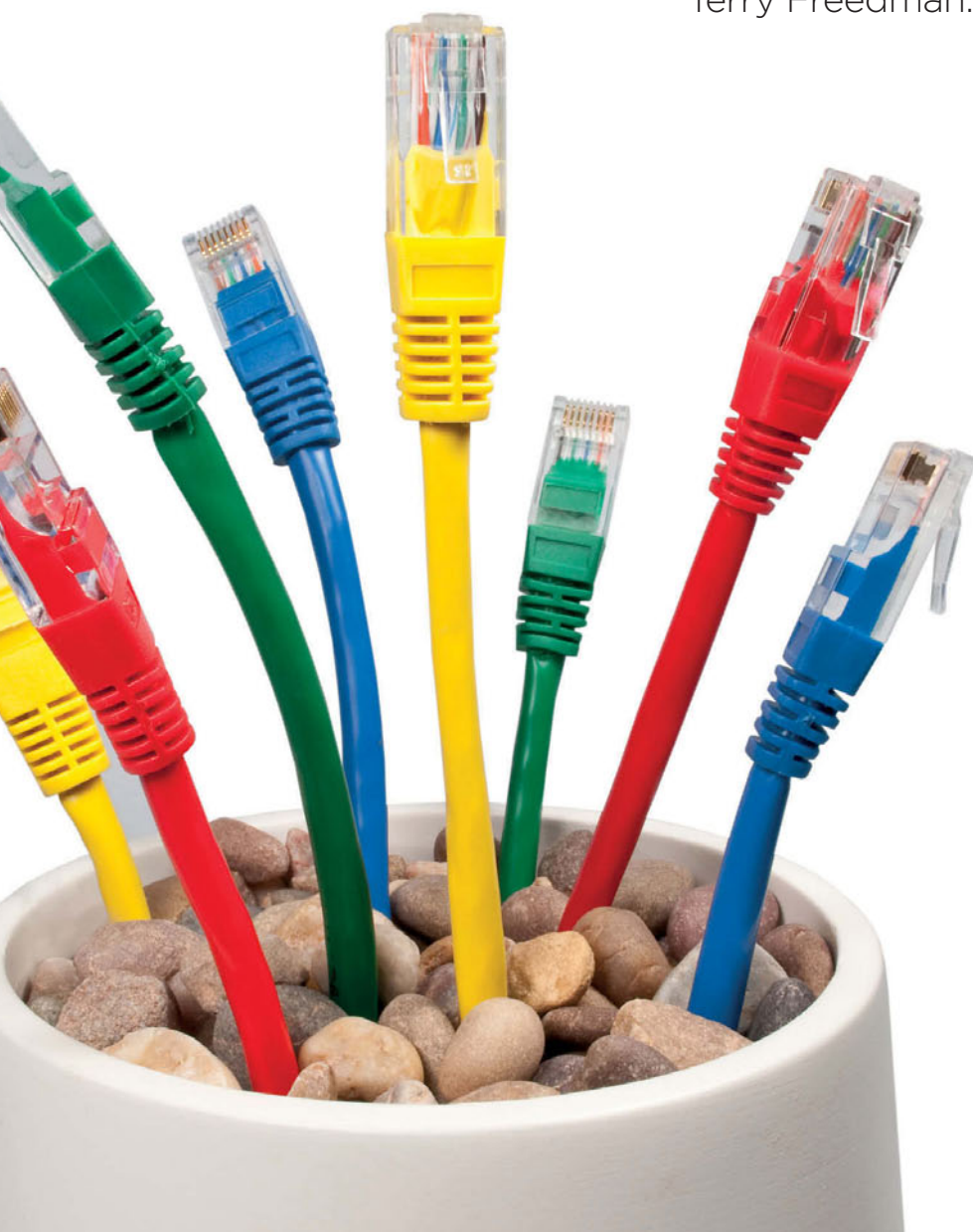
### SPEED

What's a 'good' broadband speed for your school? If your school's MIS, curriculum materials, data backups and media resources are all largely based around cloud storage, then a high speed internet connection will be crucially important. The standards users expect in this area are rising constantly, but at the time of writing it's reasonable to expect a minimum speed of 80mbps. The measure 'mbps' refers to megabits per second – since a bit is one eighth of a byte, a speed of 1mbps means it would take 8 seconds to download a file that's 1 megabyte in size.

You also need to check the contention ratio, which concerns how many people will be trying to use your connection at the same time. More simultaneous users equals less bandwidth per person. Ask about the possibility of leasing a dedicated line that's used by only your school, though even then you'll want an assurance that your connection speeds won't be adversely affected by many people in your school connecting at the same time.

### RELIABILITY

As your school's needs expand over time, you'll want to ensure that your broadband package can be modified accordingly. Be sure to ask potential providers whether your school will be able access a backup connection in





the event that the main one goes down – something that will be especially important if your MIS is cloud-based.

Can the provider offer a ‘no downtime’ guarantee? Boasts of ‘99% uptime’ sound great, until you realise that 1% downtime translates to around 15 minutes in an average school week. Would you like your lessons to be simultaneously without internet access for 15 minutes? Also check what a provider’s ‘fix time’ is likely to be, i.e. how long it will take for them to actually resolve a problem. Their stated ‘response time’ will tell you nothing – you could receive an automated response immediately, but not receive actual assistance for several days.

## SAFETY

You can expect virtually all providers to be on the ball when it comes to protecting schools and their users. They should be able to provide you with up-to-date protection against viruses and other forms of malware, without the school needing to do anything.

Needless to say, web filtering should be in place from the start, and should include the facility for schools themselves to tweak the relevant blacklists banning, and whitelists allowing certain sites and keywords as needed.

Your broadband provider should also provide a means of easily monitoring whitelisted websites. Some years ago, a geography website widely used by schools was taken over by an entity that proceeded to use the domain for hosting pornography, without changing the URL. At the very least, it should be easy for a school to report anything like that happening and have the situation rapidly dealt with. Check whether the provider may be able to offer any guidance on e-safety to parents and pupils.

## VALUE-ADDED

Finally, good providers will be able to offer schools ‘bonuses’, such as discounted curriculum software or complementary commercial applications. As always, shop around and ask for more than you think you’ll get!

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

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



# HOW RELIABLE IS YOUR DATA DESTRUCTION?

Glen Belfield suggests some ways of ensuring that your old electronic data is gone for good, in accordance with GDPR laws

**M**ay this year saw the first anniversary of the introduction of the GDPR. The Information Commissioner’s Office’s has now made its first school audits available for public viewing (see [tinyurl.com/gdpr-ed-audits](http://tinyurl.com/gdpr-ed-audits)), and its comments show that while schools are generally doing all right with the GDPR so far, more will need to be done as the restrictions tighten over the next couple of years.

Reported data breaches are up by 15% across the board since the GDPR’s introduction. The GDPR requires all organisations to report any breaches within 72 hours of discovery, which could be why reports have increased so drastically, but there’s no question that data safety is becoming an ever-pressing issue in today’s society.

Schools house masses of sensitive data, and must therefore have robust, thorough processes in place for data security and destruction to ensure the safety of their students and staff. All items held by schools, including children’s reports, staff personnel files and attendance records, must be disposed of after a specified period in as safe a manner as possible. Simply deleting files, or even smashing computer hard drives, will still leave sensitive data exposed to malicious actors.

To remain fully GDPR-compliant when disposing of old IT equipment, it’s highly advised that schools follow a three-step data destruction process:

### 1. Wipe disks

This is an effective first step towards removing sensitive data from old IT equipment intended for reuse. Deleting data from a disk will render it largely inaccessible to users, but the data itself will remain on the disk until it’s eventually overwritten by new data. Secure deletion

applications can be helpful here (Eraser on Windows, Permanent Eraser on Mac), but it’s advisable to subject highly sensitive information to more rigorous destruction techniques.

### 2. Degauss

The process of degaussing involves passing a powerful magnetic field over the disk of the hard drive to scramble the data contained within it, denying would-be cyber criminals any means of accessing the files once held on the drive. Every trace of data will be eradicated, including the manufacturer’s servo control data that a hard drive needs in order to function. As a result, hard drives that have been degaussed cannot be reused.

### 3. Hard drive shredding

The final step of ensuring that data can never be recovered from old IT equipment is to physically shred disks and hard drives. If a degaussing process isn’t completed successfully, partial traces of data can be left behind, but shredding items to 2mm particles will effectively render both the item itself and the data wholly unrecoverable.

A fully compliant data destruction provider should be able to issue a certificate of destruction you can file alongside your data protection records, to prove that the information has been destroyed in full compliance with the GDPR – it will also be useful to produce this during your next ICO audit.

**Glen Belfield is the director of Bioteknik – a Canterbury-based IT disposal and data destruction specialist**

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

# What does Windows 7's retirement mean for you?

Schools should ensure that Microsoft's imminent ending of support for Windows 7 won't leave them high and dry, says Dale Jones

**W**indows 7 was released in 2009, and has been the staple operating system for many users ever since. Almost 10 years on, it still runs the majority of PC software currently available and typically 'just works'. However, after 14th January 2020, the free support and security updates provided by Microsoft for this ageing operating system will come to an end. Why?

It's partly down to money – Microsoft generates its revenues by selling licenses for new software and operating systems – but also the fact that Windows 7 was developed using the best technology 2009 had to offer. And 10 years is a long time in the technology world.

## What to do now

Any devices in your setting that run Windows 7 (or earlier versions of Windows) will need to be upgraded to Windows 10, which might mean having to replace older hardware that lacks the power or hard drive space to run Windows 10

properly. You'll also need to consider the migration of your users' data, whether the key applications you use are compatible with the newer operating system, and the extent to which staff will have to be familiarised with how Windows 10 and/or their new hardware works.

If you choose not to upgrade and your software fails after 14th January 2020, you may not be able to get it running again. Plus, in the absence of new security updates, your whole school IT security could be permanently compromised – cast your mind back to the 2017 'WannaCry' malware attack on the NHS...

The hardest part of upgrading is the need to plan around times when staff can be without their workstations. Each upgrade can take around an hour, but by involving staff in your planning, you can help reduce the impact of the change.

## Four considerations

Prior to upgrading, you should consider four key points. Where do users currently store their information? What software do your staff and students need?

Does your school have the necessary licenses? And do you have any machines that can't run Windows 10?

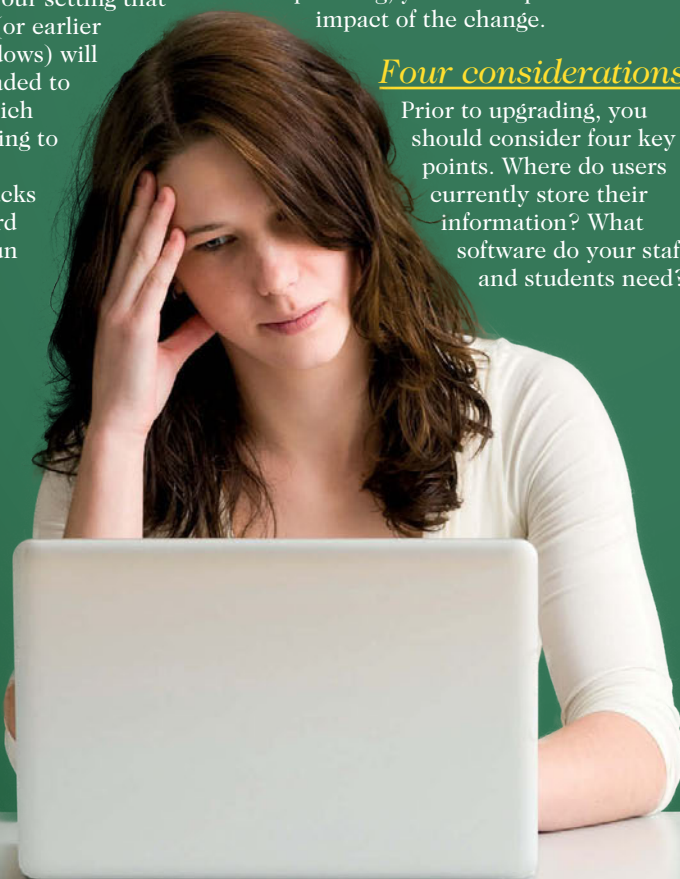
In terms of licensing costs, Windows 10 upgrades come included as part of the Microsoft Open Value Subscription Agreement for Education Solutions. If your setting isn't signed up to this, you may need to purchase Windows 10 licenses separately or else put in place a new licensing agreement. Your MAT or LA may be able to provide technical support for managing and implementing the upgrade process, or opt to outsource the work. The implementation itself may require covering the costs of new machines, and/or the cost of a technical resource to perform your upgrades.

Migrating your systems away from Windows 7 may seem like a big project for relatively little immediate gain, but it's a necessary one if you wish to keep your ICT systems secure and able to support new educational developments and innovations. If you're unsure as to your licensing status, or lack technical resources of your own, engaging a support provider such as One Education ICT Support early on can help you understand what the required changes will involve and their cost implications.

**Dale Jones is a service delivery manager at One Education, having previously worked in ICT engineering, consultancy and management roles across a range of educational settings**

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# “Bullying doesn’t end at the school gates”

We hear how the online incarnation of a long-running safeguarding programme is bringing a range of expertise to bear on keeping children out of harm’s way

**D**ot Com Digital is an online safeguarding programme – one which has grown and evolved over time with input from children and teachers since its original launch 15 years ago. The programme has hitherto been delivered using paper-based journals, and is based around the cartoon character of ‘Dot Com’ – a friend to the pupils, a child learning just like they are, and someone therefore speaking to them in their own language.

What the programme has ultimately aimed to do is help deliver messages that the police would like communicated to children via their teachers.

We’ve now taken the step of creating a new online version of the programme called Dot Com Digital. The ideas that went into its development were first discussed at a workshop attended by the chief of Essex Police, companies including DataArt and Microsoft, and Y6 representatives of Holy Cross School in South Ockenden, Essex. What emerged was the perceived need for a new resource that could be made available to schools for free with the aid of corporate

funding, and which could reflect the current level of digital threat.

## GROWING ISSUES

We’ve seen over the years that the methodology of Dot Com has proven effective. We’ve even seen cases go to court where details of incidents have been disclosed via Dot Com paper journals submitted as evidence. As such, we’ve enjoyed a long partnership with the police.

Ahead of the workshops we organised for Dot Com Digital, I’d previously considered myself quite well informed about the harms children face online. We frequently receive feedback from schools that use the resource about the different types of disclosures and issues they’re dealing with, but working alongside frontline officers who regularly come into contact with at risk children, I was shocked at the rise of County Lines issue.

This is the practice whereby drug dealers travel around different parts of the country, looking out for vulnerable children who they can potentially groom

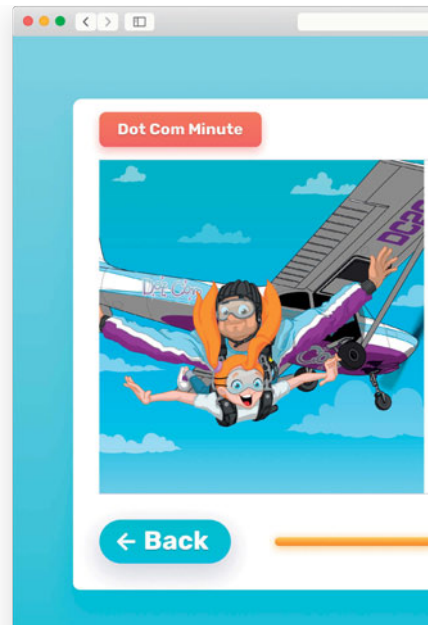
into committing future crimes. Up to now, it’s a form of criminal activity that’s tended to be fought on an area by area basis, but the threat is now increasingly mobile.

I’ve since sat in Home Office meetings concerning the issue, listening to discussions of how criminals are offering children ‘buy one, get one free’ offers for drugs via a terrible, yet extraordinary use of social media.

It’s also long been the case that bullying doesn’t end at the school gates any more. Incidents involving the use of WhatsApp and other services are on the rise, including cases where as many as two to three thousand malicious messages have been sent to children’s phones overnight.

## CONSISTENT PATTERNS

The new Dot Com Digital programme provides children with an online journal they can access via an individual login. They will then work through the journal, answering questions and responding to





discussion prompts on a range of different issues, including how to manage and talk about their feelings, how to respond to bullying, and now in the digital version, how to identify and report negative social media use, harmful online material and signs of grooming.

What's notable about the process is that potential risks can be detected in the children's responses and automatically brought to their teacher's attention. Up to now, we've been reliant on teachers reading through children's paper-based journals and identifying any possible issues. When using the online digital journals, teachers can receive risk notifications based on keyword recognition via their own login screen, and can then proceed to engage in conversation with the child.

During my discussions with the police, they outlined to me how the gang- and sex-related grooming of children tends to follow a consistent pattern. Children can therefore be helped to understand how

certain things people might want you to do online can have negative outcomes, and be given the skills to identify a safety network of people they can turn to if they're worried or frightened.

One of the Dot Com lessons in the digital journal is a short video of the Dot character learning those signs herself – 'if Dot's knees are wobbly like a jelly, she doesn't feel safe.' It's important that we teach children how to recognise their own 'flight cycle' at signs of danger, since this is what they'll experience when something happens online that makes them feel unsafe, just as they would in the real world.

## FUTURE PLANS

We're currently in the process of ensuring that the technology works and that teachers are happy with how it's implemented. When the programme is launched nationally, instructional video resources will be available for teachers to watch, so that they know how to use the resource.

Going forward, the Holy Cross School children we heard from spoke of wanting to see an app version that they and their parents could access at home. In particular they wanted an app that would include an avatar or chatbot similar to the Dot Com character that they could seek help from, which is certainly something I'd like to see in future.

From September 2020, it will be a statutory requirement for primary schools to teach their pupils relationships education and lessons in staying safe online. Our plan is to launch Dot Com Digital in October this year, making it a resource that could potentially help schools to fulfil those new PSHE curriculum requirements. We've secured funding for Dot Com Digital up until the end of 2020 – our hope is that we'll be able to continue offering it to schools as the momentum behind it grows.

## PATTERN RECOGNITION



Anton Bagrov, senior account executive at project partner DataArt, tells us more about Dot Com Digital's automatic alerts function

The Dot Com Digital system can be made to monitor the content of children's digital journals and automatically deliver alerts to teachers and designated safeguarding leads. To do so, it will look for certain words – by way of a simple example, if a child answers the question 'Do you feel safe at home?' and their response is 'no' or 'never', that would raise an alert.

Children are also able to insert drawings in their journals, which can be similarly analysed. When a child experiences stress, they will be more likely to share information visually than in writing. Any drawings that might raise an alarm – say, the outline of a knife – can be made to trigger an alert.

The software can further store the history of children's journal entries and flag any unusual changes or differences. The software lets staff apply as many filters, patterns and level of analysis as they wish, and share comments with teaching colleagues and DSLs. There's also the ability to share clips from journals directly with parents online via one-time login sessions.



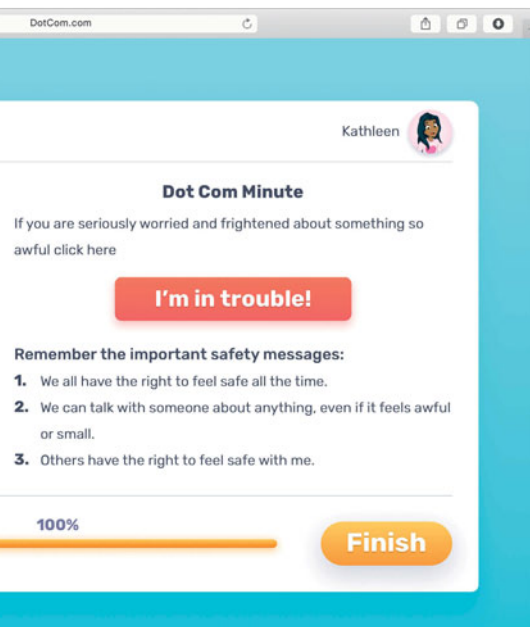
Sharon Doughty is founder of the Dot Com Children's Foundation

[@dotcomcharity](https://twitter.com/dotcomcharity)

[dotcomdigital.co.uk](https://dotcomdigital.co.uk)

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(source for KS1 to KS4 teaching resources)







**"Inspirational,  
socially relevant  
programme with  
lots of cross-  
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Wynndale Primary School



# Values-based learning

Looking for an inspirational school trip to explore an award-winning exhibition led by an educator?  
Interested in an interactive, age-appropriate and enquiry-based learning programme where pupils experience *lightbulb* moments?

## **Take Leo's journey with us**

*The Journey* is an award-winning exhibition designed for primary schools. Pupils follow the story of a 10 year old Jewish boy to safety from Nazi Germany to England via the Kindertransport.

Our two learning programmes ('Take Leo's Journey' and 'Be Inspired to Write') will empower your Key Stage 2 pupils to:

- Experience a Holocaust survivor share their inspirational story on film or in person.
- Explore the nature of choices, identity and what it means to belong.
- Challenge ideas, perspectives and stereotypes.

They will also engage with ideas and viewpoints from people different to themselves.

## **TAKE A LOOK AT THE TWO LEARNING PROGRAMMES:**

**[www.journey.holocaust.org.uk/you-can-come-to-us/primary-schools/](http://www.journey.holocaust.org.uk/you-can-come-to-us/primary-schools/)**

**BOOK NOW:** [www.holocaust.org.uk/forms/primary-school-booking-enquiry-2019](http://www.holocaust.org.uk/forms/primary-school-booking-enquiry-2019)

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# Community Engagement

## LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Tackling the challenges faced by schools collectively sounds appealing, but be clear as to how doing so will help you and your fellow leaders, says Yvonne Gandy

**I**mproving schools and bringing on the next generation of teachers and leaders aren't the sorts of challenges that schools can tackle on their own, so it makes sense for different schools to share their knowledge and resources and work together on addressing them.

The government recognises this too, and has thus put collaboration at the centre of its new strategy for improving rates of recruitment and retention. It has proposed reviewing the role of teaching schools and establishing new regional teaching school hubs, which will each work with between 200 and 300 schools on developing and delivering effective teacher training, CPD, leadership development and school-to-school support.

The proposals are due to be piloted from autumn, but this model of large-scale collaboration is already working well in some parts of the country, with the Outstanding Leaders Partnership (OLP) – a school-led nationwide organisation of MATs, teaching schools and other school groups – playing its part.

### PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

With OLP's support, a group of teaching school alliances in the north west has formed the Warrington Strategic Board to jointly deliver their CPD and school improvement. "It just makes sense to work closely together, identify where we can pool resources and expertise and play to our individual strengths," says Louise Smith, CEO of Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT). "Ploughing your own furrow won't work, and leads to a duplication of effort, a waste of resources and even competition against each other."

The Warrington collaboration shares responsibilities for delivering OLP's National Professional Qualifications for school leaders, and co-operates closely on school improvement, meeting every term as a strategic board to work out their priorities.





But how should school leaders 'do' collaboration? According to Caroline Roberts, director of WPAT's teaching school alliance, leaders should take an open-minded approach to seeking out existing partnerships and teaching schools that share similar values and can demonstrate that they're using the latest research and evidence.

## COLLABORATION PREPARATION

First of all, however, it's best to consider whether collaboration is the way you want to go via the following set of questions:

### 1. Is there an appetite for collaboration?

Think about where your school is now, how outward-looking it is and the extent to which it's engaged in meaningful networks. What about your team's culture – are they content to do what they've always done, or do they regularly bring new ideas to the table?

### 2. Where can you improve?

Areas to consider here include the progress of your curriculum planning and what your data is telling you about progress in your school. After conducting phase 1 workload reduction exercises, what will your school workload picture look like?

### 3. What are your strengths?

Identify your subject knowledge experts and find out whether you have staff with a passion for mentoring and coaching others. Have you trialled any evidence-based programmes that are starting to bear fruit?

### 4. What's the local and regional picture?

Which consistently high performing schools in the local area have similar demographics to yours? Reach out to nearby teaching schools and enquire about their area of expertise – which networks and organisations are they plugged into? They may have connections with Ofsted, School Improvement Boards and the Teaching School Council, all of which will be worth talking to.

*Yvonne Gandy is programme director of the National Professional Qualifications at Best Practice Network*

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## WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Mark Abrahams explains how budget cuts inspired the creation of a new matching service aimed at helping schools with their resource procurement

**O**ur idea to launch Reuse4education was inspired by our experiences from running Recycle Your Cycle – a service that refurbishes bicycles and vacuum cleaners and supplies them to charity shops. Having seen the amount of waste generated at recycling centres, and observed the growing popularity of the 're-use and 'recycle' movement, we began thinking about we could use a similar model to help the education sector.

From talking to staff at a number of schools, we saw a great deal of frustration at their inability to source various items of equipment they needed due to budget cuts. The flipside of that was seeing how some larger universities and colleges seemed have budgets available for building and equipping new gymnasiums, science centres and other major projects. That prompted us to consider how both sides might be able to assist one another.

The end result is the reuse4education online platform, which aims to help educational settings, including schools, universities and even nurseries, sell, donate and loan equipment to one another, thus creating a mutually supportive community. One school might want to secure the loan of some specialist equipment for one or more lessons themed around a particular topic, while another might want to borrow some stage lighting from a local secondary school or college to help them stage their Christmas play.

The service was launched in May this year, and we currently have just over a hundred institutions registered and using the site. Of those, primary schools make

up around 50%. The service is free to access, and can be used to list any item – even stationery. If an institution has purchased too many pencils or too much photocopying paper, for example, the site can provide them with a straightforward way of either selling or giving away those supplies to any other setting that might be able to use it.

It's still a little early for us to be able to spot trends in our users' activity. Our initial thought process was that given universities' larger budgets and tendency to replace their equipment more frequently, we'd see them helping schools in their local area. We still believe that to be a strong part of the site's service offering, but we're also seeing direct local communications between a number of secondary and primary schools.

Moving forward, we plan to put in place a feedback facility whereby users can report on how their transactions have gone; if needed, we can then act as a neutral arbitrator in the event of disagreements. Our aim over the coming year is to have a thousand educational institutions signed up, since the bigger the community, the more resources and equipment will be made available to the site's users.

**Mark Abrahams is the founder and CEO of Recycle Your Cycle and Reuse4education**

 @reuse4education

 [reuse4education.com](http://reuse4education.com)

# Help build better lives

Supporting pupils affected by an adverse childhood experience will require far more than traditional discipline policies and 'quick fix' interventions can provide, advises Lynn Miles...

**B**y the age of 18, half of the UK's children will have suffered an adverse childhood experience (ACE). These might include emotional, sexual and physical abuse – often perpetrated by a primary caregiver – with 10% having endured four such experiences or more.

I was one of those children. At primary school I was violent and unpredictable; at secondary school, withdrawn and disengaged. Fortunately, thanks to some perceptive teachers, flexibility within the school system and my welfare being seen as a higher priority than exam results, I turned out okay. Had it not been for those teachers, my life would have been very different. I wouldn't have trained to be a teacher and chosen to work with children like me as my career.

Many staff will never truly understand what it's like to live the life of a child experiencing adversity, but schools can certainly assist in making life better for these children, and even help them begin to heal. My own advice for schools supporting children enduring adversity would be to do the following:

## 1. Adopt a whole school policy and practice

Schools must create environments in which the children feel safe, valued and ready to learn. There's no low-cost, quick fix solution to be had here, since the damage will already have been done to these children, often over the span of years. Deploying a handful of strategies implemented by several staff across a term won't work. Whole school changes to policy and practice, implemented consistently, are the most effective way of addressing these challenges.

## 2. Avoid 'one-size-fits-all' approaches

Buying in an intervention and training staff in how use it won't necessarily always work. Schools and senior leaders need to properly recognise the situations they're dealing with and proactively take steps towards addressing them, so that children can be helped to thrive, rather than just survive. Explicit whole school training, backed up by good support, strategies and resources is the best approach – it needs to be for all staff, personalised and ongoing.

## 3. Focus on restorative practices

Punitive, 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies will be ineffective for children who have had difficult childhoods. Incentive and threat-based strategies simply aren't powerful enough to stop deep-rooted behaviour that has served as protection in the past. Restorative practices are needed to improve and repair relationships between people and communities; mercifully, schools are increasingly replacing their 'discipline policies' with 'relationship policies.'

## 4. Provide a variety of practical subjects

Narrowing the curriculum is the wrong approach for these children. They need music, art, drama, dance, sport and technology – practical subjects with therapeutic qualities that will help them regulate, feel a sense of success and allow them to express their creativity, thus helping to repair some of the damage done to the brain through early adversity.

## 5. Provide the right team

These children will benefit from interactions with your most qualified and experienced staff, rather than unqualified teachers, TAs and supply staff. The staff in question should be permanent, invested and knowledgeable professionals with a deep understanding what has happened to these children and the impact their experiences have had on their bodies and minds. The staff will need to be effectively supported, and consistent and compassionate in their approach, no matter what the children throw at them.

**Lynn Miles is a lecturer in education at Teesside University, which offers related ACE short courses, whole school CPD and, from September 2019, an education MA in trauma-informed practice**

 @LynnMiles70





# BRING BRITISH VALUES TO LIFE

By engaging children with parliamentary processes and democracy, your school's teaching of British values can become more than just an exercise in box ticking, says Sally Maddison

**W**alking past Y4 Oak class, shouts of "Order! Order!" fill the air. No, it's not a new behaviour management strategy – it's a whole-class House of Commons-style debate.

The importance of 'British values' is one of those vague things we're told to make a key part of our school life, but it often ends up as a forced, faded display in some dusty corner of a school corridor. Something referred to every so often, without fully understanding how to really make it relevant for the children, especially when it comes to democracy.

I knew there must be a better way to approach teaching democracy beyond when we study ancient Greece. I discovered that by making a few small changes, teaching British values could (and did) become a massively valuable, engaging and enjoyable part of our school life.

## PUT IT TO THE VOTE

Our first step was to turn the school council into our pupil parliament – a simple measure, but one which turned out to have a huge impact.

Each class has its own MP, who represents their group's views in meetings and then feeds back the outcomes to the children. To become an MP, the candidates campaign, create a list of ideas and promises – their manifestos – and deliver a 'Why you should vote for me' speech. The pupils then fill out individual ballots and vote in secret. A school prime minister from Y6 is also voted for and they act as the head boy or girl.

The school MPs and PM meet regularly with a member of SLT to discuss their classes' ideas, feed back on previous 'actions' discussed, vote on new ideas and even set up in-school petitions for things such as 'Music on the playground at lunchtime'. Minutes are taken at these meetings and displayed in each

## 5 STEPS TO ENGAGE PUPILS WITH DEMOCRACY

- Create a school pupil parliament, giving the children the opportunity to campaign and vote
- Hold House of Commons-style debates about topics that are relevant to the children, such as the start of the school day
- Invite your local MP or peer into school to talk with and work alongside the children. You can find the contact details for all MPs and Lords via [tinyurl.com/mps-lords-contact](http://tinyurl.com/mps-lords-contact)
- Visit the Houses of Parliament for free by filling out the application available at [parliament.uk/education](http://parliament.uk/education) – don't forget to apply for the travel subsidy too
- Take part in UK Parliament Week on 2-8 November by signing up at [ukparliamentweek.org](http://ukparliamentweek.org) – as well as receiving lots of free resources, you can join in with a series of live lessons

classroom.

Explicitly linking what the children are doing to how Britain's actual voting system and parliament works has built a much deeper understanding of elections and why it's important to vote. This isn't too different from the way schools already elect council representatives, prefects or head boys and girls, but by making these small changes the children are able to really articulate what democracy means, why it's important and use words like 'campaign', 'manifesto', 'ballot' and 'representative' in an informed way.

## FINDING TIME

Now, having a pupil parliament is all well and good, but how do we make democracy part of our normal curriculum when our timetables are already bursting at the seams?

Well, it so happened that our reciprocal reading text was the 'Discover the UK Parliament' primary schools booklet (see [tinyurl.com/psm-ks2-parliament](http://tinyurl.com/psm-ks2-parliament) – print copies can be ordered for free), and the children wanted to know what the word 'debate' meant. This led to a discussion about how the MPs in the House of Commons debate and the kind of things they talk about.

I mentioned that one recent debate had been about the sugar tax, and suddenly the whole room was filled with shouts of, "It's not fair," and, "But I love fizzy pop." So the afternoon's science lesson went out of the window and we held a proper, parliament-style debate. I was blown away by the children's enthusiasm, maturity and the wide range of different arguments they came up with.

## MEANINGFUL DEBATE

First, the children had to research and think about the pros and cons for each side of the argument. Next, I separated



them into two groups – the party in power who were for the sugar tax, and the opposition party who were against.

They were given roles, such as leader, deputy leader and minister for business, and then sat in rows of chairs facing each other as they do in the House of Commons. I played the role of the Speaker of the House and the children had to stand up if they wished to say something. I referred to each child as 'the Right Honourable' and they were allowed to clap if they agreed with someone's point – but no booing!

The results were incredible. These children, who often find it hard to listen, talk in groups effectively and offer detailed reasons in their comprehension answers, were being respectful, thinking about what had been said and giving informed and thought-through responses. Some even went home and watched real parliamentary debates.

By giving the debate a very clear structure, making them stand, rather than put their hands up and framing it all in the style of the House of Commons, the children were utterly engaged and left with a new understanding of democracy.

We did catch up on that missed science lesson in the end – but more importantly, I'd learnt the power of teaching democracy.

### DIRECT ENGAGEMENT

Debates like this now form part of our English programme of study, developing the children's reasoning and oracy skills, as well as their understanding of the democratic process. In fact, we're looking to organise a Nottingham Junior Parliament for this summer, bringing primary children together from different schools across the county to take part in House of Commons-style debates.

I've also since discovered that you can not only invite your local MP into school,

but also request a free visit from a member of the House of Lords. We've had two peers in school so far, and both times the children have been enthralled.

And did you know that anyone can set up a formal petition to government that may potentially be debated in the House of Commons? As soon as we learned about this, the children and I went on to the [petition.parliament.uk](http://petition.parliament.uk) website and set one up. A girl suggested we petition to get more help for children in school with type 1 diabetes, so that's what we did. Now the children check the petition to see how many votes it has, look at the map to see where people have voted and even try to think up ways to get more votes.

We've also taken part in UK Parliament Week, had free workshops in school from the parliament education team and booked for 30 children to visit the Houses of Parliament, after discovering that you can take school groups around there for free, with travel cost subsidies.

When I first thought about teaching children about the British value of 'democracy', I saw it as a one-off lesson to tick a box. Very quickly, however, it became clear that it could become something that not only engages the children in learning about it, but could also impact other areas of their academic and social education.



**Sally Maddison is deputy head of Sir John Sherbrooke Junior School, Nottingham, an SLE and a Shakespeare ambassador for primary schools**

 @primarydrama





# MAKE YOUR SCHOOL A HAPPY ONE

Stephanie Davies discusses the profound impact that a 'realistic happiness culture' can have in school settings beset by performance pressures

**W**hen we talk about happiness, there can often be a sense of it being a short-term thing. However, it's important to note that there's a difference between happiness and pleasure. Pleasure tends to be something short-term and quite self-centred, whereas happiness is something much greater than that, and more far-reaching in the long term – particularly in schools.

At the same time, however, it's also okay to *not* be happy. Children and young people especially can these days be pressured to think that being happy is the be-all and end-all, when what we actually need to talk about more is the idea of 'realistic happiness'.

## A COMFORTABLE SPACE

Happiness isn't always achievable. Life, after all, is full of ups and downs, so experiencing peaks and troughs is entirely natural. There will inevitably be days when you don't feel great, or feel sad. What matters is how we cope at such times, and how we can help others work through their own difficulties. It's this which can create a truly happy culture within a school.

You can help this process along by creating a system of school buddies and school groups for your teachers. Which teachers among your staff seem to be performing particularly well? Identify who they are, and form small staff groups that they can regularly work with and chat to, perhaps at lunchtimes or after school. These talking groups can be really helpful, but shouldn't be mandatory. Have them perhaps discuss different topics or themes each week, and make sure that staff know they can drop in on them as and when.

The groups might choose to talk about SATs one week, and maybe something entirely unrelated to school the next – perhaps personal wellbeing, or experiences with the menopause. Creating small talking groups of this kind

will help foster a broader sense of community and give people a comfortable space in which they can talk about specific subjects that are important to them.

## ACTS OF KINDNESS

Another thing you can do is organise activities that might fit the aforementioned 'pleasurable' and 'short term' description, but which can boost morale over time. One of our ideas at Laughology is something we call 'Getting mugged off'. Buy a large mug, fill it with some pleasant, inexpensive goodies and treats – nothing too large or expensive – and leave it anonymously on a table in a room belonging to a teacher who's recently done something brilliant with an anonymously written note.

Having done it once, make it a regular weekly thing whereby a teacher takes their turn in filling the mug with goodies and leaving it on a colleague's desk in recognition of something great that they've done. On the one hand, it's a simple act of kindness that shows appreciation for others' efforts, but it also taps into something else – that highlighting instances when people do the right thing is vitally important.

With schools under so many different pressures and constantly fretting over what they need to do next, marking those moments when colleagues excel themselves with small rewards is a really positive move. Many settings will do precisely that with their children, but rarely with staff.

You can also take practical steps towards reforming policies and procedures that may be causing issues. A big one for many teachers right now is their school's marking structure – if you haven't already, consider joining the many

schools now giving serious consideration to the volume of marking they currently expect their teachers to manage, and the marking approaches they expect to see.

It's not as though a school will stop marking completely after reviewing its marking structure – but it may well be that a better way of managing your teachers' marking demands comes to light. Perhaps there's a different, more effective approach out there that's worth looking at.

## REAL OUTCOMES

In the course of our consultancy work with schools, we've tended to find that when senior teams are broadly happy, the teams they work with will be too, and so will the children. Building a culture of realistic happiness across a school starts with the leadership – which will involve headteachers recognising the importance of their own wellbeing in the way they carry themselves, their behaviours, how they react to events and the relationships

they form with their team.

Where that's the case, we've seen increases in SATs performances, wellbeing improvements in staff, increased happiness levels, better behaviour among the children and instances of richer thinking and learning. Children are

more willing to raise their hands in class, and more likely to respond to conflict – be it behavioural or personal in nature – in a thoughtful and considered way.

In the qualitative responses we've received, we've heard of children being appointed as 'happiness champions', whose role is to help their younger peers talk through any conflicts they're experiencing and lend support in managing them better.

“Pleasure tends to be something short-term and quite self-centred, whereas happiness is something much greater than that”

We want people to recognise just how important happiness is for the lives of everyone – not just in education, but also workplaces. That's why, in 2015, we held our first National Happiness Awards, covering two sectors – 'Happiness in the Workplace' and 'Happiness in Education'.

## WIDER RECOGNITION

The 'Happiness in Education' categories aren't just intended as a celebration of 'happiness for happiness' sake – what we look for in the nominations and entries we receive are successful outcomes as the result of happiness-related activities undertaken in school. The more we're able to get that information out to a wider audience of schools, parents and educators, the more likely it is that they'll start promoting happiness in education themselves.

Entries for this year's Awards are now open, and will close on **29th October 2019**. We want schools to tell us what they're doing to promote happiness, and to present us with evidence of those activities organised under five separate headings (see 'Happy people'). By 'evidence' we don't just mean statistics – we also want to see videos, photographs and any other material that will bring what you're doing to life and help your entry stand out.

The winner of the 'Happiest Primary School' category in last year's awards was one people may have heard of, thanks to *Britain's Got Talent* – Flakefleet Primary School in Lancashire, in recognition of the valuable and discreet support it provides

to children and families from the local area, such as washing clothes and sometimes providing Christmas and birthday presents.

Another notable previous winner a couple of years ago was Fourfields Community Primary School in Peterborough. The headteacher, Sue Blyth, later went on to speak before a conference audience of Ofsted officials about what it was that made Fourfields such a happy school, and why happiness was so important to them.

That's brilliant, both for them and us. We want schools to be acknowledged for the really important work they're doing which isn't recognised by Ofsted. Our belief is that if enough schools are engaged in such work, and increasingly getting attention because of it, Ofsted's got to start taking notice.



**Stephanie Davies is the founder of the training and development provider Laughology**

 @laughology

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

## CREATE PEOPLE

**Based on academic research we've seen and further research we've done ourselves, the process of creating happy people requires five key elements:**

### CONFIDENCE

**Not just the confidence that someone needs to make the next move, but also a sense of confidence in other people**

### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

**The ability to move ourselves forward, while recognising our achievements and successes**

### MUTUAL SUPPORT

**The giving and receiving of support, as well as kindness, community and a shared sense of purpose**

### POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

**Effective relationships forged between members of staff and between different groups within the school**

### COPING SKILLS

**A recognition that life isn't about being 'up' all the time; that tough things sometimes happen and that our environment can affect our ability to move beyond them**





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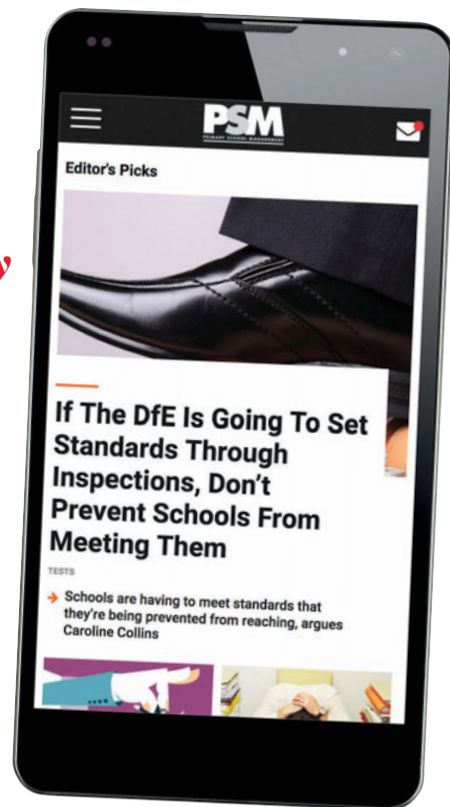
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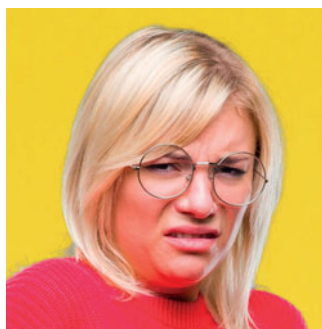
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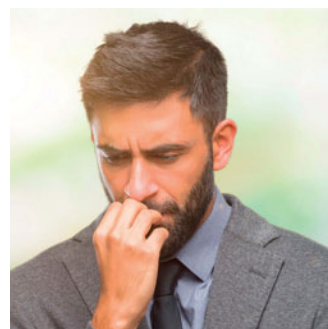
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# SUN SAFETY AT SCHOOL

Have last year's summer temperatures and hours of blazing sunshine changed your school's approach to sun protection?

**M**oderate exposure to ultraviolet light is essential for our health, but larger doses of UV light can damage skin, produce burns, cause premature skin ageing, and in the very worst cases, skin cancer.

Despite last summer being the UK's joint hottest on record, a recent survey by SC Johnson Professional revealed that a third of respondents who worked outside last summer didn't apply sun cream whilst on the job, and that only a quarter applied it regularly.

The NHS often issues warnings concerning the dangers of sunburn in childhood, citing it as a factor in increasing the risks of developing skin cancer later in life (see [tinyurl.com/nhs-sb-risk](https://tinyurl.com/nhs-sb-risk)). Good sun protection habits need to be established at an early stage, thus giving primary schools a key role to play in teaching children about the importance of effective sun protection.

Primary pupils will typically spend far more time outdoors in the summer months, during periods when UV rays will be at their highest. On average, they will be outside for 1.5 hours per school day – sometimes more, if they're taking part in PE lessons or other outdoor activities.

## WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

The issue is a complex one. Does the responsibility for ensuring children are given appropriate UV protection lie with

parents or schools? Are parents sufficiently aware of the risks that come with overexposure to UV rays?

The DfE has previously advised schools to take a 'common sense' approach to UV protection for pupils, and agree a policy with parents on how sunscreen should be applied to children while they're at school and in what circumstances (see [tinyurl.com/dfe-sun-12](https://tinyurl.com/dfe-sun-12)). Employers in the UK are further legally required to ensure their employees don't suffer harm or injury at work, including potential harms from occupational UV exposure – which means that provisions should be made for teaching staff, too.

Limited budgets and the resourcing needed to draw up a robust school policy can sometimes hinder such efforts, but it's certainly possible for primary schools to effect significant changes in pupil behaviours by teaching them best practice. One way of doing this might be to educate them on the UV index, and how it can be used to identify the point at which sun protection should be applied (namely UV level 3 or above).

At SC Johnson Professional, we'd recommend that schools adopt the following '5 S' approach to sun safety, while incorporating the use of sun protection creams to protect their pupils:

### 1. SLIP on sun protective clothing

Clothing can be one of the most effective barriers, to UV rays, so encourage pupils to keep covered up.

### 2. SLOP on sun cream

Apply a broad spectrum, high SPF sun cream 20 minutes before initial exposure, re-applying every two hours as needed

### 3. SLAP on a hat and neck protection

Where possible, use hats that feature ear and neck protection.

### 4. SLIDE on some sunglasses

A pair of high-quality wrap-around sunglasses will help protect children's eyes.

### 5. SHADE from sun where possible

Encourage pupils to stay in shaded areas wherever possible, particularly between 11am and 3pm.

Various avenues are available to help schools implement effective sun safety policies – raising awareness is an important first step.

**Chris Brooks is technical product manager at SC Johnson Professional; further details of SC Johnson Professional's sun protection creams, information packs and activities for schools can be found at the URL below**

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 [debgroup.com/uk/education](https://debgroup.com/uk/education)



# Give Every Child the Chance to Smile

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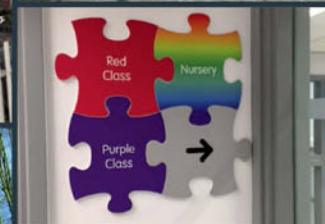
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# SCHOOLS SHOULD FOLLOW PUPILS' ECO EXAMPLE

The protest actions of Extinction Rebellion have captured pupils' imaginations, but they should also be prompting some soul searching among school leaders, observes Fergal Roche...

I wonder if you too have been made to feel a bit uncomfortable lately by the sense of having to do your bit to save the planet. Just a couple of months ago, few of us had ever heard of Extinction Rebellion. Now you can't look at the news without seeing another story about the need to change the way we live.

Cycling through London a couple of months ago, I was frustrated to discover a couple of thousand protesters had taken over Waterloo Bridge and were preventing traffic from getting through. However, I happened to notice a few cheeky cyclists were chancing their arms and being let through by the gathered protestors. I quickly joined them, and happily claimed my eco-warrior credentials when they extended me the same courtesy.

I was relieved to catch my train, but did feel a bit unsettled the following morning when I heard Emma Thompson speaking very convincingly on behalf of those people about the urgent need to reverse the climate change trends we're currently seeing. For starters, the total global insect population is dropping by 2.5% a year, with potentially devastating implications for the food chain.

Having spent so much of my life working with schools, I started thinking about their response to the environmental situation. I was shocked to learn that 25% of morning rush hour traffic – the slowest and smokiest – is down to school drop-offs. And yet there's a lot we can do.

We can encourage wider use of school buses. A 49-seater coach is, based on average numbers per school run journey, equivalent to 31 cars. If parents can't walk with their children to school, or encourage them to cycle, they should at least see if there's a bus service available. If they're worried about their children's safety, modern technology can now reassure them. CoachHire.com, one of the biggest school transport providers in the country, offers an app for parents which shows them whether their child boarded the bus and where their bus is at that very moment.



Schools are also among the biggest institutional users of electricity, with lighting accounting for more than half of that. Walk round a typical school and you'll still find lights left on in unused classrooms and over-lit dining rooms, not to mention flickering striplights that cause issues for children with certain types of ADD and conditions such as epilepsy.

Again, there are solutions available. eLight (elightgroup.com), for instance, is transitioning schools to using LED lighting for a fixed monthly fee, with no requirement for capital investment. The savings unlocked are typically double the fee, thus freeing cash from the old lights and enabling schools to make enormous savings.

What about school uniform production? Many of us are increasingly concerned at the environmental damage caused by sweatshop factories, but there's an alternative. ShopKeepEasy (shopkeepeasy.com) is an online shopping platform that schools can use to create and sell clothes and

accessories with custom designs fashioned from environmentally-friendly materials, such as a type of polyester made using spent plastic bottles.

Maybe we can't all cycle everywhere, but there are certainly other ways in which we can make sensible and easy decisions that will have a positive impact on our surrounding environment. If school pupils are the leaders of this burgeoning movement, then schools themselves should seize the chance to do what they can to adopt new behaviours and protect the futures of those they serve.



**Fergal Roche is a former teacher, headteacher and founding CEO of The Key; he now runs Nobel**

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# Why I Love...

Site manager **Simon Kellett** explains how Fireco's Freedor helped him improve pupil safety and avoid some troublesome maintenance tasks

Newport Junior School in Aldershot has 300 7- to 11-year-olds on roll and is based in an old Victorian building known for its unique character. It's the job of Simon Kellett, the school's site manager, to oversee maintenance and repairs, hire contractors for site work and ensure that Newport remains compliant with health and safety regulations. On occasion, however, different areas of Simon's responsibility can run into each other and present some tricky challenges...

**“Our pupils were having problems walking to class.**

On the school premises we have fire doors situated in corridors which are immediately adjacent to the classrooms. Since these are routes carrying high levels of foot traffic, the doors would be constantly opened and moved through, leading to noise issues caused by the doors being regularly slammed and kicked open, which in turn caused disruption and damage.

**“To try and address these issues, the fire doors would sometimes be wedged open.**

I then began searching online for a product that would allow everyone to walk through the corridor more easily and resolve the issue of the doors slamming, while maintaining compliance. I came across the Freedor – a wirelessly controlled, battery operated overhead door closer – and found that it suited our needs perfectly.



It's now possible for everyone to traverse the school's corridors easily, with no disruption to any classes from noisy doors.

**“I'm also the school's Fire Safety Coordinator, so I have to look for solutions that are fully compliant with fire regulations.**

Freedor absolutely fits the bill. The new doors are no longer heavy, but instead feature gentle resistance that allows them be easily opened and closed. The doors are transom-mounted, and therefore beyond the reach of little fingers and feet, which is also very reassuring.”

**“The installation was painless and the service has been fantastic.**

If there's an issue, it's resolved straight away. Our account manager, Alastair, is always available on the phone and ready to answer any questions. I test the products myself each week and have found them to work 100% of the time. Freedor does what it says on the tin. It's not disruptive, it's easier to use than other door products and

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## THE SIGNS OF MAT MISMANAGEMENT

The causes of MAT failure take time to build, says Laura Williams – preventing them means knowing what to look for and responding quickly...

**W**hether it's a financial notice to improve, a poor Ofsted report or a failure of governance, news stories about MAT scandals have become all too common.

The questions often asked are why it took intervention from Ofsted, the DfE or the ESFA before people realised how bad the situation was, and why nothing had been done up until that point. Well, a MAT can't lose all of its money or shift from Good to Special Measures overnight – these things happen over time.

How can you know if you're working in a mismanaged MAT? What symptoms should you be looking out for that might lead to a detrimental diagnosis in future? In my experience, there are three key areas you should assess to determine whether your MAT is being mismanaged:

### 1. GOVERNANCE

Consider the constitution of your board and governing bodies. Determine whether they're the right people to undertake these roles in terms of their values, skillset, personal interests and capacity.

Review your existing governance and self-evaluation systems, while considering how objective these processes are, how often they're undertaken and how effective your MAT is at following up on areas for development. Also evaluate the effectiveness of your scheme of delegation.

Assess the quality of your meetings in terms of how they're scheduled, how agendas are drawn up and how discussions are recorded. Any evidence of accountability, scrutiny, challenge and support should always be clear and documented. Consider also your governance systems' level of transparency. You should be able to clearly articulate your decision-making process and justify the actions of governors to both local stakeholders and external bodies.





## 2. LEADERSHIP

Consider the capacity of your leaders to deliver sustainable improvement within your MAT. Assess how well your leaders tackle poor performance and conduct, and whether they execute their own leadership role fairly, equitably and consistently.

Determine how well your leaders apply your MAT's policies and consider your own role in ensuring MAT systems and processes are followed with respect to education, employment law, finance and compliance. Review the performance management processes for your leaders and ensure that they focus on MAT-determined core competencies beyond education-specific targets.

Consider how well the leaders within your MAT respond to challenge and opportunities for collaboration. Issues in those areas can indicate underlying cultural problems that may erode the effectiveness of the MAT over time.

## 3. FINANCE

Consider your finance staff's level of experience and the qualifications they hold within the context of the role you're expecting them to perform. Assess their ability to provide correct and timely information, and to present this in an audience-appropriate way.

Determine your finance team's effectiveness in responding to challenge and scrutiny in meetings and from external bodies. Questions that can't be answered and data that can't be supported are both red flags that shouldn't be ignored.

Review your MAT's financial systems to ensure that appropriate checks are in place and able to act as an 'early warning' system. Financial issues within your MAT shouldn't come to light for the first time during an external audit report.

Finally, consider how the finance function integrates with other areas across the MAT, including school development planning, curriculum planning, staffing strategy and capital expenditure. A financial team that works within a silo cannot be effective.

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

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# MANAGE THE ATTITUDES OF RECEPTION STAFF

If your reception staff are sending out the wrong signals, a difficult conversation may be in order

It's difficult to have a conversation about someone's general attitude and demeanour, since these can come across as aspects of someone's personality that you're unlikely to change. This is right, in that people's personalities tend to be resistant to change, but it's not their personality we're looking to alter here – it's their behaviour.

The key to having a successful difficult conversation about behaviour is to be extremely specific about the behaviour that's causing the issue; in this instance, what it is that's making them come across as miserable.

If you were to simply say 'You're miserable,' you're hardly being fair to them. They may not even be aware that this is how they're coming across – even if it's obvious to you – never mind why. If you try and bring it up with them like this, their response will be at best defensive, and at worst, actively hostile.

Breaking down exactly what makes your reception convey a negative and unhelpful attitude can help you formulate the issues in a more specific and approachable way. Examples I've previously seen include keeping people waiting at the reception desk; adopting a brusque tone of voice; and actively ignoring people entering the reception area.

Talk to the staff about these behaviours and habits, and clearly outline what you'd like to see instead. For example: "I feel that you can come across as unhelpful on reception, and this shows up in several ways. You can often keep people waiting when they arrive. It would be better if you stopped what you were doing and greeted them."




## POSITIVE CHANGE

I've seen this approach work well in the past because it's clear, and gives the other person all the information they need to make the changes you're looking for.

Whether those changes actually get made will depend on their willingness to acknowledge the existence of the behaviour you've highlighted (ideally via a clear and succinct explanation). Having agreed that their behaviour is causing problems, it'll then be down to them to decide how they're going to change their behaviour as a result.

Not everyone manages to make the change successfully, but I've seen more receptionists than not make those positive changes and shake off those lapses into miserable and unhelpful behaviours.

**Sonia Gill is founder of the consultancy Heads Up, which specialises in making schools outstanding, and author of the #1 ranked books *Successful Difficult Conversations in School* and *Journey to Outstanding*; if you found this article useful, sign up to Heads Up TV and receive weekly 2-minute 'top tips' videos for holding 'successful difficult conversations' – see [ukheadsuptv.com](http://ukheadsuptv.com) for more details**

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# How accessible is your information?

Your premises might be fully accessible and your curriculum inclusive to all – but can you be certain that everyone's getting the message?

**W**hen someone has a learning disability, it can affect every part of their life and prevent them from getting the information they need to make informed choices.

Broadly speaking, 'accessible information' refers to information which people can understand, but that can mean different things to different individuals. For some, it might mean presenting information in large print or Braille; others might consider it to be information translated into their first language.

By law, pupils with disabilities, parents and carers have the right to be treated equally, and to have information made accessible to them. There are three important areas in which schools have to ensure compliance under the Equality Act 2010 – 'access to the building', 'access to the curriculum' and 'access to written information'.

## SUBSTANTIAL DISADVANTAGE

'Information' in this context should take account of pupils' disabilities and the formats preferred by both pupils and parents, and be made available within a reasonable time frame. Examples of this might include handouts, textbooks and information about school events. The basic requirement on schools will be to let pupils and parents/carers know that written information and other forms of communication will be made accessible to them upon request. You could potentially include a note on your website or promotional materials, create a sign or post a notice on a bulletin board.

If a parent or carer with a disability asks for accessible information, work with them to identify how their needs can be met. You don't necessarily need have to have the relevant accessible formats immediately to hand, but you

will need to provide the information required in a timely manner.

For example, a visually impaired pupil who can only see material in 16pt font size or larger will be at a substantial disadvantage compared to their non-disabled peers if materials are only provided to them in smaller print.

To use a different example, consider the disabled pupil who has dyslexia and finds it very difficult to read text typed on white paper. In this case, the school can provide the pupil with handouts printed on yellow paper. In another instance, a disabled pupil with dyslexia finds it difficult to read text on all types of paper without the aid of a plastic overlay sheet – the reasonable adjustment here would be to simply provide that pupil with a plastic overlay sheet for them to use in all lessons.

## SPECIALIST PROVISION



By way of a counter-example, an independent school provides overlay sheets to a pupil with dyslexia to use when reading text, and supports this with weekly sessions provided by a specialist teacher. If the school were to then add the cost of these adjustments to the pupil's school fees,

that would amount to discrimination.

Depending on the circumstances involved, schools may find themselves needing to provide disabled pupils, parents or carers with specialist equipment such as screen readers, adapted keyboards or accessible computer software. The pupils' needs may extend to specialist service provision, such as sign language interpretation, lip-reading or deaf-blind communication, and potentially also entail fitting an induction loop, infrared broadcast system or an audiovisual fire alarm system.

Accessibility is ultimately more important than the way your documents look. You could spend considerable amounts on making them look impressive, but if people can't understand what they say, that's money wasted. Take time and care when making your information accessible.

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

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 [ea-audits.com](http://ea-audits.com)





# WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Keeping animals at your school site can be hugely rewarding, says Mike Fairclough – but make sure you know what you're getting into...

*"Your water buffalo have escaped! They're on the news!"*

It was 7 O'clock in the morning, and my father-in-law was phoning to tell me something I didn't know. "Oh, I know, it's fine. I've got it sorted," I lied.

Keeping animals at a school is full of trials and tribulations. It can be deeply rewarding, and at times very challenging, but I'd like to convince you here that it's all worth it.

## HOT WATER

Turning the clock back to a month before six of my school's water buffalo escaped, I was sat in my office while under investigation by Trading Standards, having got in hot water for the 'illegal movement of livestock'. Admittedly, my enthusiasm for education and new projects can sometimes get the better of me. This was one such occasion, and now an imposingly tall Trading Standards Officer

was informing me that I'd breached the law.

He was aware that the school kept sheep. He also knew that the sheep had been sent off to slaughter and that the meat was being sold to parents of pupils at the school. As relative novices to this, we hadn't realised that certain paperwork needed to be completed before we could sell the meat. The officer rapped my knuckles, which was fair enough – but then he leant across the table and said, "I really like what you're doing here. Have you considered lambing? And would you like a herd of water buffalo?"

It turned out that a local farmer was selling off a number of his animals, including some exotic breeds. Happily, the gentleman who'd come to speak to me found the idea of a school farm really inspiring, and wasn't hugely worried about my misdemeanour regarding the paperwork.

The following day, my farm manager and I rocked up to the location where the animals were being sold. We bought a small herd of rather large Asian Water Buffalo and took them straight back to school.

## THE MARSH

I'll leave that story parked there for the moment, and attempt to sketch out the bigger picture regarding the animals at my school and offer some advice to those interested in keeping animals at their school too.

I've been the headteacher of West Rise Junior School for 15 years. My colleague, Alex Richards, is the caretaker for our linked infant school, and now also my farm manager. The school is located on a council estate in

Eastbourne, opposite a large area of marshland. Alex previously found out that this area, known locally as 'the marsh' was due to be rented out for grazing by our LA. I approached them and asked if instead my school could lease the land and use it for a living history project. They approved of the idea, and thereafter gave us permission to manage the 120 acres of wetland, including a large lake.

Over the years we've kept chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, alpacas, ducks, geese, turkeys and bees, as well as the infamous water buffalo. Later this year we plan to introduce wild snakes and lizards to the marsh and start equine therapy this year. Our animals are kept both on the marsh and on our main school site.

## GETTING STARTED

If I've not scared you off yet, and you're still considering keeping animals at your school, I'd suggest beginning with chickens. We started ourselves with four hens that Alex bought from a local farm. You don't need a licence to keep them, they're the cheapest animal to keep and relatively low maintenance, but they will obviously need

looking after properly.

A chicken coop can be either purchased ready made or knocked up yourself, and the chickens will require pellets for food and access to

water. Animal welfare is paramount, so you'll also need a competent person to take charge of looking after them. This will involve feeding the chickens, letting them out of their coop in the morning and shutting them away at night (assuming they're free range).

We employ Stevie, a local young man, who takes care of our chickens and the other animals on the main school site. Alex is employed to look after the water buffalo and sheep on the marsh and to oversee the running of the farm as a whole.

The children at our school love the animals. Our hens are all free range and have the run of the school playing field and playground. They're so tame that they'll cross the playground at break time with complete confidence and eat from the palm of a child's hand. The children also collect the eggs, which are then sold to the parents.

## BY THE BOOK

A year after we introduced the hens, Alex purchased four pygmy goats from a local farmer. Talking to experienced farmers and asking for their advice is highly recommended. The farming fraternity are usually very keen to see children interact with farm animals and learn about where the meat on their table comes from.

It is, however, essential that you contact the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), if you decide that you'd like to keep goats, sheep, cattle or pigs. You must inform DEFRA one month before obtaining the animals and they'll give you a holding number, while signposting you to all the advice you might need.

Additionally, risk assessments will need to be written, addressing the risks and hazards associated with keeping animals. These should be shared with all stakeholders and regularly reviewed. That may sound onerous, but the intention is to keep everyone safe from harm, including the animals themselves.

Looking after animals has a very positive impact on children. It can assist with their mental health and wellbeing

(think of reading dogs and equine therapy), while promoting character traits such as kindness and empathy. Animals can also provide an inspirational boost to children's creativity and ability to express themselves.

## UPS AND DOWNS

We first purchased our water buffalo shortly after obtaining the goats. I remember a Year 4 child at the time asking me "Where do they lay their eggs?" If there was ever a reason to educate children about animals and farming, there's the perfect example.

Finally, I want to impress on readers that keeping animals at a school can involve a steep learning curve. Our herd of water buffalo escaped from the marsh the week after we put them on the land. Someone had left the gate open (it's now securely padlocked) and the herd ran away, only to become accidental TV stars on the local news. However, the event also served to expose our animals to the wider media world. Our buffalo and related projects have since featured on the BBC's

Countryfile, Blue Peter, Channel 4 News and in several national newspapers. This has raised the school's public profile and helped us attract significant funding.

If you do end up deciding to work with animals, you'll inevitably experience some ups and downs along the way – but the rewards and the benefits to your children will be worth it. Just remember to lock any gates!



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

## ANIMAL ESSENTIALS

**If you decide to keep cattie, you'll need to have them TB tested by a qualified vet. This may be required once a year or biannually, depending on your area of the country.**

**The cost of food is a serious consideration – beef nuts for cattle, special pellets for sheep, different pellets for chickens. You need to stock up with enough food and store it in a dry, secure place. You'll also need hay in winter, when the grass will be short or covered in snow, and vet bills can be expensive, depending on the issue.**

**Given these financial considerations, it's advisable to get the whole school community on board. Fellow enthusiasts will come up with ideas for fundraising, the proceeds of which can go into a pot specifically for the animals.**





# IS A WORK-LIFE BALANCE UNATTAINABLE?

Rather than strive for a 'work-life balance', education professionals should instead aim for a 'managed disequilibrium', says Catherine Carden...

**T**eacher workload continues to be a regular fixture in traditional media and social media discussions. Recent coverage has suggested that teachers are leaving the profession in greater numbers than ever, with a Guardian report in April this year claiming that one in five teachers plan to leave teaching within two years, and two fifths in the next five years (see [tinyurl.com/gdn-apr-tr](https://tinyurl.com/gdn-apr-tr)).

An NEU survey cited within the report (see [tinyurl.com/neu-work-19](https://tinyurl.com/neu-work-19)) worryingly found that 40% of respondents predicted they wouldn't be working in education by 2024. The profession is in the midst of a recruitment and retention crisis.

## A LONG-TERM TREND

These high attrition rates seem to boil down to one thing – work-life balance. Those leaving, or intending to leave the profession point to issues such as excessively long working hours, the amount of administration, increased class sizes, accountability pressures and Ofsted demands, as well as the impact of their work on their health and family life.

This increasing desire among educators to leave teaching might seem like a growing trend, but the statistics and reasons often given are hardly new. During her time as Education Secretary between 2014 and 2016, Nicky Morgan's response to climbing attrition figures was to initiate a workload-related survey of teachers. She subsequently established three independent teacher workload review groups to consider ways of eliminating unnecessary workload, which produced reports on marking, planning and teaching resources, and data management. Each report set out a series of recommendations for the DfE, Ofsted, governing boards, school leaders, ITT providers, teachers and researchers, and they remain available on the DfE

webpages (see [tinyurl.com/dfe-workload](https://tinyurl.com/dfe-workload)).

The current Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, has built on this work by developing a workload reduction toolkit for school leaders and a handbook for governing bodies, aimed at supporting schools in enabling a better work-life balance for their staff. He's also committed to collating robust evidence on teacher workload every two years and sought to publicise these efforts, as

addressing those pressures that have stemmed from the prior focus in inspections on outcomes, associated floor targets and national benchmarks. There's clearly been an acknowledgement on the part of government of workload-related challenges currently being faced within and across the sector, and it's taken visible steps towards providing a framework for addressing these issues.



shown in the video 'Working Together on Workload' (see [tinyurl.com/dfe-work-vid](https://tinyurl.com/dfe-work-vid)), which sees prominent education experts supporting the DfE's moves to reduce teacher workload.

Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, has meanwhile publicly stated that Ofsted's incoming inspection framework will help reduce workload by

## 'OUTSTANDING' PROBLEMS

These moves by government to reduce unnecessary workload should be welcomed. Every effort ought to be made to embrace these measures and engage with the resources and support being offered – and yet, I fear that this will have little impact on the daily working lives of teachers and school leaders, and as such, have only a limited impact on the attrition rates we're currently seeing in schools.

Why? Because teachers are committed and selfless professionals. Seeing the children for whom they're responsible achieve is important to teachers; it's what they strive for. As a result, teachers are constantly looking to do things better – to deliver the perfect lesson, a great set of SATs outcomes, excellent behaviour, a stunning set of exercise books showing significant progress. Teachers aim to be outstanding.



I feel that word has a lot to answer for in terms of where we are with teacher workload, stress levels and the perceived lack of work-life balance. Aspiring to be outstanding results in teachers putting themselves under extreme pressure. That means that even when reforms are introduced with the specific aim of reducing workload, a teacher's practice

is unlikely to change. There will still be that strong sense of professional commitment and pride, and a tendency for teachers to stick to their existing ways of working, despite the resulting negative impact on their wellbeing.

## MANAGED DISEQUILIBRIUM

The short answer is no – not really. Instead, accept that a work-life balance is ultimately unattainable. How can anyone ever really expect to establish a 'perfect' balance between their work and personal life?

This desire to achieve and maintain an unattainable equilibrium between our working and 'out of work' lives could, in fact, be burdening us with additional pressure and stress. That's the conclusion reached by Joanna Barsh and Susie Cranston in their book *How Remarkable Women Lead*. They suggest that we stop aspiring to achieve a work-life balance, and instead seek to establish a 'managed disequilibrium'.

A managed disequilibrium acknowledges that there are times when work will be dominant in our lives and take up the majority of our time, imposing on our lives beyond and outside of work. It's an approach which recognises there will be occasions when we need to put in a lot of hours, stay late and work weekends, but also that these need to be made up for at other times with the disequilibrium tipping the other way – towards our lives outside and beyond school.

Because there will be periods of time when there are fewer pressures and less going on, when there will opportunities to leave work closer to the end of the standard school day and not work at weekends. Accepting that the demands of teaching staff result in a disequilibrium, rather than striving to maintain a consistent balance between life at work and life at home, will reduce the pressures that many feel to try and attain the unattainable.

The key word here is 'managed' – we must all feel that we're in control of this disequilibrium process, ensuring that the scales go both ways. As professionals, we should identify and plan for those busy times at work, whilst simultaneously ringfencing times when that's less the case for our personal lives.

## TAKE ACTION

The following practical steps will have a significant impact on teachers' wellbeing and careers:

### 1. DEVELOP A STRONG SUPPORT NETWORK

This may consist of colleagues, line managers and/or friends and family. People who will listen and offer realistic and practical advice.

### 2. SEEK OUT A MENTOR

Someone experienced who a teacher or leader respects, and who can guide them through difficult stages of their career. A good mentor will offer advice, ask questions and be honest. A mentor isn't necessarily for life; different people will make for ideal mentors at different stages of an individual's career. Staff can be proactive in identifying who those people might be, simply by asking if possible candidates might be willing to mentor them.

### 3. ENGAGE IN COACHING

A good coach will help staff work through various issues and problems, enabling them to find their own solutions via the use of effective questioning.

### 4. KNOW YOUR SUPPORTERS

A supporter is someone who champions another individual and their work, pushing them forward for opportunities and publicly applauding their achievement.



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# MANAGING BEREAVEMENT

Andrew Cowley looks at how leaders should balance practical considerations with empathy when responding to staff bereavement

**W**hether you are faced with dealing with the passing of a colleague's parents, in-laws or other family member, a principles-based approach sets us in good stead for managing the scenario. Crucially, decisions reached here will be spur-of-the-moment ones. If you live your values, your tough choices will be the right ones, as trust, compassion, empathy and respect direct your actions.

Losing a member of your family is tough. However hard-faced and unemotional someone might appear in public, behind that mask is the full range of human emotions. Some people are good at holding it all in, traditional 'stiff upper lip' style. Others will struggle to hold back the tears.

## BE THERE

If you genuinely know your colleagues, you can tell who will keep things private and who will be more open about their feelings, but in both cases your support will be appreciated. Offering support alone – the 'I'm here if you need to talk' approach – isn't enough, as that puts the onus on the other party. Proactive leaders will anticipate this.

Asking a colleague in 'just to talk' is an effective means of support. Don't rampage straight in with '*How are you coping after the death of...?*', as this shows little sensitivity. Try not raising the matter at all. If it comes up in conversation, so be it. The simple act of talking and taking the time to be there may be enough to show your empathy.

There are three stages to consider: the period of illness leading up to the loss; the time between the passing and the funeral; and the time of mourning. The first and last could be of indeterminate time, and herein lies the test of empathy and compassion over cold organisation.

When a colleague comes to you with the news of a terminal illness in the family, is your reaction one of shock at

the news, or at how your school is going to be affected by potential staff absence?

## UNEXPECTED ARRANGEMENTS

It is at this time that empathy and compassion need to be unpacked from your toolkit, together with a healthy portion of confidentiality. Some people will share the sad news with their colleagues, because this is the comfort blanket they may need, but equally others may want it kept quiet. Allowing for hospital visits in work time is inevitably going to result in some gossip and some more direct questioning about an absence. Be aware of this and kill the gossip. If you have a strong culture of confidentiality this is easier, but you may have to have a few stiff conversations to shore up the privacy that some circumstances demand.

Have some key people onside, because there are going to be timetable changes and cover issues. Being flexible in planning and being fair to everyone else may need some unexpected arrangements. It is the inflexible leader who allows such tragic circumstances to add unnecessarily to workload.

In the case of a lengthy illness, the final days may be spent in hospital or in a hospice and this is the time to cut your colleague some slack. They may be repaying your support by a full day at work, but if they need to go at half past three each afternoon, let them go. The staff meeting, the display board, the marking they have missed can wait. If your empathy cascades down to your team, others will step in and support with the essential tasks.

*"Your trust and loyalty will be repaid by staff who are looked after"*



## PEOPLE, NOT POUNDS

When the time comes, despite some people saying they will be all right, they aren't going to be all right. An empathetic leader will give time off before and maybe after the funeral. In the majority of cases, a colleague who loses a family member will have said goodbye to a parent, grandparent or in-law. In the case of parents, there may be no end of legal and probate matters to attend to. Many teachers will live some distance from their home town (or even country) and may need to be away for some time. Insisting on a return to work isn't going to help anyone.

Whether it is a week or two that you allow, think of people, not pounds. Your trust and loyalty will be repaid by staff who are looked after.

This brings us to funeral attendance. I have been told of some schools that only permit staff to attend the funerals of immediate relatives and allow only unpaid attendance for other occasions.

Where does this leave us with colleagues who want to attend the funeral of family friends? I have also heard of leave being refused because 'it would inconvenience others', which lacks any empathy whatsoever.

Many colleagues are happy to make their own cover arrangements, swapping PPA time or making up time elsewhere, so as not to cause any disruption to the time of others – no 'inconvenience' here. For some people, being able to attend a funeral allows for 'closure', while for others it is an expectation of their culture. Not being able to say a proper farewell can trigger feelings of guilt. A flexible and thoughtful approach to funeral attendance is therefore an important wellbeing consideration.

## SCHOOL AS A REFUGE

The final stage to consider is probably the most difficult and challenging: the grieving process and recovery. Grief is

draining, physically and emotionally. Anyone who has lost a parent or in-law may run on nervous energy for a few weeks and outwardly appear to be holding it all together, but as with any mental health issue the scars are hidden. Keeping an eye on them in an unobtrusive way is a key strategy.

Rather than a school leader taking the prime responsibility, there may be a trusted friend who is better positioned to help and listen; a teacher who began at the same time as their colleague, or maybe someone who has been through a similar experience themselves of late.

Leaving someone to come back without support shows a lack of empathy, though a number of teachers have told me that they had support before their bereavement, but little afterwards. One said, "It was a case of 'it's over now, you can get back to work' and 'just get over it' from some staff, and little more than lip service from the head who told me I had taken enough time off."

Counselling services, or providing the number of the Education Support Partnership, are the very least that can be offered. Think about key dates, such as the anniversary of the passing or birthdays, and how your colleague is going to face the next long holiday, given that school might be a refuge from the pain.

Empathetic school leaders will set themselves a written or digital reminder of these significant times and act upon it. Though it might not seem much, never underestimate the positive impact of a simple yet considered note in a card or a text message to express your sincerest thoughts.



**Andrew Cowley is a primary deputy head and Y6 teacher; this article is based on an edited extract from his book, *The Wellbeing Toolkit – Sustaining, supporting and enabling school staff*, which is available now, published by Bloomsbury**

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# Budgeting

## AUDITS SHOULD HELP, NOT HINDER

Catherine Dottridge explains why a good, thorough audit shouldn't be a cause for concern, but rather a tool that can make you a better manager

I clearly remember my first audit as the school business manager of a single-academy trust. I'd been in post for two months, with no previous experience of academy finance, when a team of junior auditors descended on my office with relentless requests for what felt like unnecessary data and information. If that wasn't bad enough, both the senior audit manager and partner then left during the process, seemingly leaving no-one to actually lead the audit. To say I learned from the experience would be an understatement.

Now, as the CFO of a growing MAT, I'd like to think I've established a thorough, yet practical and fit for purpose audit process with the support of my trustees and colleagues.

### LAY THE GROUNDWORK

The first step is to appoint the right external auditors through a clear tender specification and selection process. If you're writing a specification from scratch, use your SBM network to obtain examples that you can tailor to your needs. It's worth investing time at this stage, since getting the specification right from the outset makes the rest of the process run much more smoothly. Good auditing requires a thorough understanding of the audited entity; once they're appointed, then providing they demonstrate quality service and good value for money, stick with them for, say, three to five years. Any longer, and there's the risk of complacency setting in.

A thorough audit process will look into the nooks and crannies of your processes, so it has to be one you can trust. That's often down to the skills and reliability of those conducting the process, or at the very least, the audit leader. Where





possible, ensure that sufficiently skilled, accessible and committed auditors are deployed throughout the process, and establish professional relationships from the start. Plenty of tea and coffee usually helps!

The purpose of an audit is to examine, verify and issue an opinion on financial statements and the accuracy and probity of accounting transactions. You need to be confident that the process will highlight any misdoings that have fallen through your internal control processes, be it accidentally or intentionally. However, you also need to know that they'll concentrate on what matters most, and not necessarily look under every rock hoping to find something somewhere. There's a careful balance to be struck between an effective and supportive audit, and an intrusive, punitive investigation.

## A JOINT EFFORT

Careful, transparent communication is key, and this cuts both ways. Keep your auditors informed of your business activities, main risks and any potential accounting challenges. In return, they should inform you of the latest regulations or standards to help you prepare for the audit, and have correct processes in place day-to-day. You should be jointly working towards a successful audit.

The final step is the written report of the findings. What this looks like will take shape over the course of the process, so engaging in positive professional discussions throughout should help you avoid any nasty surprises at the end. All parties should be prepared to discuss any queries or issues, acknowledge 'real' concerns as they arise and confirm the best corrective action to take.

Robust audits play a crucial role in providing independent financial assurance to stakeholders. Those of us responsible for the control and management of school funding should feel tested and challenged, and ultimately confident that the public money we're entrusted with is in safe hands. Consider it this way – engaging successfully with good auditors enables you to share ideas for improvement, and can actually make your life easier!

*Catherine Dottridge is the CFO of Tenax Schools Trust and chair of governors at Sir Henry Fermor Primary School*



## WHY I'M ADOPTING THE CHART OF ACCOUNTS

Nathan Waites explains why he welcomes the ESFA's newly launched Chart of Accounts

**L**ast month saw the ESFA announce the introduction of its new Chart of Accounts. This is the DfE's standard for financial data that will underpin the academies accounts return and budget forecast returns. At the time of writing, adopting the Chart of Accounts will be voluntary, but doing so could have benefits.

According to the ESFA, adopting it will potentially enable automated data transfer from an academy trust's finance system to ESFA for financial returns relating to the 2019/20 financial year – and presumably all future years – thereby reducing the costs faced by those schools and MATs that currently use auditors to map their data.

Developed with input from many of the main budgeting and accounting software providers, the new Chart of Accounts sets out a standard set of codes that will be used by the ESFA for their central reporting, and for academies to use in their future ESFA submissions.

In theory, this should allow for easier, more detailed and more accurate benchmarking comparisons with a greater level of detail. While the hope is that schools can therefore benchmark apples with apples, there may still be some variety in flavour since each school is unique, with its own characteristics and demographic. The ESFA's published Chart of Accounts (see [tinyurl.com/esfa-coa](https://tinyurl.com/esfa-coa)) illustrates how each of the new ledger codes is mapped, what reporting categories they fit into for benchmarking purposes (Column N), and how different lines will be mapped on BFR and BFRO submissions (Columns S & T).

Adopting the Chart of Accounts may be voluntary, but I intend to do so with

effect from this September, as I perceive the longer-term benefits to outweigh the initial effort required.

It's likely that the big software providers will be issuing their own guidelines on how to integrate and adopt the new Chart of Accounts into each of their systems over the coming months. It's important to note that changing your coding structure can only really happen at year end – attempting this mid-year isn't advisable, as you'll have already been using the existing structure for all transactions up to that point.

Having already started my budget planning for next year, I'm hoping that I'll be able to import the new Chart of Accounts into my budgeting software, where it will sit alongside the current structure. By a process of mapping my current structure to the new codes, I should then be able to produce my budget using the new coding structure, ready for all my future transactions to utilise it with effect from 1st September 2019.

Key to this, however, will be ensuring I understand how my software company can help facilitate the transition, while also checking whether my auditors have any advice on how best to do so, and that our governors and trustees are aware of – and approve – the changes.

**Nathan Waites is Chief Financial & Operating Officer for The De Curci Trust and a Fellow and member of the Advisory Panel of the Institute of School Business Leadership**

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# Should cash in schools be a thing of the past?

A carefully chosen cashless payments system can deliver huge benefits, but parents might not necessarily share your enthusiasm, says Caroline Collins...

**A** key part of the school business manager's role is to improve efficiencies, but this can sometimes, be more challenging than you might think. Handling cash from parents and pupils is one such area, with the result that many schools have moved away from accepting cash and cheque payments completely.

Imagine working in the school office and taking payments for every child's lunch, attendance at breakfast club, after-school club fees and each school trip they participate in. The time involved in receiving said money, counting, issuing receipts, recording transactions and subsequent banking could be more wisely spent on other tasks. The difficulty, however, may be encouraging parents that online payments are a much simpler way of doing things.

## MIS communication

As a school, the first thing to think

about is what kind of system you're looking for and who will manage it. There are now a number of companies out there that provide 'cashless payments' software, and your priority should be to ensure that the payments system can speak to your MIS. If it doesn't, you'll be saving less time than you would by trying to allocate payments manually.

The next thing to consider is what type of packages the provider offers. Most will provide an online payments facility, along with a host of other options, such as text messaging, menu planners, club bookings and school trip payments.

Once you've narrowed your choices down to those systems that will provide what you want and are compatible with your MIS, you'll want to know how easy the system is for parents to use and for the school to maintain. In the current technological climate you'll encounter many parents wanting to make payments via a mobile app, so be sure to include that

option on your wishlist. In terms of maintenance, you should try to secure a demo or speak to others that have used the relevant system to gauge the time commitment involved in its initial set up and subsequent upkeep. If it looks onerous, it probably will be.

## Cash, cheque or neither?

Having chosen your platform and organised the set up, you'll be ready to go. Now you need to decide if you're going to give parents a choice of online payments or cash/cheque, or whether you'll be stopping cash and cheque payments altogether. The prospect of no more cash in school is a very attractive one, but think carefully before banishing it as a payment method completely.

There will be some parents who simply won't want to move away from physical payments for a number of reasons, and your school needs to decide whether disenfranchising this group of parents would be counter-productive. If a parent is adamantly opposed to using online payments, will the school subsequently find that parent's dinner money to be continuously in arrears? If you can offer a combination of acceptable payment methods, you'll have a solution that suits most parents.

Once your new system is in place, make sure you use any marketing materials that the provider may be able to offer. It's also worth allocating some time to help parents get acquainted with your payments portal – since online payments are ultimately the way forward, and an investment that your school is sure to value over time.

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

 @caroline\_261





# CONTROL YOUR ENERGY SPEND

Many schools have been able to manage their own utilities payments for a while now – but are you truly in control of your highest cost behind wages?

**H**ave you ever waited until the last minute to renew your energy contract, only to find that you now have limited options available and little time to decide?

Let's step back and consider the options available to you well ahead of time, which could involve one of five different approaches. The first is that your Local Authority (LA) or a public buying organisation will have an agreement with a supplier through a framework that you can access. Alternatively, you could look to a trusted association such as the ASCL or ISBL and access the mini competition frameworks that they provide.

The third option is to secure the services of a consultant specialising in the education sector that has a compliant process you can obtain access to. Should you be below the OJEU threshold (see [ojeu.eu](http://ojeu.eu)) for compliance, you could potentially use one of the many commercial energy brokers that will likely be hassling your school, MAT or LA on a near daily basis. Or you could fall back on option five, begin contacting a series of energy suppliers and handle the energy procurement process yourself.

## HOW FREE ARE YOU?

The prospect of leaving your LA's existing energy agreement is one that remains clouded by myth – the notion that you can't is simply incorrect. However, you will need to carefully consider the timing around when to provide your notice of termination.

Surprising though it may sound, many less scrupulous LAs and providers attempt to make this process extremely difficult, and will try to tie you into notice

periods of up to 24 months. Make sure you thoroughly check the terms you're currently signed up to, lest you end up doing a whole load of work only to find out that you'll have no choice in the matter for a further five years!

When it comes to your search for an alternative contract, your first key consideration will be whether to go with a fixed or flexible contract. The process of deciding will involve having to address a whole series of different questions, but in its simplest form, I'd suggest seeing this choice as similar to a mortgage arrangement – fixed for a specific period, or variable in a way that will follow broader market trends. The important difference, of course, is that prices for energy are much more volatile than the Bank of England's base rate.

In terms of payment methods, there are ultimately only two options available for organisations wanting to operate with integrity. You can pay a fixed fee agreed in advance for the services provided, or else you can pay a 'per kWh' commission that's added to your unit rate and paid by the energy supplier. Either way, you ought to be happy that you're getting value for what you're paying.

## BE SUPER PRODUCTIVE

For busy school leaders and business managers, the most productive use of your time will likely involve enlisting experts who can do the administrative heavy lifting for you. Your job should be to understand the essentials of what you need to know, and what issues and

problems you should look out for.

All suppliers, brokers, consultants and PBOs will purchase energy off the same wholesale market. If the price offered by one of them therefore deviates by more than a few hundred pounds, there's likely to be something wrong with the offer itself, the calculations made, or indeed

## IN PRACTICE

Zenergi recently assisted a school that was under pressure from its LA to make a rapid decision regarding its electricity contract, with little prior notice and no indication of a contract price for the forthcoming period. Zenergi responded promptly, feeding into a governors' meeting with useful information.

It was ultimately decided that the best outcome would be for the school to exit its existing electricity contract with the LA. Zenergi's offering was some 6.5% cheaper than the school's previous arrangement, resulting in immediate savings, but also a number of 'hidden savings' in the form of assistance with managing the relevant contracts, invoice validation and detailed reports concerning the account as part of the company's Positive Energy Pack service.

**“Your first key consideration will be whether to go with a fixed or flexible contract”**

the size of the entity's commission fees. Any and all analysis must be based on the total cost, including all charges – not just the p/kWh rate.

A classic tactic that's often deployed here is for individuals to provide 'pass through' contracts. Under the terms of such contracts, notable charges will initially be left out, only to be passed on later. At the same time, the capacity or availability costs won't be included – or inconsistent if they are – and there can often be sizeable discrepancies on standing charges.

What you can rely on, however, are the pressing deadlines and pressure to act that you'll encounter throughout the process. While it's true that energy prices are pretty much only valid for one day at a time, this shouldn't affect a provider's recommendations to you, and it certainly shouldn't be used as an excuse for forcing you into a particular decision. Sure, the price they offer you today might technically be higher tomorrow, but by the same token, it may well be lower. In any case, the contract offer to you as a customer will still be available to buy – it certainly won't be the case that they can't offer you anything the following day.

Finally, watch out for the old trick of calculations made on the basis of different consumption rates. Make a point of noting all the rates that suppliers are offering you, and apply them to a single, consistent pattern of energy use. That way, your analysis will actually provide a true like-for-like gauge of what each supplier is willing and able to provide.



**Graham Cooke is  
CEO of the education  
utilities consultant  
Zenergi**

 @zenergi

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

## EXTRACT MAXIMUM VALUE

Don't fall for the 'car insurance' mentality of prioritising price above all else, getting it done at the last minute and failing to engage with the company you're partnering with – the latter will prevent you from seeing what else you might be able to get out of them.

Below are examples of some areas that will create genuine value, be it in terms of time and resources or returning funds to your budget:

- **BILL VALIDATION**  
Because it's surprising just how many bills from suppliers are incorrect
- **VISIBILITY OF COSTS**  
After all, how can you be expected to manage something that you have no control over?
- **CONTRACT AND SUPPLIER MANAGEMENT**  
Many reading this will doubtless understand how valuable it can be having someone deal with energy suppliers, so you don't have to.
- **COMPLIANCE**  
Since many schools don't even adhere to simple energy compliance, or else overpay for things like Display Energy Certificates, you need to make sure you don't fall foul of legislation
- **REFURBISHMENT PROJECTS**  
Try leaning on your energy partner and seeing what they can do to help you when, for instance, refitting LED lights or obtaining funding



# IS YOUR STAFF BUDGET AT BREAKING POINT?

If you're among those deeply concerned by the recent rises in schools' staffing costs, you're certainly not alone says Sue Birchall...

**F**or my sins, I've worked in education for a while now, and there have been many occasions during my career when I've experienced a sense of déjà vu. Stay in schools long enough, and you'll start to recognise how numerous 'new' decisions and policies merely shadow existing or previous approaches – the latest being the government's current funding models and decisions on spending. So what's brought on my déjà vu this time?

In the last two years there have been some significant increases in the staff-related costs borne by school budgets, mainly national salary changes and some sector-specific overheads. These cost increases apply nationally, and have had to be mostly absorbed by existing budgets, putting yet more pressure on schools' already overstretched funding. Other industries have had to bear the same rises, but schools are unique in that their ability to generate extra income through improved output is extremely limited.

## LACK OF CLARITY

The cost increases in question include employer National Insurance contribution rises, annual increases in the minimum wage and rises in 'the living wage', all of which are further exacerbated by inflationary pressures. Yes, these are costs that any industry can expect to incur, but given the narrow ways in which education settings can access additional funding opportunities, you can understand why they've caused particular concern among school leaders.

Some of the education-specific staffing costs have been covered by additional government funding, which has, of course, been gratefully received. The downside, however, is the fact that this funding isn't necessarily guaranteed. We've received assurances from government that financial assistance to cope with the cost increases will be forthcoming, but the fact that these funds won't be distributed via traditional

means – i.e. through LAs or the General Annual Grant – makes me nervous.

In the past, funding streams outside of LA and GAG allocations haven't been sustained. We can point to Pupil Premium as perhaps an exception to this, though again, we've never received a guarantee that Pupil Premium will continue indefinitely. I'd point to the ongoing lack of clarity surrounding the PE and Sport Premium and universal infant free school meals as reasons for my nervousness. The uncertainty over their longevity feels very familiar to me, going back as far as the Standards Fund of the late 2000s, when 'other' monies were allocated for specific purposes outside of the school's grant.

Chancellor Philip Hammond's policy of 'pay what you can afford' has left schools with a dilemma

## WHAT CHANGED LAST YEAR

In 2018 the government announced significant salary increases of 3%, 2% and 1.5% for three levels of teaching staff, and confirmed that these rises would be funded through the teachers' pay grant. The criteria on which this decision was made meant that schools were expected to fund the first 1% themselves, thus leaving some schools out of pocket. This particular grant is due to remain in place for at least this year, but it is small comfort. The decision as to where this funding will come from, moving forward, will apparently be made following the next full spending review, currently due to take place in 2020.

Chancellor Philip Hammond's policy of 'pay what you can afford' has left schools

with a dilemma, and given rise to an even greater disparity between schools and MATs on matters relating to teachers' pay. Factors such as the ability to increase earnings has meant that teacher recruitment and retention at some schools could suffer and become hard to address in the event of any existing financial restraints.

The government has recognised the steady build of concerns around teacher recruitment and retention, and in January this year published its teacher recruitment and retention strategy in order provide schools with some support ([tinyurl.com/dfe-rec-ret-strat](https://tinyurl.com/dfe-rec-ret-strat)). In my view, however, it has to also recognise the full impact of its own pay decisions, and start seeing them as more than just a means of making the profession more financially attractive. The financial impact they have on the schools and academies where those teachers teach is very real, and must be taken into account.

## WHAT'S NEW THIS YEAR

As of September 2019, employers' contributions to the Teacher Pension Scheme will increase to 23.68% – a rise of 40% compared to what they were previously. The government has stated that this will be fully supported by a



separate fund paid to schools during the 2019/20 funding round, There will also be a process whereby schools can submit bids for funding from a further pot if their pension costs exceed 0.05% of their budget. Yet the question remains – for how long will this financial support continue?

In April this year we saw the living wage revised to £8.21, prompting a review of the LA support staff pay model that's largely based upon national Joint Negotiating Committee scales. The effect of this has been to increase the cost of support staff pay at many schools quite significantly – indeed, since 2017 the lower end of these scales have gone up by over 15%. There have notably been no announcements of additional funding to help with this, and it has affected schools across the board. I had one school report to me that 22% of their staff were now more than 10% more expensive to employ, all within the space of a single year.

In addition to all of that, the Local Government Pension Scheme is soon due to undergo its three-yearly cycle of actuarial valuation, which may well highlight the need for further employer and employee contributions. If it does, that will add yet more strain to our budgets that's unlikely to be eased by any centrally-provided support.

## APPLY STICKING PLASTERS!

As a member of the schools funding forum for my county, I'm keenly aware of the different elements that form the backbone of school funding. The formulae that are drawn up and put in place to calculate the schools block and other areas of LA spending are mind-boggling.

Academies are affected by this too. They might receive their funding direct from the Education Funding Agency, but the situation they face is similar. Making up for shortfalls by placing additional funding in grants that sit outside established funding structures does little for transparency. Nor does it provide

much reassurance that the support can be relied upon in the long term.

Moving forward, my fear is that these additional costs will be the straw that breaks the camel's back, prompting the government to adopt a 'sticking plaster' approach to managing the problem. If the government's strategy for recruiting and retaining teachers recognises that pay and conditions need to be improved, then school and academy budgets have to be increased in order to reflect this. A recognition of the fact that schools and academies aren't able to operate without support staff of all levels should result in additional support costs being funded too.

At a time when general expectations are that the 'books will balance', these necessary rises in expenditure have to be matched and properly funded. Failure to do so simply isn't an option.



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





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## A PROBLEM OF PERSPECTIVE

Issues can be resolved more effectively if leaders and colleagues prioritise understanding over being understood, says Richard Bruford

School leaders spend a considerable amount of their time in problem solving mode. There are those problems that leaders can create themselves – perhaps through their own actions, or due to change initiatives they’re overseeing or requiring of others. Then there are those problems that emerge from factors beyond school leaders’ control. It can be a minefield.

One of the biggest challenges leaders face is when a problem is pushed in the their direction because no-one else feels – rightly or wrongly – that it’s theirs to solve. The notion of ‘somebody else’s problem’ is something we’ll all have encountered at some stage.

In some cases, the leader will be left on their own to solve the problem, which might explain why school leaders can find the role to be an isolating experience. When leaders are simply left to resolve problems they’re given by themselves, it’s possible that the solution they come up won’t satisfy those who aren’t willing to lend help and support. In such cases, school leaders will need to develop resilience and other strategies to deal with the criticisms which may follow.

One trait that leaders need to develop is that of being approachable, so that critics feel able to engage in respectful dialogue in order to better understand the actions that have been taken, but this is no easy task.

It firstly requires leaders to be open to feedback. Many leaders might say they have an ‘open door’ policy, but the true test of this is how comfortable





colleagues feel when entering said door. This may be a reflection on the leader themselves, or possibly reflective of their colleagues' prior experiences of working with other leaders in the past. It's crucial that your colleagues feel safe in expressing opinions without fear of retribution – but then there can be some willing to give leaders blunt, often cutting feedback, without reservation.

## EMPATHETIC LEADERSHIP

Be aware that many of your critics will first seek to be understood, before seeking to understand. They will often not be able to perceive the bigger picture, and in some cases, may not even *wish* to see it. In my view, this has worsened over time with the rise of social media and the instant gratification that comes with being able to air personal views quickly. Compounding that are increasing expectations throughout wider society that problems can be remedied with immediate fixes.

Empathetic leadership is required here – the ability to take a deep breath, take a step back and bite our tongues, while trying to understand why our critics are acting in the way they are. This is hardest of all when we know the behaviour of some critics is downright wrong.

Nevertheless, we must strive to create environments that encourage respectful and civil approaches to dealing with problems. To get there, we need workplace cultures where the norm is that we first seek to understand each other, then seek to be understood.

Before we tell someone how their actions have made us feel, let's first ask them why they took those actions in the first place, as doing so will open the door to a more productive discussion. As leaders, we'll sometimes enter meetings where we know a colleague is going to express some frank opinions. On these occasions, we might want to lay some groundwork that will prompt them to want to understand, in a way that opens respectful dialogue. Because always seeking to be understood may well close those doors through which we can receive valuable feedback.

*Richard Bruford is a head of school, public speaker, and consultant based in Suzhou, China*

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## 5 STEPS TO BETTER WELLBEING

It's in every leader's power to improve the emotional wellbeing of their staff and pupils, says Katie Hill



**T**he rising mental health crisis in England's pupil population has led to calls for all teachers to be trained in identifying warning signs. In the school I recently left, having worked there for eight years, there were at least a hundred new cases just within one year. I'm sure many readers can top that number. But how can schools hope to make pupil wellbeing a priority? Doing so needn't involve drastically changing your school structure – it can be about taking small steps that have huge impacts.

### 1. Believe in innate 'okayness'

Adopt a school ethos which acknowledges that every individual is ultimately okay beneath the fear and negativity that might be affecting them. Whenever you can, drive home the message that everyone is capable of showing greater compassion and equanimity for each other – in assemblies, INSETs, open day speeches – and watch the ripples spread.

### 2. Acknowledge change

It can sometimes feel as if the teaching profession is defined by change. If, however, senior leaders take the approach of acknowledging incoming changes, rather than exaggerating or downplaying them, open and honest conversations can be had which will help leaders be more responsive in how they support affected staff. Acknowledge that everyone deals with change differently, and that we can handle it better as a community.

### 3. Thoughts and emotions are dynamic

Our thoughts, feelings and emotions are subject to change too. It's easy to fixate on mental health labels that we and others can define ourselves by, yet as humans, we're changing all the time. That's not to say we should dismiss

mental health symptoms, but rather remember that thoughts and emotions are temporary. We can build this into how we teach by acknowledging changes in thought that have occurred during a lesson, and reflecting on how our own thinking undergoes constant change. It's okay to change your mind – we do it all the time.

### 4. Change the rhetoric

In schools, where so much learning relies on verbal communication, language is powerful. And one of the most powerful rhetorical tools out there is the phrase 'made me'. Too often, we'll link external events to our own emotions – blaming colleagues when we feel angry, or the 'the system' when we're frustrated. But what if those feelings are caused by our thoughts about said circumstances? If we can remove the thought that something's 'made us' feel a certain way, we can accept that it's only our thoughts that create feelings and emotions. Thoughts and emotions that are constantly subject to change.

### 5. Weave in time for stillness

Entrepreneurs will often say that success happens when it's allowed to. We can learn a great deal from ourselves, if we just take the time to listen. By introducing 'minutes of stillness' at the start or end of the day – brief, mindful moments consisting of breathing, stretching or simply embracing quietness – we can acknowledge the coming and going of our thoughts.

**Katie Hill is the founder of Mindful Magic – a provider of mindfulness-inspired sessions and tools for children, parents and teachers**

 [mindfulmagic.info](http://mindfulmagic.info)

# How visible are you?

Scheduling in time to engage with the broader goings-on in your school isn't always easy, but it's well worth doing says Jill Berry...

I often ask aspiring leaders to consider what successful leadership looks like: *"Think of the best leader you've ever worked with. Suggest three reasons why their face or name is the one in your head right now."* This leads to a discussion of the group's corporate understanding of what the most effective leaders do, and what they are. It connects to the kind of leader they one day aspire to be.

Words such as 'visible', 'approachable' and 'accessible' always feature. In my experience, those we lead connect those characteristics with leaders who are aware; who know well, understand and value those within their teams. Aspiring heads invariably reassure me of their commitment to becoming a visible school leader.

While I agree with the importance of visibility, I'd suggest that this can be more problematic than we realise. As a head – particularly a new head – you'll perhaps be busier than you've ever been before. With all those appointments, meetings, emails and phone calls, it's easier to become trapped in your office than you might think. Getting out and about as much as you wish to can be difficult, and you need strategies to ensure it happens.

## Teaching

I'd venture that teaching is important for heads; for your understanding and credibility, to help build relationships and to reinforce the central importance of what our schools are all about. You shouldn't, however, teach simply because you enjoy it and would miss it. This is self-indulgent. You're an expensive teacher, and there may be far more talented teachers on your staff!

If classes you teach suffer because you're frequently out of school, that's unacceptable. You certainly shouldn't teach because the classroom is an escape from some of the challenges of headship. But teaching will ensure you're visible, and give you opportunities to establish positive relationships with individual pupils.

## Cover and duties

Another way of getting into classrooms is by providing cover for absent colleagues. This will let you learn more about the school, get to know pupils and support your staff.

Doing a regular duty around the school will also get you out and about, giving you the chance to chat informally to pupils, support and teaching staff and other visitors. Choose a duty where the head's presence is powerful. Many heads

will ensure they're out and about at the start and end of every school day – if you can, plan this into your diary.

## Extracurricular activities

Supporting and involving yourself in activities builds your knowledge of the wider life of the school, bringing you into contact with more pupils, staff and parents. It shows your interest in, and appreciation of, all members of the school community and what they contribute beyond the classroom.

## Lunch and walkabouts

Having lunch in the school dining hall each day, sitting with different groups and talking about things often not school-related is a good way of getting to know individuals as people, not just as colleagues or learners.

Visiting lessons, calling in at different events and being present in the school is time well spent, but you need to work with whoever is managing your diary to ensure this time is scheduled in (and sacrosanct!) Otherwise, even with the best of intentions, it may not happen.

Being a visible head can be a challenge. But it's worth it!

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





# SHOW ME THE ROPES

Anthony David offers some words of advice for newly appointed headteachers confronting the challenges of the role for the first time...

**O**kay, here's the frame of reference – I run two schools, both judged as Outstanding. I set up a new school from scratch that was quickly regarded as the 'go to' school in the local area. I've mentored new heads, trained heads, identified and grown heads. Successful? You betcha.

So what stops a head's head from inflating? Just remembering those first few months....

## EXHILARATING AND CRUSHING

I have a memory that I can't shake. I'd been a head for four months at a lovely but tired school that needed a shake-up. I'm sure you can visualise it – some things had been left to fester, and I was the clean-up person. Trouble was, I'd only been in the job for five minutes, barely knew where the Pritt Sticks were kept and certainly wasn't prepared for the expectations placed on my shoulders.

One day had been particularly hard, involving a whole catalogue of events which, in most cases, you wouldn't expect to take place over a whole year. It didn't help that it was the end of term and I was tired. I've certainly not experienced a day like it since.

I remember driving home when a colleague from the diocese rang and asked me how I was doing. It was a simple question, but I pulled over and literally started sobbing. It was also my son's birthday. *Happy birthday, son. Your dad feels like he's having a breakdown.*

You can't underestimate the pressure you'll experience in your first year as a new head. If you can remember how exhausted you were when you finished your first year of teaching – most likely very – magnify that by a significant degree, and there's your mental state following the initial year of being a

headteacher. It's both exhilarating and crushing all at once, but if you ride the year carefully you'll learn lessons about yourself and your own style that will shape your leadership for the rest of your career. Put simply, how can you be shown the ropes without landing on them?

## ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Headship, like all areas of education recruitment, is experiencing a downturn. If you want to secure a headship, then at least right now you can certainly find one. That said, it's in your interest to acquire as much experience as possible before you start applying, since you may well find yourself being appointed to a new headship role faster than you think!

By 'experience', I mean leading whole school strategies, working closely with your current head and identifying those areas where you lack experience. If the latter includes financial matters, then make a point of working with your head on setting the school budget. If the head in question is experienced in doing this themselves, ask if you can try setting the budget yourself, subject to their approval. This will help you to consider what's core to your leadership style.

I'm a person-led leader myself, always looking to secure equity for all across my community – staff as well as pupils. It's driven my leadership style for many

years, and the upshot has been Pupil Premium and EAL pupils at my schools significantly outperforming national and local stats, and colleagues being given genuine opportunities to grow.

Did I arrive into headship like this? No. It's an approach that I've carved out and



honed over a number of years, but the essence of it was always there. I was able to germinate it by working closely with generous heads who allowed me to lead and make mistakes.

## PAUSE, THEN FAST FORWARD

Consider carefully where you're going to apply. For me, there were two LAs I'd researched that I felt would support me the most. Consider also who you're going to work for. Will it be the LA, a MAT, a federation or a diocese? I've previously worked for all four, and while all have their benefits, there's something to be said for the additional support heads receive at church schools. Dioceses typically have

dedicated education teams, which have largely not been as affected by recent funding cuts as LAs. By default, church schools are pastorally motivated, which extends to supporting their heads. In my experience, the added support I've received at church schools has been very welcome.

When it comes to selecting the school you wish to apply for, don't be afraid to discuss mentoring and support either during your research or at the interview stage. You need to be secure in the knowledge that the governing body will take your wellbeing as seriously as they do other members of staff. After all, you're the most expensive member of staff on the team, and if you're a good head, that will resonate across the community. Nothing crushes a school faster than the suggestion that the head simply 'isn't very good'.

The likelihood is that you'll be partnered with a mentor. I remember my own mentor well – Tim was an experienced head, well respected, and taught me a key

skill; *think deeply, then act swiftly*. It's all too easy to either not act at all, or to act too swiftly. Hit the pause button and give yourself a bit of thinking space, then press fast forward. Tim still remains the type of head I aspire to become, even now after many years in the job.

The key requirement for mentors is to be a sounding board, since you'll be hit with a catalogue of events that you're not prepared for. The most vulnerable time for any school is when a new head starts. People take it as an opportunity to leave, renegotiate their contracts or conveniently 'forget' good practice. Use your mentor as a guide, since they'll have likely had similar experiences themselves.

*"Nothing crushes a school faster than the suggestion that the head simply 'isn't very good'"*

## START DANCING

Don't for a moment think that your first year will simply be a case of 'jogging along'. Too many heads have had to manage inspections, contend with mass resignations, respond to drops in standards and oversee restructurings. Be prepared to inherit a bit of a mess; if it's anything less than that, then you're doing well. In my first year I was inspected twice, supported a family through an infant death, restructured the staff, took staff through accountability procedures, inherited a court case and, finally, was asked to bid for a new school – at a time when I barely knew how to manage one, let alone two. Adrenaline will be your new friend.

As a head, you'll quickly find that learning slowly isn't an option. Yet if there's one final piece of advice I can give about how heads should learn the ropes, it's that you'll make mistakes and that this is important. If you're driving a school forward, don't expect everything that you hope to deliver to succeed immediately. But some of it will. Maybe the shadow of a good idea will evolve into something hugely successful.

Arguably, the most important thing for the school is how quickly you can pick yourself up from the ropes, dust yourself down, learn from the last punch and start dancing in the ring once more.



**Anthony David is an experienced headteacher, executive headteacher and educational writer and speaker**





# DO YOU POSSESS A LEADERSHIP MINDSET?

With budgets shrinking and staffing issues becoming ever more complex, Joe Britto asks if it's time for school leaders to take a leaf out of the corporate playbook...

In my professional role as a psychological coach and management consultant, I work with leaders of multinational companies to grow the leadership mindset that will help them find solutions to the challenges their businesses face.

One of the consistent messages I send is the need to embody the six attributes of a leadership mindset: **genuine curiosity, enterprise thinking, flexibility of mind, mindfulness, resilience, and creating leaders**. When a leader of a business embodies those attributes, they do more than shift their mindset. Once they shift the way they think, they see their challenges differently. That means seeing the nuts and bolts of what seems like an intractable challenge in a new light, and that new solutions are now possible.

This doesn't just apply to leaders in business. With worsening teacher-pupil ratios and rapidly changing school environments, operationalising the six aforementioned attributes provides us with our own personal North Star for meaningful change. Let's therefore look at what operationalising three of those attributes – genuine curiosity, enterprise thinking and flexibility of mind – might look like.

## GENUINE CURIOSITY

Genuine curiosity is a learning mindset. It asks why – not simply to answer a question, but to push the boundaries of our thinking. The questions asked can be profound in their simplicity. Where is the subtle flexibility within the National Curriculum to cater to the needs of the pupils we see every day? Why do we

teach a subject the way we do? Is there another way to balance workload across a school's staff?

Asking *why* matters, but asking *why* is tough when we're looking at processes so well-established that it's easy to forget that they weren't given to us chiselled into stone tablets. Of course, we can choose not to look at our way of working with genuine curiosity. If that feels like the safest option, we're forgetting that we don't have to do anything with the answers genuine curiosity throws up. In that sense, looking at how we work with genuine curiosity is a risk-free experiment that will be successful, whatever answers surface, because the goal isn't to solve a problem – it's to ask the questions.

If we choose to ask *why*, the emerging answers can take us in the direction of finding revolutionary solutions to seemingly impossible challenges. It works that way because the answers we throw up lead us to a different train of thought where we begin to see not just one idea, but several. That happens when we realise there's always more than one valid solution to every challenge. Not all of them will be desirable, not all will be attainable, but all of them will have elements that shine.

In our goal of operationalising the six attributes, seeing multiple valid ideas is our clue that genuine curiosity has done its job and that we're ready to develop a revolutionary idea. What makes an idea revolutionary? When it's an idea that excites and scares us in equal measure.

## ENTERPRISE THINKING

Because we're working with a leadership mindset here, as we develop that

revolutionary idea we do so with an eye on the whole enterprise. When we're in the playground of enterprise thinking, it's worth remembering that we always work in the best interests of whatever we consider the enterprise to be, which is as true for educators in a school as it is for the staff of a global company.

If I see the enterprise as me, I'll work in my own best interests. If I see the enterprise as my faculty, then I'll work hard for that, defending it tooth and nail from any threats, real or imagined. If I see the enterprise as the whole school, then guess in whose interests I'll be working?

When we live the six attributes of a leadership mindset, the enterprise isn't us, or even our students. When we live the six attributes we work in the best interests of everyone – ourselves, yes, but also our students, colleagues, school, and future educators. That's what will excite you about a great idea; the ability to see the positive changes ahead when your idea works.

Why does it scare you? Because you know you've broken the wheel of *'We do it this way because we've always done it this way'*. Doing something different isn't just a breath of fresh air, but a challenge to the way we think. Changing that means changes to the way we behave.

Put like that, perhaps it's easy to see where the nervousness might come from. We're choosing to stand out, we're choosing to shine a light on a challenge and we're choosing to lead. If that doesn't give us pause for thought on whether we want to carry on, what will?

Feeling nervous when developing a revolutionary idea is baked into the concept. It can only be a revolutionary idea if it makes us nervous and excited.

## FLEXIBILITY OF MIND

Now that we know what a revolutionary idea is, let's think about how we get one. Genuine curiosity has already given us some answers to our 'why' question. Flexibility of mind will help us take those answers and see the validity of several ideas. What I mean by this is that no idea is *all right or all wrong* – all ideas have some merit.

Working on developing an ultra-strong adhesive, but can only come up with a weak, pressure-sensitive one? Great – let's put a strip of it at the top of a small piece of paper and *voila*. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Post-it notes.

That's what flexibility of mind does. It finds the grain of gold in many valid ideas and

creatively combines them to develop a revolutionary one. And because we're thinking of the enterprise as inclusively as we can, it's one that serves the needs of everyone.

Having a revolutionary idea means more than simply seeing things differently, however, and operationalising all six attributes involves more than effecting a shift in thinking. It's what we do with our new-found perspective that matters, which is why the final step is to put our revolutionary idea into motion.

A leadership mindset is a contagion. As we embody the six attributes, we shift how we work and what we think is possible. And as it ripples out, it touches and grows the mindset of others.

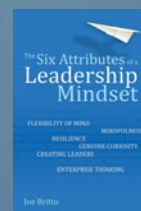
## IMPORTANT MINDSET CONSIDERATIONS

- Mindsets are developed through the experiences we've lived; shifting mindsets is about being willing to expose ourselves to new experiences
- Allow doubt into your thinking. That may sound unnecessary, or even scary, but think about it like this – if we're certain in our thinking and ways of doing things, how much room are we leaving to flex our thinking?
- Simple questions are often the most profound, because they prompt us to interrogate the foundation of our thinking.
- The focus of the six attributes is ourselves. It's natural, and understandable, to wish that others were more flexible or more curious; the measure of our own flexibility is our willingness to adapt what we're doing to bring others on board



Joe Britto is a psychological coach, management consultant, and the

author of *The Six Attributes of a Leadership Mindset*; find out more about the six attributes at [sixattributes.com](http://sixattributes.com)



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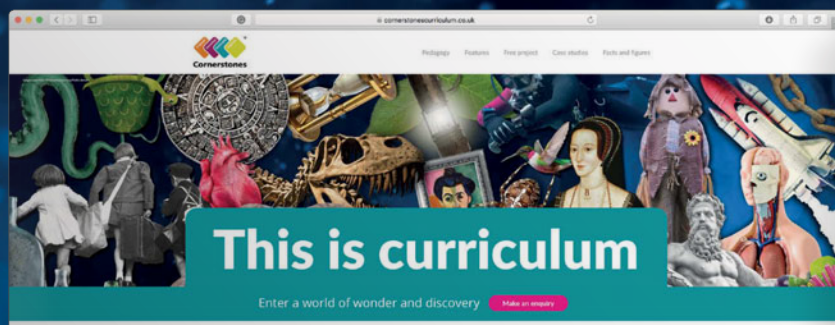


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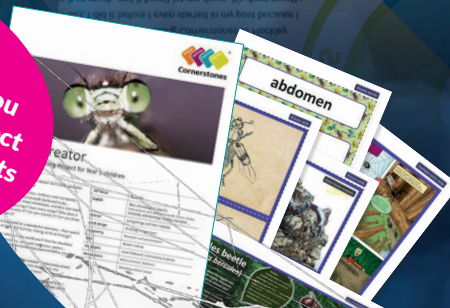
# This is curriculum

A rich curriculum with tailor-made resources for children aged 3–11.

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Getting started with the Cornerstones Curriculum is quick and easy. Book an online or face-to-face training session with one of their friendly and knowledgeable teacher consultants. Their excellent customer services team will be on hand to register your staff, meaning curriculum materials can be accessed straight away.

## WHAT SENIOR LEADERS AND TEACHERS SAY

With over 70 headteachers purchasing the Cornerstones Curriculum again after moving schools, Cornerstones pride themselves on excellent customer satisfaction. Feedback says that schools enjoy an overwhelmingly positive experience of the Cornerstones Curriculum. Ofsted success, pupil engagement and saving teachers' time are the most valued aspects of the curriculum.

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Cornerstones understand your financial constraints. That's why they offer bespoke purchasing for schools, no matter what their size. Cornerstones offer great discounts for small schools and multiple purchases, with split payments available for those schools wanting to spread the cost.

# Save on teacher time and resources



## *The Cornerstones Curriculum – a pre-planned, coherent curriculum for children aged 3 to 11*

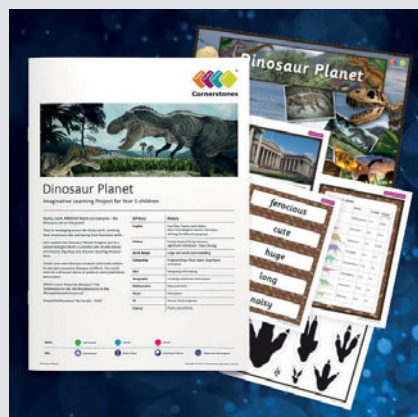
Established in 2010 by Melanie Moore and Simon Hickton, two former primary senior leaders, the Cornerstones Curriculum and teaching resources are used by over 2300 schools in the UK alone.

Cornerstones' online curriculum gives you access to a choice of over 80 learning projects that you can use to design and shape your curriculum. Each learning project delivers a series of well-planned lessons that save teachers' time and provide a coherent approach to curriculum planning. The curriculum helps you to deliver the skills and knowledge that children need as part of the national curriculum and is supported by thousands of high-quality, tailored teaching resources.

When subscribing to the Cornerstones Curriculum, you also gain access to free curriculum updates and schemes of work that support other significant aspects of learning, including Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development and Fundamental British Values.

Included with any curriculum purchase is an online assessment package that includes time-saving functions such as a parental reporting tool and an online tracker. Cornerstones also offers several other fully resourced curriculum schemes that save teachers' time and support their expertise. These include Love to Celebrate for RE and Love to Investigate for science. Comprehension and the teaching of literature are also supported by the Love to Read scheme, which is available in hard copy. Along with a full suite of tests for Maths and English, Cornerstones offers schools a one-stop shop for all things curriculum and assessment. With online support and help from the expert curriculum staff, the Cornerstones Curriculum has everything you need to raise standards and engage your children in a rich and motivating curriculum.

**Find out more by contacting  
03333 20 8000 or visiting  
[cornerstonescurriculum.co.uk](http://cornerstonescurriculum.co.uk)**





# Bedrock Vocabulary

A literacy improvement strategy that builds vocabulary knowledge, understanding and confidence

- An extensive online vocabulary curriculum that explicitly teaches aspirational, academic words
- Ready-made vocabulary curriculum
- Over 200 reading comprehension questions every year
- Multiple choice tests with automatic marking
- Badges and certificates to reward progress

Reviewed by: John Dabell

According to research, four out of 10 pupils in their first year of secondary school have such a limited vocabulary that it affects their learning. The word gap is more accurately a chasm, especially when you consider that as students progress through school they need to be adding at least 3,000 new words to their vocabulary per year.

One resource that can help is Bedrock Vocabulary – a superb online programme which teaches academic vocabulary explicitly, whilst ensuring consistent reading of aspirational texts. It focuses on powerful Tier 2 words, i.e. robust, academic vocabulary that students are likely to encounter across all subjects and content areas. Expertly written texts are included, with which teachers can engage pupils across a wide range of topics, such as the history of rap, Alan Turing, the Berlin Wall and classic myths and tales like King Midas and The Golden Touch.

What makes Bedrock so useful is the way it contextualises advanced vocabulary and embeds new words in rich and meaningful exercises and texts, thus allowing students to discover the words themselves through a variety of literacy activities and both fiction and non-fiction texts. The texts in question are read to students using clear and authentic voices, which are far better than the robotic tones often used elsewhere.



Bedrock is a truly robust vocabulary system because it explains the meanings of sophisticated words through multiple contexts, and reinforces those meanings through thought-provoking, playful, and interactive learning moments. These deliberately test, probe, push and move literacy forward, with no shortcuts, so students can be assured of plenty of challenge.

There are three to five words in each 20-minute lesson (e.g. 'epitomise', 'sage' and 'voracious'), five or more lessons in each topic, and 13 topics in a block, with each block taking one academic year. In the lessons students read about words, think with images, explore antonyms and synonyms, use their imaginations, play with sentences and quiz themselves. It's full-on learning, and I especially like the smartphone text messaging feature. Naturally, the system analyses results and provides feedback on each student, enabling you to track their progress.

Shortlisted as a finalist for the Bett Awards 2019, Bedrock is a slick and stylish system that will open many literacy doors.



## VERDICT

- ✓ Research-driven and based on best practice (e.g. spaced learning)
- ✓ Exposes students to challenging vocabulary with plenty of reinforcement
- ✓ Encourages students to think more about what words mean
- ✓ A consistent, relevant and well-designed vocabulary curriculum
- ✓ Greatly improves students' ability to comprehend written text

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking to harness the transformational power of literacy to help students move past the lexical bar, improve their attainment, increase their cultural capital and help everyone become confident wordsmiths.

To learn more, visit  
[bedrocklearning.org](https://bedrocklearning.org) or follow  
 @BedrOckLearning

# ParentMail



A parental engagement system used by over 6,000 schools and 3 million parents

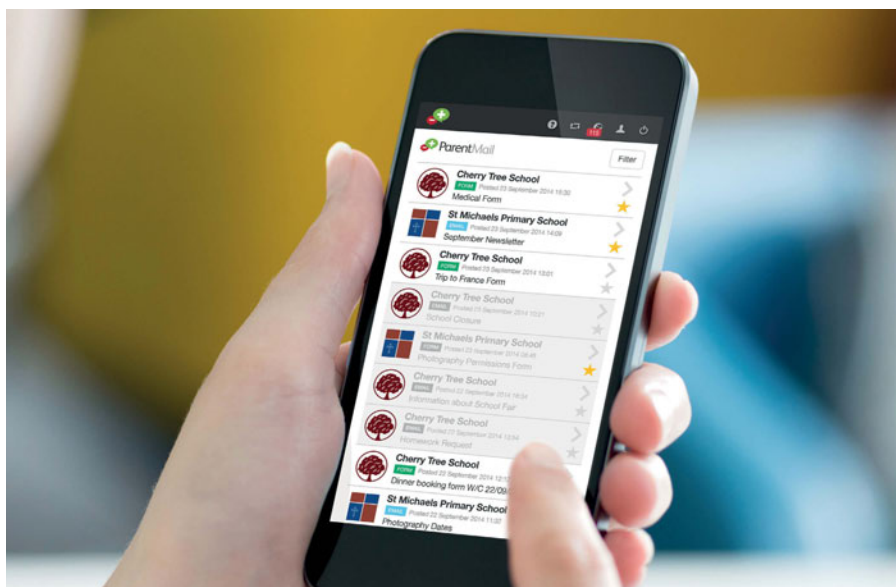
- Helps share information, manage events, manage online payments, record absences and more
- Generates customisable data reports to support student learning
- Streamlines processes, protects sensitive data and delivers cost savings
- Support available from a comprehensive help site with live chats and guided tours

Reviewed by: John Dabell

Schools need to keep parents on side if they're to help children achieve, yet some schools can make life harder for themselves by using cumbersome and outdated parental engagement systems. Engagement can be far easier to manage via a suitable technology solution that's able to keep parents in the loop, flexibly meet their needs and make your communications flow more efficiently.

ParentMail is an expert in this area, having seen its parental engagement platform improve parent-teacher relationships and boost parental involvement across thousands of schools.

The recently overhauled main portal through which users access the ParentMail service is laid out simply and logically, while providing a host of different ways in which to keep parents engaged with what's going on in school. ParentMail is built around a suite of five core application modules - '+Pay', 'Communications', 'Online Forms', 'Parents' Evening' and 'Meetings and Events', each of which can be accessed via desktops and mobile devices. The Communications module is particularly impressive, allowing you to send attachments of up to 10MB direct to parents' phones via a school-branded ParentMail app. With Online Forms, parents can also easily complete trip consent forms, fill out surveys, grant pupil permissions and access the



school's dinner menus.

Meetings and Events serves as a digital diary, helping keep parents abreast of open days, sports events and other key dates. Parents' Evening appointments can meanwhile be made from home with a single tap, thus freeing teachers from a potentially time consuming administrative burden. One of ParentMail's more dynamic features is the +Pay module for processing cashless payments. Parents can use it to top up their child's dinner money and pay for sports clubs, school trips, revision guides and indeed anything else, with a choice of ways to pay, including PayPal.

For useful information on how well your parents are taking to ParentMail you can turn to the main dashboard, which gives you details on its uptake and how many are using ParentMail regularly, as well as suggestions for boosting registrations.

Taken as whole, ParentMail comes across as reliable and incredibly efficient. It enables a series of handshakes and smiles to be shared between a school and its parents, making for happier and more productive relationships between the two. With a system this intuitive in place, there's no excuse for parents to be left in the dark about developments at their child's school.



## VERDICT

- ✓ User-friendly and convenient
- ✓ Removes barriers to parental engagement
- ✓ Can deliver huge improvements to your organisation and logistics
- ✓ Makes administering parental interactions faster and cheaper, while reducing staff workload
- ✓ Keeps everyone in the loop and up to date – especially helpful for reminders and any last-minute changes

## UPGRADE IF...

You're looking to dynamically engage with parents to help children achieve more, build positive relationships and offer cost-effective interactions with the school via one flexible platform. Each module is priced separately, starting from £219 per year.

To learn more, visit [parentmail.co.uk](http://parentmail.co.uk) or follow @parentmail



# TOP OF THE CLASS

Support your pupils with this selection of resources, equipment and services



## 1 FALSE POSITIVES

Disruptions to vital teaching, interference with crucial tests, unnecessary evacuations – false fire alarms can present huge issues within the education sector. Following a recent revision to British Standard '5839-1:2017 Fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings', the British Standards Institute now recommends in section 20.2b that: "All manual call points should be fitted with a protective cover, which is moved to gain access to the frangible elements."

Safety Technology International supplies a range of protective covers, ranging from integral covers to sounder models, in variations to suit all applications. These covers are specifically designed to prevent false alarms, be they accidental or malicious.

[sti-emea.com](http://sti-emea.com)



## 2 WORLD-CHANGING SMILES

Smile Train is an international children's charity that empowers local medical professionals with the training, funding, and resources needed to provide free cleft surgery and comprehensive cleft care to children globally. We advance a sustainable solution and scalable global health model for cleft treatment that drastically improves children's lives and their abilities to eat, breathe, speak, and ultimately thrive. Since 1999, Smile Train has transformed the lives of more than a million children by giving them the power of a smile – but there are still many children with clefts in need of treatment.

[smiletrain.org.uk/students](http://smiletrain.org.uk/students)



## 3 SMART SURFACING

PlaySmart UK develops and installs a wide range of playground flooring. Over the past 14 years we've gone from being an installer of grass mats to a well-established industry leader in playground flooring. We specialise in traditional surfaces, from grass mats to rubber mulch, as well as more unique products we've developed to overcome safety concerns. Our impressive client base features many of the largest play companies and councils from all over the UK, as well as others outside of the play industry looking to make use of our surfacing knowledge.

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

## TAKE BACK CONTROL

eTeach is a complete suite of software and advertising tools which empowers schools to take back control of their workforce planning and recruitment budget for good. Using the annual advertising licence, eTeach Premium, schools can slash their agency spend, take control of their talent pools (including supply), market their school as an employer of choice, proactively build a talent pipeline year-round, master their community communications, achieve GDPR-compliant recruitment and become a school that's simply easy to apply to. Contact [info@eteach.com](mailto:info@eteach.com) for more details. [eteach.com/recruit](http://eteach.com/recruit)



## 5 BE INSPIRED

The National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Laxton, Nottinghamshire exists to share unique stories from survivors of the Holocaust, and to educate and protect future generations. The Centre's 'Journey' exhibition is suitable for primary aged children and the only one of its kind in Europe, telling the story of 10-year-old Leo – a German Jewish boy growing up in Nazi-governed Berlin during the 1930s, before following his journey to the UK as a child refugee aboard the Kindertransport. The centre also regularly hosts talks by inspirational Holocaust survivors, and is set within an acre of beautifully landscaped countryside that features a series of sculptures crafted by renowned artists.

[holocaust.org.uk](http://holocaust.org.uk)



EDUQ&amp;A

# Should we be teaching maths differently?

Rebecca Klemm, PhD, founder of NumbersAlive!, outlines her approach to numeracy



## What is your teaching background?

I have taught numerical, mathematical and critical thinking for over 40 years to learners of all ages, from pre-school to graduate school. The common thread of my teaching has been mentoring through life relevance and storytelling. I focus on the question being investigated, and then lead learners through the design-thinking process – providing the skills and tools needed to address the question as originally perceived, and adjusted once initial efforts suggest possible alternatives.

## What principles underlie the NumbersAlive! approach?

NumbersAlive! is sensitive to the often 'hidden' questions of "When will I ever use this stuff?" or "Why do I have to do this?" Leading with realistic applications implicitly addresses such questions, so they're rarely asked. Practice is important to skill develop in most disciplines, but maths is often taught with a focus on the 'doing' without considering the end goal. My mother taught piano by asking her students to

select a piece they wanted to be able to play – the selected piece would then be brought out regularly to reinforce that goal. Practising scales was never the end goal, but rather a necessary step toward playing the piece. I adopted the same approach to teaching.

I was always intrigued by a *New Yorker* cartoon that showed numbers sitting on a stage above the caption, 'We'll now let the numbers speak for themselves.' I was struck by the frequency of that statement and the visualisation hit me like a cold shower. With an interest in theatre, I wrote a musical where the numbers were the characters, telling their own stories and demonstrating their role in human endeavours. The name NumbersAlive! seemed perfect, as it suggests maths is a living, useful subject rather than a mysterious, abstract discipline involving seemingly infinite doses of worksheets.

## What sets it apart from other maths resources?

I simplify sophisticated maths through observation, discovery, and creation. I ask students to

invent maths which responds to the basic question of why maths exists. The same could be asked about any language. Whatever their origin, languages become more complicated and confusing over time due to human migration and invention. We teach young children to count from 1 to 10 or higher, as if 10 is a new character rather than a multi-digit number 'word.' We then wonder why students don't understand our current place-value system.

I created small and soft magnetic numbers so that small hands could construct maths in a fun and friendly way and realise that rearranging the same numbers creates different 'number words' of varying value (i.e. 23 versus 32). NumbersAlive! also uses a lot of geometry, because arithmetic and multidimensional geometry should be able to talk together, rather than be treated separately as if they're distinct disciplines.

## What materials do schools receive by signing up to a NumbersAlive subscription?

Our subscription series is still in development, but will include curriculum-linked actual life activities. We recently launched a free video learning series called *The Numbers Show*, starring Zero and the Digits, which includes 8- to 12-minute videos alongside extensive cross-disciplinary learning guides, scavenger hunt questions that users can use in their own games, and episode-specific activities. The subscription series will take the ideas introduced in the videos and move them to more formal lessons that will help teachers and parents lead learners through practical applications in disciplines they may not understand.

To find out more, email [info@numbersalive.org](mailto:info@numbersalive.org), visit [numbersalive.org](http://numbersalive.org) or follow @numbersalive



# THERE MUST BE NO OUTSIDERS

All pupils should have access to adults who create tolerant, safe environments in which children can thrive and grow, says Debra Kidd

In 2008 I found myself sitting in the headteacher's office in my middle son's school (graded Outstanding by Ofsted), discussing the fact that my Y5 child was regularly being called 'gay boy' by other children in class and in the playground. It was making him feel like he didn't want to go to school any more.

"It's just playground talk," the head said. "It's not malicious ... he doesn't join in with the football games and he spends all his time with the girls. Perhaps if he tried to be more sporty, things would be better for him. It's going to get worse at secondary school if he doesn't."

I was less assertive then than I am now. I went home in a fog of despair, with no idea what to do. I wish Andrew

Moffat's 'No Outsiders' programme had been around then.

"I'm not gay, Mum, I'm not!" he cried. He bought a girl in class a red rose and some chocolates with his spending money to prove it. He was gay, but he couldn't bring himself to admit it for another eight years. There were no books in his school about little boys who wanted to be mermaids, or about baby penguins being raised by two daddies. There was nothing in his lessons to make him feel like there might be other people like him, and the adults in his school dismally failed to help him.

The head was right about one thing – it did get worse at secondary school. It was only after he left, came out and began thriving in an inclusive, vibrant and warm sixth form college that we heard the half of it. The medicine balls thrown at his head in PE. Being tripped up, pushed against walls, daubed in Tippex. The name calling and worse.

He's now a young man, flamboyant and proud – a campaigner for equality and gay rights and a brilliant role model for his youngest brother, who has just come out at the age of 12.

In Y5 (at a different school) he too was called 'gay boy' and was teased about having a gay older brother, and about his own preferences and interests, as if not being sporty or enjoying the company of girls was somehow weird. But this time he had a teacher who wouldn't tolerate intolerance. She spoke to the class, made sure they understood that all people were equal in her eyes, and that she would truck no bullying in her school. She told the children about her own gay brother, and how much she loved him. My child stood a little taller and his classmates became kinder.

Whether we like it or not, children are aware of differences in gender identities and sexuality from a very early age. It's not about sex – it's about being able to feel like you belong, that you're a part of the community you care about, and that your similarities and differences are things to be valued and celebrated. That's what the No Outsiders project is – it's about belonging. It's about making sense of a confusing world by teaching children that the answer is kindness.

There's no place in our schools and in our society for attitudes that make children feel excluded for their race, gender or sexuality. It's time we stood up as a profession for the values we hold dear, and we should demand that our politicians and media do the same.



**Debra Kidd has worked in education for over 20 years and has delivered CPD nationally and internationally**

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