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COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL



## From the editor



I think the term 'Challenging times' doesn't really sum up the last month as all your schools fully reopened for the autumn term. I have seen the frustration as government guidance seems to change at midnight on a Friday, when everything you thought needed doing had already been done. This then led to stressed weekends and long days.

There was also the frustration over testing kits and where people can get a test - just a 400-mile round trip! And let's not forget the confusion over who has to self isolate if someone in a household or classroom comes down with symptoms. I don't think you will forget in a hurry. But things are getting back to a 'new normal' as hand washing routines fall into place and collection and drop off teething problems abate. It is genuinely heartwarming to see the children back at school.

That's not to say that the next couple of months are going to be without their problems. We have already seen increased restrictions in different regions. And who's to say when, or if, we may have more lockdowns and school closures. In this issue we look at the importance of keeping the lines of communication open with parents during this Covid-19 pandemic. Ensuring that the messages you send out are read, easily understandable and how to take some of the burden from heads.

We also look at ways of boosting your fundraising power after your budgets have been curtailed due to the Coronavirus.

What will be paramount is the mental health and wellbeing of staff and pupils. Uncertainty can lead to stress for both school leaders and children. Schools will also have to have contingencies in place if they have to close, or a bubble has to be sent home, and go back to remote learning. But I know it's a challenge that you will face, as always, with professionalism and dedication. Good luck.

Enjoy the issue,

Mark Hayhurst  
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## Our experts this issue



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From the makers  
of **Teach Primary**

## HIGHLIGHTS

9

**GROW YOUR OWN**  
Lessons in nutrition from the  
vegetable patch

36

**BUDGET BOOST**  
Fundraising tips during  
these COVID times

13

**IT'S GOOD TO TALK**  
This is the time to get parental  
engagement right

54

**KEEP TO THE  
POINT**  
Communications focus

## 9 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

- Grow your own
- Lessons in nutrition
- It's good to talk

### 14 A REAL PAGE TURNER

The power of school book clubs to help improve literacy

### 16 INCLUSION AND UNDERSTANDING

How to protect children with invisible illnesses that need to shield at school

### 19 STREAMLINE YOUR CHANNELS

Take back control of your school's communications

### 20 THE ATTAINMENT GAP: WHAT NOW?

How Covid-19 has impacted the learning gap and what can be done about it

### 22 GET THE RIGHT RESEARCH

Do teachers need to be more like doctors?



## 25 BUILDINGS & PROCUREMENT

- Safe and sound
- Sprinklers
- Virtual clerks

### 29 EASE OF USE IS THE KEY

What you should look for in a financial management system

### 30 WHAT IS OUR NEW NORMAL?

What happens going forward?

### 32 EVERYONE SHOULD PLAY THEIR PART

How to get your whole staff involved in the financial well being of the school

### 34 GETTING TO GRIPS WITH ICFP

Why the Integrated Curriculum and Finance Planning system is relevant to the primary phase

### 36 GETTING YOUR BUDGET BACK ON TRACK

What you can do to raise money and what to consider for the long term to increase your budget

## 39 EDTECH

- Inspiration is key
- Cyber security
- Quiz time

### 44 TAKE AN ONLINE CLASS TRIP

How to deliver transformative careers experiences in a time of Covid-19

### 46 PLAN FOR EFFECTIVE REMOTE LEARNING

Contingency plans for continued coronavirus lockdowns

### 49 ESSENTIAL FOR EVERY PUPIL

EdTech in school is as important as tables and chairs

### 50 LEARN FROM WHAT WORKED

How to use EdTech to plan lessons for a blended learning approach

## 53 LEADERSHIP & HR

- Coming back
- Keep to the point
- Burnout

### 58 A DEMANDING ROLE

How to decide on an acting deputy head

### 60 A GUIDE TO LEADERSHIP

Why some Academy Trust leaders fail but most don't

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## 62 THE NEW NORMAL

Reflections on the full re-opening of school after lockdown

## 65 KEY MESSAGES MOVING FORWARD

Advice to school leaders in these challenging times

## 66 A VERY DIFFERENT LANDSCAPE

What does 2020-21 hold for teacher training?

## 68 COLLABORATION AND JOINT PROBLEM SOLVING

A strong working relationship with the unions can support the wellbeing of school leaders and staff



# DROP

# SATs

# 2021

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# Don't be afraid to lead your school

Lord Jim Knight, Member of the House of Lords, a former schools minister and chief education and external officer at Tes Global, gives us his views on education

## **What did you learn about the education system in your role as schools minister between 2006-09?**

When Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair asked me to do the job, my school experience was as a pupil in the private sector, as a parent of kids in local schools and someone who had once been a secondary school governor of a comprehensive. And that really didn't amount to that much. So I had to quickly learn how the system works. It's a broad spread of responsibilities that the post holder has in terms of everything to do with teachers, their recruitment, their training, their pay, and so on and so forth. Then there's the curriculum, how that works, what's expected of it, the development of school leadership and school buildings. There's a lot to get your head around.

So, first and foremost, in that time I learned how the system works. And while there have been changes since, they've not been that significant in terms of the general wiring of the system.

## **Did you enjoy the role?**

I loved it. And, with the exception of a year that I spent as employment minister in 2010, I have devoted my working time to education ever since. I think it's partly because there aren't any easy answers. It's a profoundly human endeavour and there is all the diversity of humanity that you're bringing to bear to try and develop the talents and the prospects of young people through education. There just isn't a right and wrong answer for everybody and that makes it endlessly fascinating and endlessly motivating, because the core business of education is something that we should, and broadly do, buy into to create a future for our young people.

## **During these difficult COVID times what should schools be focusing on?**

My perception is that very many heads are having to focus on practical things such as how you keep a safe regime in place to safeguard the health of staff and pupils.

Obviously, schools have to spend a lot of money on mitigating some of the health risks, so they're also worried about budgets.

But all of that is pushing teaching and learning down the list because all of these things are immediate. They're getting guidance at the last minute and having to decide whether or not this means you have to do it or you ought to do it, and how much can they determine their own rules? I think it is really important for primary heads to connect with why they want to be there, which is all about teaching and learning. This will start with the wellbeing of yourself as a leader, to make sure you're able to lead, and the wellbeing of your staff. It's about creating a safe and healthy environment for the kids so that they can learn. And you can't lose sight of having the contingency plans around continuing to learn. But first and foremost, think about the learning because that's why you're there.

## **What would you like to change in primary education?**

I look back on my time and I don't think I challenged the orthodoxy of testing enough. I was responsible for getting rid of key stage three SATS. But I am of a strong view that we over test our children, that we're in danger of creating, in some schools, quite a sterile Year 6 because it's just too dominated by prep for the SATS and for those few subjects that are being tested in that context. I would want us to trust teachers more, trust their professionalism more. Also carry through more of the learning culture of early years and primary and not drag down the learning culture of secondary into primary. Have more love, more trust, more professionalism and less testing. Also, less of the high stakes accountability that makes school leaders understandably risk averse. It's career threatening if your risk goes wrong, but we need to continue to take risk and innovate.

“So I had to quickly learn how the system works.”





And finally, I think we need to pay more attention to the home/school relationship. One of my reflections of the last few months has been that it has changed the way most schools are connecting with parents. The parents had to take on some of the role of teachers during lockdown and they found that difficult. They are very happy to see kids going back to school. But they have gotten closer to their children as learners. And they are, potentially, a much stronger ally for teachers than previously and we should really build on that.

#### **What role will technology have to play in the future of primary education?**

We need to ensure that everyone has access to a decent connection with a decent device

at home, regardless of income, so that they can be included. That way teachers can take advantage of the technology for things like flipped learning. So then homework is something you can think about completely differently, I think it is something that in Key Stage 2 there is a place for. And then there's parents' evening, will they continue in the same way? So many schools found that parents' evenings on a digital platform worked really well, instead of everyone traipsing in and sitting on tiny chairs around low tables looking at portfolios of work. It was more convenient for everyone concerned. There'll probably be a blend because parents may still want to see some of the work that's been done on paper. But things like that are an opportunity to move

away from annual reporting, to move to a more rolling system and really share in the endeavour of teaching kids. In turn, parents will be able to share how the kids are in terms of their wider wellbeing, which I also think most teaching professionals are taking more seriously than ever before.

#### **Do you have a message for school leadership for the year ahead?**

Be brave enough to lead. Don't be tied up by all the guidance. Pay due regard to it in terms of safety and mitigating risk, but lead, don't wait to be led. You are school leaders, lead teaching and learning in your school almost regardless of all the nonsense that's coming out of Whitehall.

#### **CAREER TIMELINE**

**1987**  
Educated at Eltham College and graduated from Cambridge University

**1987**  
Started a theatre company with Sam Mendes, Tom Hollander and others. Worked in theatre management for five years

**1992**  
Entered local politics and became Mayor of Frome, and Deputy Leader of Mendip Council

**2001**  
Elected to Parliament for South Dorset in 2001

**2006**  
Appointed Schools Minister until 2009

**2010**  
Defeated at General Election, made a peer and started a commercial career in education

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# School Improvement

## GROW YOUR OWN

Karen Cooper explains the importance of pupils engaging with the environment and nutrition

**A**t Overdale Junior School we were so pleased to achieve the prestigious Gold Food for Life award despite the coronavirus pandemic. We were the first school to be awarded Gold in Leicester City and the second school to achieve Gold in the county. Food for Life is a Soil Association programme, and encourages schools to grow food, help schools to deliver cooking on the curriculum, assist in improving school meals, learn about farming and integrate these issues into everyday learning. There is a strong emphasis on community involvement.

It's really important to have our own vegetable patches and the pupils learn so much from them. They learn how to grow organically from seed, they harvest and cook with produce including onions, leeks, potatoes, beans and fruit such as rhubarb, blackberries, plums and apples. Through outdoor science lessons they learn about the plant life cycle, pollination, growing plants, composting, weeding and watering. They understand where food comes from and are encouraged to grow plants at home. They learn how to use simple gardening tools and, importantly, about seasonality and are more likely to try new foods if they have grown them themselves.

### HEALTHY EATING

All of the children take part in Food Routes lessons where they learn about healthy eating, cooking skills and preparing predominantly savoury snacks and meals, for example fish pie. They begin to

understand where food comes from, how it is produced and find out about the five main food groups in the Eatwell Guide and how these help our bodies to grow, repair and be healthy. The children also learn how to make a healthy packed lunch. We also have food-based whole school curriculum themes like Roman Banquets and World Kitchen. In addition, there is an after-school cookery club where families enjoy cooking together.

And growing their own food

definitely gives them a greater knowledge of the environment. For example, we look at how far fruit and vegetables have travelled to get to supermarkets, conserving water and growing organic produce. Children learn to respect nature and animal habitats in forest school lessons in our extensive grounds where we have a spinney, pond and stream.



## RAISED BEDS

If other schools are looking to start their own vegetable patches, I would suggest raised beds because they allow children to work at standing height. Also, different classes or year groups can have their own bed and grow things like herbs, onions, leeks, beans, carrots, salad leaves and tomatoes. While, rhubarb, fruit bushes and trees provide good harvesting opportunities for use in the school kitchen or cooking lessons. Cloches can help get seeds and plants growing quickly. Ask parents/grandparents to help out and have outdoor science lessons in the curriculum and buy suitable gardening equipment for children like gloves, trowels and forks. Activities can include building compost bins, bug hotels, planting seeds, watering, weeding and crop rotation.

The Food for Life Programme has given us the impetus, support and platform to develop a strong healthy school ethos integrating cooking and gardening into the curriculum and improving school meals. Former head teacher Mrs Hart said: "The Food for Life programme has become an integral part of diverse learning experiences we offer."

## EATING HABITS

The whole school takes part in practical cooking and outdoor science activities as well as promoting nutritious school meals. We have a Gold standard menu provided by our catering team and we constantly seek to encourage children to take up school dinners. During recent head teacher interviews the school council was asked to provide questions for prospective candidates. One question was about the importance of healthy eating at Overdale, which I believe reflects the priority of students themselves. The school council SNAG team (School Nutrition Action Group) has helped drive the programme forward and we have developed a robust School Food Policy to support our aims.

Each and everyday children are given the opportunity to understand and make healthy food choices; be it breakfast club, breaktime, lunchtime, cookery lessons, homework club, or Nurture lessons (for SEN/ disadvantaged children). And, while we haven't yet banned birthday sweets in school, we do encourage thinking of different ways of celebrating such occasions!

Everyone is aware of the importance of ingraining good healthy eating habits and attitudes. This is a clearly a valuable lesson for life as well as impacting on the general health and wellbeing of the school.

**Karen Cooper is a teacher and Food for Life lead at Overdale Junior School**

# CREATE A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

Alex White explains the importance of good nutrition in UK primary schools

**P**oor health, and rising health inequality, in children is one of the most pressing issues of our time. In the UK, one in five primary school children start school overweight or obese and this increases to one in three by the time these children leave primary and start secondary school. By the time children reach adulthood, almost two thirds are overweight or obese.

This is important, for a number of different reasons, and something that needs to be tackled. Obesity can affect both children's physical and mental health, increasing the risk of conditions, such as high blood pressure and breathing difficulties, as well as the potential for developing low self-esteem. We also know that children who are obese are more likely to be obese as adults, and that obesity in adulthood raises the risk of developing a number of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

## DEPRIVATION

Research also shows that there is wide scale food insecurity for pupils in the UK, with 19 per cent of children under the age of 15 living with an adult who is moderately or severely food insecure, according to UNICEF (2017). We also understand that there is a link between levels of deprivation and obesity, with obesity rates highest in the most deprived ten per cent of the population, approximately twice that of the least deprived ten per cent. A number of factors contribute to this link. For those on the lowest incomes, the cost of a healthy diet can represent almost three quarters of their disposable income and less healthy foods tend to be cheaper. The environment in more deprived areas can also mean higher exposure to fast food outlets and fewer opportunities to be active.

However, for all children, it is not just about cutting down on calories but also about the quality of the diet, especially for children who are growing and developing. It is important, therefore, that children have a healthy, balanced diet at home, outside the

home and at school. And it is at school that teachers and school senior leadership teams can make a difference, whether it be through the curriculum, teaching cooking skills and the importance of healthy eating, or in ensuring the food children get at school is sufficient and healthy. Ensuring that children get the food education that they need, can give them the knowledge and skills to be in charge of making healthier decisions in the future.

## HEALTH

Creating a whole school approach to tackling healthy eating is key. The current obesity crisis is, at least in part, down to our obesogenic environment and to tackle this, changes must be made to create a healthier environment across many different sectors. One of these examples is in school, where children spend a significant proportion of their lives and eat at least one, possibly more, meals a day. So, what can be done to ensure your school environment supports both health, wellbeing and learning about food?

In 2020, the British Nutrition Foundation launched the Characteristics of good practice in teaching food and nutrition education in primary schools document (<https://bit.ly/32u6qir>). The publication sets out a series of characteristics of good practice with regard to teaching food in UK primary schools through a whole school perspective. The characteristics were determined via consensus building

exercises with primary school practitioners and initial teacher training providers across the UK. They have been designed so that they can be adopted as part of a good practice approach by all those that teach food in primary schools.

The publication, leading on from work on the Characteristics of good practice in teaching food and nutrition education in secondary schools published in 2019, looks to support UK primary schools to ensure good practice is achieved.

The guide centers on nine characteristics which make a useful starting place for schools to start:

- Developing professional competence
- Taking a whole school approach
- Teaching the curriculum
- Running practical food lessons
- Establishing good food hygiene and safety practices
- Developing food skills
- Exploring where food comes from
- Applying healthy eating
- Making informed choices

The guide builds on these tips, demonstrating how different people within the primary school set-up can work together to ensure each is met.

In the face of a growing obesity epidemic, educating children in the importance of eating healthily is essential. There are many ways you can ensure your class is a fun, vibrant and effective learning environment for children, to ensure they have the opportunity to develop the knowledge and cooking skills to make healthier choices. There are a few examples given here, but you can learn more about good practice in primary schools by reading our free Characteristics of good practice in teaching food and nutrition education in primary schools document. Let's all work together to ensure children have the best opportunity to live healthier lives.



**Alex White, Nutrition  
Scientist, British  
Nutrition Foundation  
[www.foodafactoflife.org.uk](http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk)**

## TOP TIPS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

- **Create a whole school approach!** It is important that teaching of food is aligned with the whole school food approach and that food education is embedded in the health and wellbeing agenda of the whole school. This can be achieved through the development and implementation of policies, promotion and enforcement and ensuring that the food teaching reflects the curriculum.
- **Build in progression.** It is important that pupils have the opportunity to continually develop and build upon their food skills and knowledge, so they can prepare, cook and serve a range of dishes hygienically and safely. Children love improving their skills, so having the opportunity to make more complex dishes and learn more about healthy eating can be really motivating and rewarding.
- **Give pupils the opportunity to cook!** Let pupils try out new skills by preparing, cooking or assembling non-cook recipes at school. It is important that all practical food preparation and cooking lessons are delivered in a hygienic, safe and organised way.
- **Put healthy eating knowledge into practice.** Give pupils the opportunity to apply their healthy eating knowledge and their awareness of consumer preferences and the reasons for food and drink choices. You can integrate this into your schemes of work, or give pupils other opportunities to show what they have learnt in a cross-curricular way, such as talking about reasons for food choice in a Religious Studies class or writing about healthy eating in an English lesson.
- **Act as a role model.** Bring your enthusiasm and knowledge to the food room. It is important to be confident in the delivery of food lessons, so ensure you stay up-to-date with your professional development, and take an interest in developing your own knowledge and skills.



# Digital parent engagement in the next normal

**Driving connections and connectivity across school communities**

**IRIS Education recently surveyed over 400 UK schools and MATs to investigate the impact of lockdown on integral communications and operations.**

It appears primary schools across the country have seized the opportunity to progress their digital strategies – and to great success!

Every school leader understands the importance of parent engagement. Before email, mobile apps and social media, paper newsletters served to bridge the home/school gap. However, most schools acknowledge the difficulties in engaging with every family, every day.

With over eight million students impacted by COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown, school life changed overnight – and so did the role of parent engagement. Allowing any family to slip through the net simply wasn't an option.

**Leading to the question: does the pandemic see a change for the better when it comes to home/school partnerships?**

In our free insight guide, we explore the future of parent engagement, the impact on school communities and the role of digital in ensuring efficiency and transparency in a post-lockdown world.

**How are primary school leaders preparing for post-lockdown school life? Our findings:**

- > Nearly 90% believe the ability to access student, finance and asset data remotely will be vital from September
- > Almost 40% are planning additional teacher training to aid remote working and learning
- > Nearly 80% believe the ability for children to learn remotely will be key for student progression
- > 60% believe paper free classrooms and offices will be vital in ensuring the health and safety of students and staff

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# It's good to talk

Kerry-Jane Packman explains why there's never been a better time to get parental engagement right

**D**espite a peculiar, challenging and worrying year for most of us, 2020 has at least brought into sharper focus, for school leaders and parents alike, the importance of a robust home/school partnership.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that many parents were parachuted into supporting learning from home without any preparation. To gain an understanding of what parents were going through, we ran three polls between March and the start of the summer holidays. Our results highlighted the many challenges for schools and parents.

At the start, only one in five parents felt very confident to support their child's learning. Six weeks into lockdown, parents' confidence grew by a third. Now, over 50 per cent of parents are more engaged with their child's learning than they were before lockdown as well. Over 90 per cent of parents felt that their school had communicated very well or well during school closures.

The goodwill fostered on both sides as schools and homes collaborated through a crisis means that the new academic year is the perfect time for school leaders to reappraise their parental engagement strategies.

## BLUEPRINT FOR PARENT-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

Our Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools helps school leaders to maximise parents' interest in their children's learning by creating a successful home/school partnership, built on five key drivers:

1. Leadership, ethos and resources
2. Effective two-way communication
3. Supporting learning at home
4. Involvement in school life
5. Community engagement

School leaders can use it to improve existing strategies or establish new ones.

Parentkind gauges parents' views and attitudes to their child's schooling over time, not least in our annual parent survey. Our results consistently show us that the vast majority of parents want to both play an active role in their child's education and want a say at school level.

As a result of the pandemic, many parents remain anxious about safety. A sizeable minority, especially parents of children with SEND, require additional reassurance and support. It has never been a more crucial time to keep parents informed, maintain clear lines of communication, and listen to concerns.

## EFFECTIVE PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

**During lockdown, over 90 per cent of parents told us that they would have liked their child's school to consult with them on the return to school.**

A common problem is that a limited approach leads to responses from a narrow pool of parents who are already engaged, and who may not be reflective of the entire parent community. Provide different ways for parents to have their say, such as text, email, phone and face-to-face meetings. Don't forget to allow two-way communication.

**Only 36 per cent of parents were satisfied with the frequency of school's check-ins with parents during school**

**closures, with nearly half (47%) registering dissatisfaction.**

Making sure there is a good 'flow' of information between home and school is essential. Parents need to know where to go for further information. Providing summaries of subjects that are being taught helps parents to support learning at home.

**70 per cent of parents said they would like schools to focus on mental wellbeing when their child returns.**

Provide parents with support in managing their child's mental well-being at home as well as detailed information on exactly what you are doing to support it at school. Ensure that there is a key staff member delegated to lead on it, and that parents know how to contact them if they have concerns.

Always keep in mind how parents might contribute most effectively to your school, and give plenty of thought to the best ways of keeping them true partners, rather than just occasional visitors. The results will speak for themselves.

We are confident our Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools can reap the positive results of more effective parental participation because it has been stress-tested. It received universally positive feedback from major education stakeholders during a lengthy consultation process.

**Kerry-Jane Packman is the executive director of Programmes, Membership and Charitable Services at Parentkind.**

"Over 90 per cent of parents felt that their school had communicated very well or well during school closures."





# A REAL PAGE TURNER

Laura Lodge discusses the power of school book clubs to help improve literacy

**M**any schools are working hard to improve reading, recognising the impact that it has on children's lives. Schools are looking for ways to inspire and engage pupils and setting up a book club is one great way to do this. Petrich (2015) found that book clubs not only facilitated reading, but also developed social-emotional learning and self-motivation. Having a book club as a safe space to discuss texts can support children to become more confident, refine their opinions, widen their reading repertoire and so much more.

When setting up a book club, it is important to think carefully about your vision. While an informal, unplanned chat about books can have power, book clubs can transform thinking when time and thought is put into their creation.

## WHO WILL BENEFIT?

Many schools begin their book club journey by acknowledging that an aspect of reading provision, such as enjoyment, needs

development, or by being aware of specific groups who need support. Think about your school – where would a book club have impact?

Book clubs are often offered to the most accomplished readers in the school, the 'greater depth' readers, who may need additional challenge. Our One Education Reading Award school, St Matthew's Catholic Primary School, Allerton, have set up a book club to support just that, with the main purpose being to engage and challenge readers, alongside supporting the writing process.

Although confident readers are a worthy audience, it is important not to ignore other groups too. Children who find decoding a challenge can still gain a huge amount from being book clubbers, indeed some might argue that they may benefit more from membership than more fluent readers. The opportunity to share a text together is one which can break barriers and build confidence. Having the chance to discuss

their opinions, learning from both staff and peers, can really make a difference to a child's view of reading.

## WHAT WILL YOUR BOOK CLUB LOOK LIKE?

Once you have identified your book clubbers, your next step is to develop your club's reading identity. Consider how you are going to make your book club special. How are you going to make being a book clubber a coveted position? Some children will naturally want to join, but creating a book club buzz is crucial to engaging more reluctant readers. How you decide to do this will be dependent on your book club audience. Schools we have worked with have used secret signs; combined books with beauty treatments or just actively encouraged children to join. What is certain is that once your book club starts, and children enjoy the sessions, word of mouth will keep your book club buzzing.

Deciding on the focus for your book club sessions also takes careful thought. Book clubs are not lessons, and should not be treated as such – they should, first and foremost, be about fostering a love of reading. Having said that, most book clubs have a dual purpose, where enjoyment is central but knowledge building and challenge come a close second. Getting the balance right is key. Developing a culture of contribution, opinion and respectful challenge alongside encouraging engagement in reading, will reap the most rewards.

“What is certain is that once your book club starts, and children enjoy the sessions, word of mouth will keep your book club buzzing.”

Every book club is different and you need to decide what your expectations will be. Consider the format of your sessions. Will they involve reading, discussion or both? How will you ensure everyone can contribute to discussion? Think about whether it is feasible to ask members to read between sessions, or whether reading alongside you will have more power. Will you meet face-to-face or virtually? The OURFP website includes examples of practice (<https://bit.ly/3mh8D8K>) which may support your decision-making. Most importantly, think about how to ensure your book club becomes a safe space for participants. In order for everyone to feel comfortable sharing their opinions and the book club to thrive, members need to know that their contributions will be valued and respected. You may even wish to develop a book club code alongside your book clubbers to support this.

Ultimately, you need to view yourself as a facilitator of the book club rather than as its leader. How can you facilitate the discussion in book club sessions so that it engages and challenges pupils? Planning some key discussion points or questions in advance will support you to structure the sessions, providing ways of teasing out discussion and making the most of the texts you share together. However, I would encourage you to take your lead from your book clubbers – you may be surprised with where they take you.

## WHAT ABOUT THE BOOKS?

Of course, every book club depends on texts. Reading choices will be pivotal to the success of your book club and need thought. Considering your audience's particular needs in terms of reading should be your first priority: some groups may need more challenge, others may need something lower threat. Either way, it is important to find texts that have depth, that have aspects worthy of discussion, as that is what will give life to your sessions.

Expanding your knowledge of children's literature will support you in your decision making. Knowing your preferences and seeking to widen them means that you can provide a well-rounded selection for your book clubbers to experience. You may even wish to pass along the baton of choosing your texts to the pupils themselves, learning from their choices just as much as your own.

By giving children structured opportunities to discuss texts, we can open their eyes further to reading. Setting up a book club is a fantastic way to do this, encouraging deeper understanding and contributing to that love of reading we know is so crucial to development.

The One Education Reading Award includes a wide range of resources which can support you to review reading provision, make challenging text choices and run your own book clubs. More information can be found at <https://bit.ly/2ZBpucS>



**Laura Lodge, Senior Education Consultant at One Education Ltd and Reading Curriculum Expert for the Department for Education, but first and foremost, a teacher.**

## WHAT ABOUT STAFF?

Building a love of reading depends on staff engagement. One of our One Education Reading Award schools, Chapel Street Primary School, is working hard to develop their reading provision. Buoyed by the success of their book clubs, and having identified staff development needs as part of the Reading Award audit, leaders wanted to continue to raise the profile of reading amongst the team. Leaders at the school understand the impact that staff can have as role models of reading, so to support this, they worked with an independent bookshop, Simply Books, to purchase a carefully curated book for every member of staff. It is the school's belief that if the staff love books, then so will the children. Staff will be encouraged to share the books, participate in reading conversations and even set up their own book clubs to pass the love of reading on.



# INCLUSION AND UNDERSTANDING

Dr Helen Edwards explains how to protect children with invisible illnesses that need to shield at school

**O**n June 10th, 2020, The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) published guidance for clinicians about the shielding of clinically vulnerable children and young people. According to this new guidance, the majority of children with conditions including asthma, diabetes and epilepsy do not need to continue to shield and can return to school. However, Dr Liz Whittaker, Consultant in Paediatric Infectious Diseases and Immunology and co-author of the guidance, said: "There is a group of children who are very clinically vulnerable and they should continue to shield. There is a second group who are currently shielding but may not need to do so. It's important for parents and carers to have a conversation with their specialist to determine the best course of action. These conversations will be informed by knowledge of the severity of the disease, intensity of the treatment, and for some, their home situation."

Thousands of children across the UK suffer from chronic conditions and diseases that are not immediately obvious. These conditions are known as 'invisible illnesses' and include cystic fibrosis, lung disease, primary ciliary dyskinesia (PCD), severe asthma, autoimmune diseases and transplant recipients. Children with invisible conditions are at greater risk if they contract Covid-19 but many are keen to return to school.

What can primary schools do to ensure they are protected and supported by teachers and that all children have an understanding of invisible illnesses?

## INCREASING AWARENESS

To begin to comprehend how chronic invisible illness affects people, children need help to understand that not all illnesses can be seen, and that unseen conditions can be life-changing and debilitating. Over 90,000 children were asked to shield in March 2020. It is especially difficult for children to understand what this means. Similarly, it can be confusing for children when one of their friends has prolonged periods of time absent from school when they look well.

Raising awareness for invisible illnesses has never been more important. We must

also remember that many of these children with health conditions are not just at risk from Covid-19. Winter is always an especially tough time for those with health conditions; the 'flu and other seasonal viruses often lead to children with invisible illnesses having prolonged periods of time off school and in some cases having significant stays in hospital.

Talking to children about invisible conditions should not be a taboo subject. Many children live with these illnesses every day and they should not feel embarrassed or experience a lack of opportunities to talk about their conditions in a caring, sensitive and supportive environment. Gently encouraging children and their families to talk about their invisible illnesses and how they manage them will lead to a better understanding from their peers and teachers.

## WHAT INFORMATION DO SCHOOLS NEED TO KNOW?

Schools will normally be made aware by parents, or their child's health care team, if

they have a condition that needs to be monitored. If this has not been done it is important that parents are given the opportunity to contact staff within the school to discuss their child's health condition.

Parents will need to feel reassured about the care their child will receive when they are at school and, most importantly, children need to feel safe and confident to return to school. This will only happen if there has been sufficient time given to the discussion



and the child's routines and activities in school have been thoroughly prepared for.

Nina Peters, from community interest company (CIC) ShieldUs, works with families who have had to shield due to a variety of hidden health conditions. The organisation has been working to try and relieve anxiety and raise awareness for those at risk in society. She is concerned that schools' risk assessments need to be more robust to support children with invisible illnesses and explains: "The mental health impact is huge for children and their families returning to school. We feel it is important that children with chronic health conditions can access the support and understanding they need at school. Having spoken to many children and families who have had to shield, the overwhelming feeling is that schools need to have more robust risk assessments in place to protect any at risk children."

Expecting children to fully grasp the gravity of a pandemic is impossible. Teachers and staff will be aware that there is a delicate balancing act between ensuring children realise the risks, stick to hygiene rules and social distancing, whilst not increasing their anxiety and stress. For at-risk children this is more pronounced, and it's important that

managers and teaching staff work together to offer these children the support and understanding they need.

## POSITIVE WAYS TO IDENTIFY CHILDREN WHO ARE SHIELDING

The key is not to single out children who have health conditions. They need to feel included and understood. Using positive language and images is hugely important. For instance, ShieldUs advocates naming anyone who has had to shield because of an invisible illness as a 'Shielded Superhero'. Inspired by Clark Kent, whose work colleagues don't know he is also Superman, they suggest that children who are Shielded Superheroes have a special superpower which keeps their illness completely invisible. This is very appealing to young children.

In addition, it is vital to positively involve all children, and ShieldUs has created the concept of 'Protector Heroes' who are those who look out for Shielded Superheroes. Working together, Shielded Superheroes and Protector Heroes can make the world safer and more compassionate; what better lesson to teach our young children?

With some creative thinking there are lots of ways to help children develop their understanding about others around them

## PRACTICAL ADVICE

- To curb the spread of infection special attention needs to be paid when children are using toilet facilities and moving around the school site. How about getting children to design and create their own posters for displays in school? This helps everyone feel involved and is a great way to raise children's understanding.
- Children with certain lung conditions often have a persistent cough. Everyone needs to be aware of this so that they are not repeatedly sent home. Children who cough frequently are likely to be concerned that their friends will treat them differently now due to Covid-19.
- It is not just about ensuring people are kept safe during this pandemic, but also from other bugs that make thousands of vulnerable children seriously ill every winter. This is an opportunity to raise awareness of an ongoing situation for at-risk children. Schools must always have policies in place for every at-risk child.

who have invisible illnesses. ShieldUs has produced a free e-book available for staff to use with children. The e-book explains shielding to children in a simple and accessible way, and it can be printed and used for posters and displays. For more information visit: [www.facebook.com/ShieldUs2020](http://www.facebook.com/ShieldUs2020) or [www.shieldus.company.site](http://www.shieldus.company.site)

For children needing to shield, the return to school can still be a safe, exciting and enjoyable time, with careful preparation. Primary school managers can provide significant support in terms of risk assessment, maintaining healthy routines and working with class teachers to ensure all children have an understanding of invisible illnesses and shielding.



**Dr Helen Edwards, is co-founder of Tapestry and The Foundation Stage Forum, and a former**

**Ofsted inspector. For more information about invisible illnesses and shielding listen to the Tapestry/FSF podcast interview with Nina at <https://fsf-podcasts.simplecast.com/>**

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# STREAMLINE YOUR CHANNELS

Take back control of your school's communications, says Linda Tanner

**W**e've all been forced to do things differently since March - and schools have had to make more changes than most. With the doors shut to most pupils and staff for months, teachers and leaders had to find imaginative yet safe ways to keep in touch with children and their parents and carers. A side of A4 emailed out as a pdf once a week wasn't going to cut it!

Staff were amazingly flexible: some undertook a programme of wellbeing phone calls to families, while others discovered a talent for making and uploading cookery videos. Schools that had previously fought shy of social media suddenly found themselves with a complete set of YouTube pages and/or Facebook groups, not to mention a whole new online learning platform.

## *Tweaked*

But now that the 2020-21 academic year is under way - whether we are in an established 'next normal' or another lockdown by the time you read this - it's time to take stock. Which of the innovations is worth keeping, which can be tweaked and which ditched?

It's worth looking, too, at your pre-Covid practices, many of which you've probably used without question for years. Are they still the best ways to make sure the right messages are getting through to current parents, prospective parents and the wider community?

Perhaps it's time to streamline your communication channels. Too many, and no one will know where to go for information about your school.

First stop is your website. You have no doubt made sure that it is DfE compliant but does it need an 'autumn clean' to remove outdated pandemic advice, old class blogs and terrible photos?

Check that term dates, inset day dates, and other key events in the calendar are easy to find. What about uniform and school meals details? Ensure that the school phone number is clearly displayed and that there's a general email address or contact form - with response expectations explained.

## *Shop window*

All this will make life easier for the families that have already entrusted



their children to your care, but also remember the website is your 'shop window' for future intakes.

If you are holding open events, virtual or otherwise, make sure the details are prominent. While a few years ago you might have advertised in a local paper, now you might share the dates on social media sites - but will tired mums and dads, scrolling their feeds late at night, retain the information? Perhaps you still need a banner on your school railings.

Many have found relationships with families have improved over lockdown - so make the most of those new partnerships. Encourage supportive parents to promote your school in their social networks - and tip you off about any negative or inaccurate comments in community and private WhatsApp groups.

Perhaps most importantly, consider the impact of these changing channels on staff workload and wellbeing. Ensure roles and responsibilities are set out, time allowed for them, and training provided where necessary. Think outside the box - it is not all down to the head or business manager; if a TA has an aptitude for creating eye-catching Insta posts, why not make that part of their job?

**Linda Tanner is a communications consultant with Local Voice Media. She has been a regional journalist since 1977 and has been involved in school governance for more than two decades.**

### SEVEN STEPS

- 'Autumn clean' your website
- Streamline your other online and offline channels
- Be clear about expectations
- Counter any anti-social media
- Capitalise on hidden talents
- Share out responsibilities
- Build on parent partnerships

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# THE ATTAINMENT GAP: WHAT NOW?

Becky Francis looks at how Covid-19 has impacted the learning gap and what can be done about it

**F**or many years, teachers and school leaders have worked hard to level the playing field between disadvantaged students and their classmates. As chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, I have seen first-hand how schools across the country are going above and beyond to support their most disadvantaged pupils' learning. Thanks to the efforts of dedicated educators, the past decade saw notable gains for disadvantaged pupils' educational achievement—the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates started to narrow in both primary and secondary schools.

However, 2020 has brought with it new and unique challenges that have threatened that hard-won progress. New analysis from the Education Policy Institute has found that the attainment gap has stopped closing and is now showing signs of beginning to widen. And that was before the Covid-19 disruption, which the EEF's own findings indicate will have at least reversed the past decade's gap-narrowing progress.

Admittedly, the findings from these research papers are discouraging. However, we should take heart from the gains that have previously been achieved, knowing that the first step in closing the attainment gap is ensuring that we fully understand the extent of it. It is important to acknowledge the current scale of the problem and to learn about how it continues to affect disadvantaged students throughout their schooling in order to plan an intelligent and proportional response.

## UNDERSTANDING THE GAP

We know that the gap is already present when children first arrive at school and that it grows progressively wider over the course of their education. By the time disadvantaged students finish primary school, their attainment is already considerably behind that of their classmates. This was visible in the 2019 Key Stage 2 SATs results, which showed that half (51 per cent) of all disadvantaged pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths compared to almost three-quarters (71 per cent) of their classmates.

The same pattern continues during secondary school, resulting in significant numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds leaving school without

the qualifications they need to access opportunities in higher education, training and employment.

In seeking to close the attainment gap, we are trying to reduce the impact that a child's socio-economic background has on their life chances. It is clear that primary schools have an important role in intervening as early as possible, as the inequalities become more entrenched and harder to reverse over time. So how best to approach this vital challenge?

Looking at evidence of what has worked well in the past, for similar schools and for similar pupils, is an important place to start. Evidence can be used to guide teachers and school leaders towards teaching and learning approaches that have been the most effective in supporting disadvantaged students in other classrooms, and also leads us away from those that failed to meet

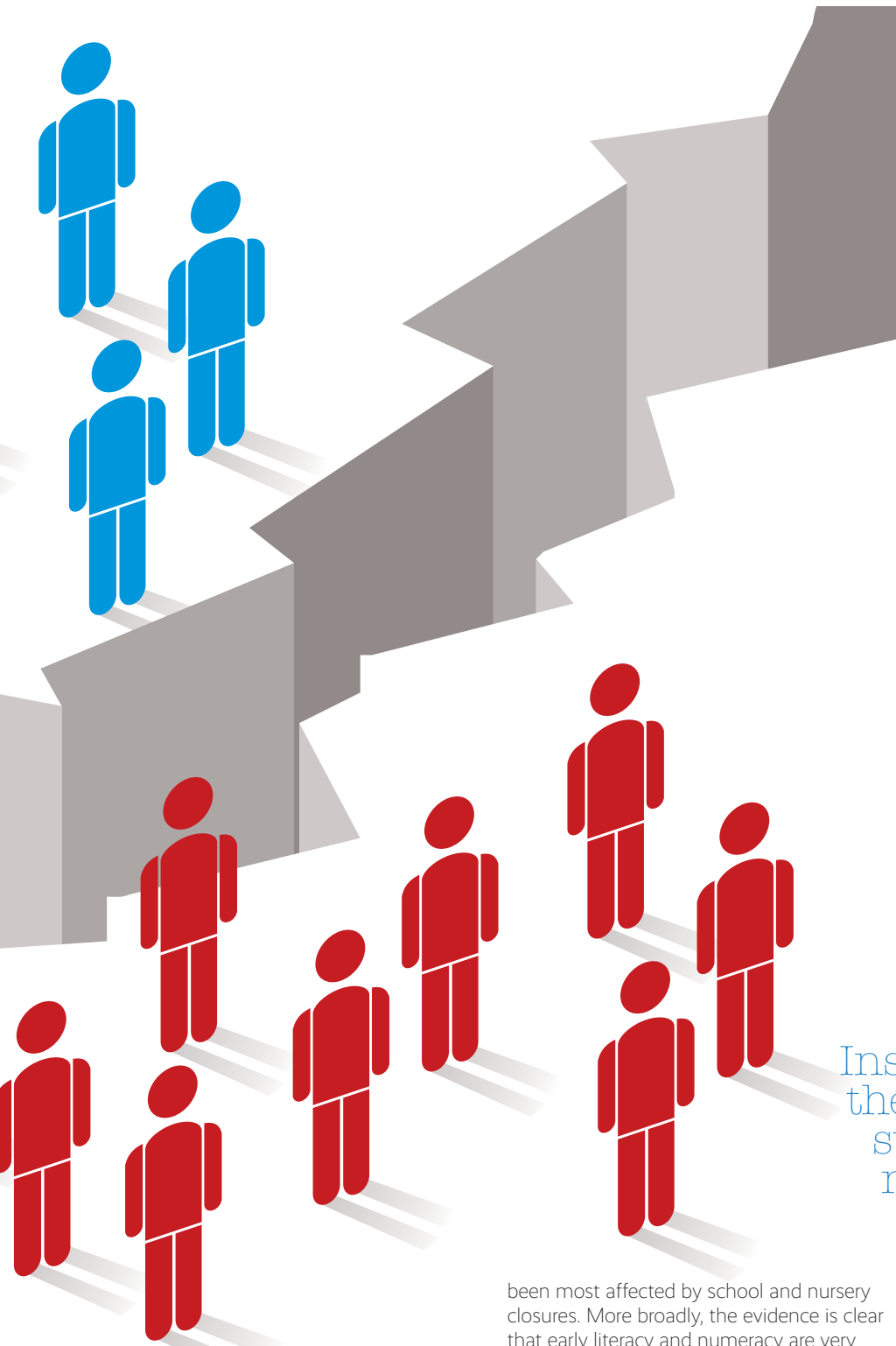
our expectations for impact on pupils' outcomes.

## PUTTING THE EVIDENCE TO WORK

Research exposes the problems, but it can also provide us with solutions. A large-scale example of this is the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), which was announced this summer to support schools both in responding to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and in closing the attainment gap.

After looking to a large-body of evidence, both from previous EEF trials and the thousands of research papers summarised in the Teaching and Learning Toolkit, it became clear that one-to-one and small group tuition has huge potential for mitigating against the





## TRANSLATING EVIDENCE INTO PRACTISE: A QUICK GUIDE

It matters more than ever that teachers make purposeful decisions when adapting to their school's approaches to teaching and learning.

A good place to start would be to decide a specific area that you want to make improvements to. Then, take time to identify programmes or practices that have shown encouraging results in similar contexts. Finally, analyse whether the possible interventions you have found meet your school's specific needs and would be feasible.

### HELPFUL CHECKLIST QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

- Are we confident we have identified a clear improvement priority?
- What are we looking to achieve by choosing a new programme or practice?
- Have we used appropriate checks and balances to ensure that we have identified the right approach to achieve these goals?
- Is there reliable evidence it can have the desired impact, if implemented well?
- Is it appropriate for our context?

“New analysis from the Education Policy Institute has found that the attainment gap has stopped closing and is now showing signs of beginning to widen.”

impact of school closures on the learning of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, plans for NTP Tuition Partners began, an initiative through which schools will be able to access subsidised high-quality tuition to provide targeted academic support for struggling pupils this academic year.

Similarly, evidence from EEF-funded trials showed that the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) offers a low-cost way to boost young children's speaking and listening skills. The intervention itself involves scripted individual and small-group language activities provided by trained early years staff. The strength of its impact was clear to see in the research findings, making it a sensible but exciting option as a recovery programme for young children whose language skills have

been most affected by school and nursery closures. More broadly, the evidence is clear that early literacy and numeracy are very strong predictors of future life outcomes. For some children—and disproportionately those from poorer backgrounds—the COVID lockdown will have impeded progress in these areas. Our EEF Guidance Reports on these topics include research-based advice and examples to support the most effective teaching practice.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In these unprecedented circumstances, teachers and school leaders are understandably viewing the new academic year with a certain amount of uncertainty and apprehension. The responsibility of supporting children's wellbeing and their

learning following school closures will take a sustained and collaborative effort on all our parts.

While there is no silver bullet, or 'one size fits all' teaching approach that will definitively turn the tide on educational inequality, research provides us with tools to address the challenge. The proven success of teaching and learning practises and interventions that have raised the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, gives teachers good reason to be hopeful about the future, and the difference that they can make to their pupils' lives.



**Professor Becky Francis**  
is Chief Executive of the  
Education Endowment  
Foundation

# GET THE RIGHT RESEARCH

Jon Tait asks do teachers need to be more like doctors?

**S**o much teacher training and professional development time over the last 20 years has been devoted to areas such as relationship building, behaviour management and the ability to engage students.

It goes without saying that these are all vitally important skills and without them you are certainly not going to be an effective teacher, but some of the most alarming areas of professional knowledge and learning that appear to have been missing from almost everyone's professional toolkit, are the very fundamentals about how we learn and retain information as human beings. When you strip back what our core business is as teachers and how our students (whether we like it or not) are assessed at the end of our input to judge how well they have progressed under our care, it staggers me that as a profession, we have not paid closer attention to the research on how students learn more efficiently and effectively. Far too much time has been spent on thinking that if we ensure that our students are engaged (or in some of the worst cases, 'entertained'), then they will somehow just 'get it' when the time comes to put pen to paper in the exam hall. But that is only half of the battle. Getting students to a stage where they are engaged in what you are delivering is paramount, but that still doesn't mean that they are going to remember everything you are talking about when they come to be assessed on it. The blood, sweat and tears that we lose at the front of our classroom every day may be completely wasted if we don't have a good grasp of cognitive science and the implications this may have on our classroom craft.

## PLANNING

From planning to assessing and everywhere in between, cognitive science should form the bedrock on which we stand as teachers. Unnecessary time, money and resources should not be wasted on strategies that have already been proven to not be particularly successful. Blindly trialling new approaches on students and using them as your crash test dummies when there is a wealth of research already written on what might be your best bets in the classroom is almost negligent as a professional.

Rest assured though, this isn't about removing human judgement, experience and

essential knowledge of context away from the decision making of teachers and replacing it with a raft of research reports and directives that teachers must follow in robotic form. Evidence and educational research should add to the experience and skill of a teacher to help their strategic decision making, ensuring it becomes more reliable, efficient and effective.

## RESEARCH

Professor Rob Coe summed up the use of, and need for, research in education very well in his 2019 '20 Years Later' follow up to his 1999 'Manifesto for Evidence-based Education': 'Research can never tell teachers what to do, nor should it; it can, however, help provide teachers and leaders with what Prof. Steve Higgins (and others) have called 'best bets'. It can – and should – provide the theory underpinning the action in classrooms, leadership meetings, governing body committees and policy-making discussions'.

## MEDICAL

One way of looking at it is by comparing teaching with the medical profession.

You wouldn't expect to go to the hospital and have a surgeon try out a new medical procedure on you, just because he or she thought it sounded like a good idea would you? Unfortunately, an identical situation has been happening in classrooms up and down the country for decades, with teachers trying to find effective ways to get students to learn, by a process of trial and error with very little evidence to back up our choices and strategic decisions.

In our defence though, unlike the common cold or a broken leg, which can probably be treated as similarly in Middlesex as it can in Middlesbrough, context is key in education. No one child is the same and as the experienced ones amongst us will even tell you, a strategy that works for a group of students before lunch, might not be a successful strategy straight after lunch.

Dylan Wiliam summed this up perfectly in 2015 when he said 'In education, everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere' (Wiliam 2015). Having said that though, and not wanting to dismiss or diminish the significant part that research can play in education, a set of guiding principles





firmly rooted in robust and globally accepted research, would be a great place to start when thinking about how we might teach our children. Irrespective of the context that a teacher may find themselves in, whether it's socio-economic, geographical or a gender bias, robust research from globally accepted studies gives you sufficient confidence to know that it is a tried and tested theory that is based on biology and psychology and not just on hearsay and rumour.

## COGNITIVE

Thankfully it seems that through evidence-based research, followed by a trend of more research informed practice sweeping into schools, a new dawn has broken, shining light on how we truly learn as human beings. Research on cognitive science from leading academics from some of the finest universities across the world is now being brought into the mainstream education arena as a basis for designing our teaching practices around. Organisations like the Education Endowment Foundation, Evidence Based Education, ResearchEd, The Chartered

College of Teaching and the Research Schools Network, are making huge strides in this area. The fact that teachers and school leaders are beginning to consult key pieces of research on cognition, before they plan, write and deliver their curriculum means that there is a definite shift in the sands. If we pride ourselves on delivering a world class education system, then surely we also need to pride ourselves on the fact that our strategies for getting the best out of those children under our professional guidance are based on firm foundations, rather than a guessing game in the hope that something might work for the majority.



**Jon Tait, Director of School Improvement and Deputy CEO, Arete Learning Trust (North Yorkshire) and author of Teaching Rebooted**

## DON'T BURY YOUR HEAD IN THE SAND

There are many different reasons why we haven't engaged with research as much as we should have over the years.

From it being inaccessible due to length, language and knowing where to find it; to our own confirmation bias wanting to only engage with things we already believe in; to every school having its own context and challenges so we believe that what works in Shanghai couldn't in Sussex.

It can be all too easy to dismiss a piece of research because you were too busy to read it, or that it wasn't trialled with your students, but if we continue to bury our heads in the sand when it comes to trialled and tested strategies about how children learn best, we will continue to waste time, energy and money while helping to squander the life chances of the young people in our care.



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# Buildings & procurement

## SAFE AND SOUND

Daren Fraser looks at four key points decision makers need to consider to ensure a compliant and safe flat roofing system specification



**E**nsuring flat roof systems not only meet the functional and budgetary needs of a school, but also fully comply with fire regulations is not always simple.

### BUILDING REGULATIONS COMPLIANCE

It is crucial that any new or retrofit element of a building complies with the fire safety standards. For flat roof installations, one of the main sources of regulation and guidance in England is Approved Document B (Fire Safety) of the Building Regulations and in particular, Section B4 'External Fire Spread'. This section focuses on walls and roofs with 'resisting fire spread from one building to another'. As such, Approved Document B states minimum distances between buildings and provides a required fire resistance of the materials based on this distance.

The required level of fire resistance is

demonstrated as the rating that the system achieves against the European test standards. This classifies roof systems into five categories based on their performance - Broof, Croof, Droof, Eroof and Froof. There are also four distinct tests (t1 to t4) each with separate testing procedures designed to meet the specific requirements of different countries - t1 for Germany, t2 for Scandinavia, t3 for France and t4 for the UK. The t4 test has been established to meet the stricter requirements of UK standards, so the first step when reviewing a roof specification is to ensure that the selected flat roof system has passed the t4 test and is therefore compliant to Broof(t4).

The separation distances and corresponding fire resistance stated in the regulations are designed to protect the roof from fire spreading from other buildings but cannot account for ignition sources that may be closer. Therefore, although a strict

reading of Approved Document B might indicate that a system with a lower fire rating is acceptable, this is not recommended. Anything less than a system that meets the Broof(t4) classification means that the building is more susceptible to fire risks.

### INDEPENDENT TESTING

In addition to checking the fire rating, decision makers should fully interrogate the information within a specification to confirm the proposed system complies with Building Regulations. A key source of information is the details published by the system supplier itself and this should be examined to confirm the system has undergone independent testing that verifies any performance data. For example, British Board of Agrément (BBA) certification will confirm compliance with the Building Regulations, outlining all tests carried out and the Broof(t4) classification.

## TESTED SYSTEM APPROACH

However, it is important to ensure the system being specified is the same as that which was tested. A common issue is a substitution of components for ones that have not been tested as part of a system. This was among the elements raised in the Hackitt review of Fire Safety and Building Regulations. This not only risks non-compliance but also potentially undermines the safety of the building in the event of a fire. For example, if the system has only been tested and passed with a specific type and thickness of insulation, it is dangerous and poses a risk to assume that it will still perform as expected if this is changed. As well as the safety concern it may invalidate the guarantee provided by independent insurers as it hasn't met the classification provided to meet the required Building Regulations.

Langley's flat roof systems have been independently tested through the BBA and certified with extensive additional fire testing, varying insulation types and thicknesses and using different roof decks. This means that Langley's TA Flat Roofing Systems can be used in a range of different configurations to suit the client's flat roof requirement while ensuring full compliance with the regulations. These systems are also LABC Assured; providing further certification on compliance with Building Regulations and standards across England, Wales and Scotland.

## APPROVED CONTRACTORS

A compliant system is required to be competently and expertly installed, therefore it is essential that the flat roof is installed by a contractor that is fully trained and the work is monitored throughout to ensure a high standard of installation. Leading system suppliers will be able to provide a database of approved contractors and will guarantee the works covering materials, design and workmanship, providing peace of mind. While a flat roof system might seem to meet all the requirements of the school it is crucial that the details are examined carefully to confirm its compliance. It is strongly recommended to choose suppliers' systems with independent certifications, that have been extensively fire tested and is compliant to Broof(t4).

For more on the services Langley provides for schools read our guide to Pro-active Flat Roof Asset Management for Schools and Academies. Both can be found by visiting [www.langley.co.uk/technical-downloads](http://www.langley.co.uk/technical-downloads).

*Daren Fraser, Head of Technical at Langley Waterproofing Systems Ltd*



## SPRINKLERS ARE ESSENTIAL

### Tilden Watson explains the larger risks schools face from fire

**S**chools in England are nearly twice as likely to suffer a blaze as other types of commercial building. An alarming number of school buildings pose a high fire risk - yet many are poorly protected against a potential blaze. Unless Ministers bring England into line with other parts of the UK, where sprinklers are mandatory, large fires will continue to blight schools. This is harming children's education and putting lives at risk.

Burnt out schools and classrooms cause major disruption to children's education, with repairs leading to months or even years of upheaval. They also result in the loss of spaces which local communities rely on out of school hours. As well as protecting pupils, sprinklers drastically reduce the extent of damage when there is a blaze, often confining the fire to a single room. This gets children back into schools and classrooms quicker as well as saving taxpayers' money.

## RESEARCH

New research by Zurich Municipal, the leading insurer of schools in the UK, discovered the fire risks posed by 26,866 primary and secondary schools in England. It found the average school posed a fire risk 1.7 times greater than non-residential buildings (with a fire risk score of 0.58 and 0.33 respectively according to Zurich's model).

When compared to 2.9 million non-household properties, schools were also three times more likely to fall into the "high" fire risk category (58 per cent v 20 per cent), as defined by the study.

Despite being far riskier than average when it comes to fires, many schools also lack the equipment needed to prevent small fires becoming major disasters. Of more than 1,000 school inspections carried out by Zurich, 66 per cent were rated as having 'poor' fixed fire protection systems, such as sprinklers. Just 14 per cent were rated 'good' or 'excellent'. A further quarter (24 per cent)

were judged 'poor' for fire detection measures, such as smoke detectors and fire alarms.

## FAULTY ELECTRICS

Firefighters have been called to nearly 2,000 school blazes in the last three years. Larger fires in schools cost on average £2.8 million to repair and in some cases over £20 million.

The findings have led Zurich to launch a parliamentary petition (<https://bit.ly/2RtzKzk>) to urge MPs to change the law on sprinklers in schools. While sprinklers are compulsory in all new or major refurbished school buildings in Scotland and Wales this is not the case in England.

## DANGERS

According to Zurich's analysis, seven million (7,036,327) primary and secondary school children are taught in the 58 per cent of buildings that are a high fire risk.

In June, Boris Johnson pledged £1bn to fund a decade long school rebuilding and repair programme and a further £560m in early August. Based on large fires alone, Zurich estimates that the repair for school fires could hit £320 million over ten years. Zurich wants the government to ring-fence some of its investment to improve the resilience of schools at high risk of fire. Insurers work closely with schools to help them manage their fire risks but the installation of sprinklers minimise the dangers from the outset. It costs far more to repair fire-ravaged schools than it does to install sprinklers. Even so, schools cannot be expected to pick up the bill. The government's COVID-19 investment is a critical opportunity to ensure schools are more resilient to fire. Unless the law on sprinklers is changed, much of this funding will be wasted on repairing fire damage.

**Tilden Watson, Zurich Municipal's Head of Education**

# Online is good news for school governance

The pandemic has the potential to open up a huge pool of clerking and governor talent for schools, says Jeremy Kaye

**B**efore the pandemic governing body clerks had to be within reasonable travelling distance of the schools they worked with and governors had to be local.

If a clerk was unable to make a meeting there would be a search to find another one and if that wasn't possible then there would have to be a complicated reorganisation of diaries.

Now, with the benefits of videoconferencing technology there is the potential for a highly professional stand-in clerk to always be available because geography no longer matters.

It's perfectly feasible for a clerk from Preston to work with a school in Penzance.

This transformation is already happening with the clerks and governing bodies that we work with. I believe these changes aren't just for the pandemic and its aftermath and that they represent a huge, long-term change in the way governing bodies operate as a whole.

## Construction

For too long schools and academies have struggled to find governors with the wide mix of professional skills they need: skills in areas such as law, health and safety and building and construction. This has been a particular problem for schools in rural or disadvantaged areas.

With a virtual approach governors can attend from their home office or workplace with no need for special arrangements. It also makes it easier to bring in former residents or pupils who have the right professional skills, even though they may live in an entirely different part of the country.

The virtual approach has big implications for the quality of challenge that school leaders can expect from their governing bodies. The wrong mix of governors could make the governing body too operational, with the risk that governors don't spend enough time focusing on the bigger picture.

The ideal governing body should be a critical friend to the chair of governors, headteacher and SLT, able to challenge them in a way that will help the school to be the very best it can. With online opening up a huge pool of potential governors this is an attainable ideal for



virtually every school.

We are seeing a fundamental shift in the operations of governing bodies. Governor recruitment usually happens in September, but with schools still navigating their way through uncertain waters it is likely that current governors will want to stay in place supporting their schools for the time being.

## Efficient

There are other benefits to the virtual approach. A traditional physical meeting might stretch to two or three hours, but a meeting of a similar length online just isn't endurable for most people. The agenda needs to be tight and well managed and a lot of governors I speak to find these meetings to be more efficient and effective as a result.

Another advantage of the online approach is that online platforms can make online governance more effective and better organised than the traditional approach, providing governing bodies a central point to store the paperwork and communicate with each other.

The traditional physical meeting will still play a part. Many schools and trusts will wish to maintain some kind of physical meeting in the future, albeit on a reduced level. A MAT of four or five schools may require more than 20 governor meetings a year. This could be a mixture of physical

governing body meetings and virtual committee meetings.

## Interact

The schools we work with support us in not returning to physical meetings before the end of the year at least but in the longer term most want a mix of virtual and physical meetings with a number of clients already moving to completely virtual meetings. Others will retain one physical meeting, such as the AGM, with the rest online.

The idea that people always need to interact physically to be able to join the dots and work effectively has been around for decades in almost every organisation. The virtual approach to clerking and governance makes a pretty convincing case for online being as good as, or perhaps even better in many ways than face-to-face and points to a future in which the two are likely to co-exist, benefiting schools, their pupils and their communities.

**Jeremy Kaye is Head of Clerking and Governance at Judicium Education, a professional services company working with more than 1,700 schools across England. Judicium Education advises on health and safety, HR, legal services, clerking, governance and data protection. [www.judiciumeducation.co.uk](http://www.judiciumeducation.co.uk)**

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# Ease of use is the key

Sheldon Gillmore explains what you should look for in a financial management system

**D**oes your financial management system (FMS) work for your organisation, or does it feel like you're always having to fight against it? If you want to find an FMS that works for you, look for these five features.

## Tailored functionality

Your Financial Management Software should work around your needs – not the other way around. Don't spend money on a system that won't do everything you need it to. Think about what your business needs from an FMS and make a list.

This could include:

- Integrations and APIs.
- Procurement functionality.
- Reporting suites.
- Multi-location and multi-currency functionality.

Over the years, you'll also need an FMS that has the flexibility to add more functionality. Will you grow out of your FMS over the next few years? You can ensure this doesn't happen by choosing a system that can grow with you; otherwise, you're going to have to look for another supplier again in the near future.

## Ease of use

Your provider should offer training alongside your software implementation, which is a great way to get everyone up to speed. However, financial experts aren't the only people who use a financial management system. It needs to be simple enough for everybody in your team to use. For example, it could work like a spreadsheet software package to make it easy to understand, as it would mimic software that most people are already familiar with.

This also future proofs you if your finance staff later decide to move on as they

won't take with them a very specific set of skills that would be needed to run your entire finance function. Your other staff members will be able to fill in the gaps and keep your company running smoothly.

## Automation tools

Modern financial systems should be designed to make your life easier. Automation tools can drastically reduce the time you spend on low-value, high-effort tasks. Look for a system with automated workflows and other tools that can make your team more efficient. Even tasks like invoice processing and ledger consolidation can be managed for you nowadays, which could free up huge amounts of time for your busy team.

## Cloud hosting

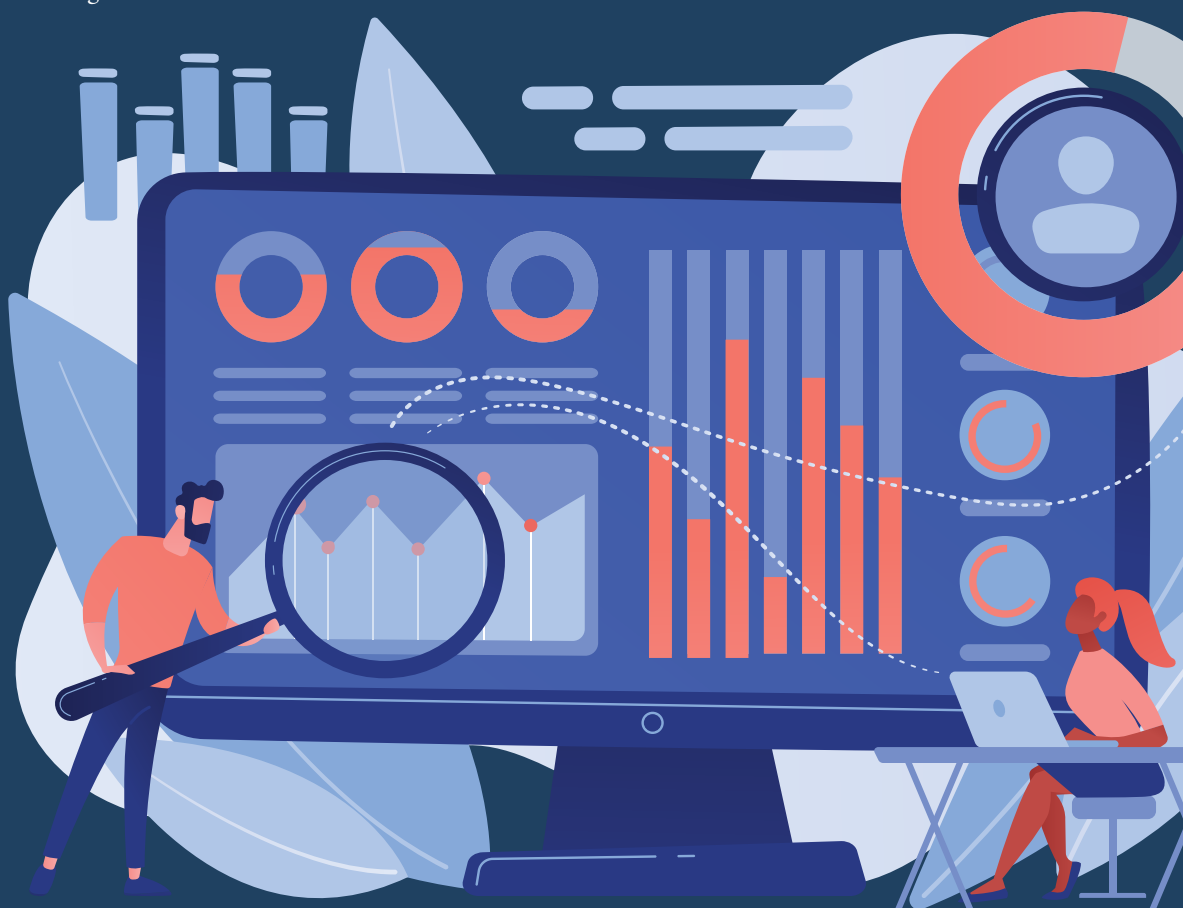
At a time when the ability to work from home is more important than ever, your financial management system needs to

be cloud-based. It's not just remote working that's important, either. Safety and security should be a top priority, especially when talking about sensitive financial data. Look for a provider that offers secure cloud-based hosting to protect your valuable data.

## Happy customers

What are customers saying about the potential financial management systems you are thinking about adopting? This is a great way to find out about any extra features – or any reasons to avoid buying into a system. You don't have to take a supplier's word for it anymore; they should have case studies and customer testimonials that tell you exactly how their customers feel about their product.

**Sheldon Gillmore is a sales specialist at IRIS Software Group**



# WHAT IS OUR NEW NORMAL?

Sue Birchall examines the struggles during lockdown and what happens going forward

In line with government advice, from September we have all returned to school with every child and staff member expected to maintain full-time attendance. During lockdown and the summer holidays a plethora of work has been carried out to make all schools 'safe' and fit for purpose to enable our school communities to return.

Key teams have been working since March to put all of the safety measures in place, provide the ICT systems required to offer remote working and ensure that all of the business operations of the school continue to happen. This is a task that is ongoing due to the changeable nature of the government directives and advice from Public Health England, our local authorities and MATs amongst others.

So now we have achieved what at times has felt like it would be impossible to attain, what does the 'new normal' look like?

## OPERATIONAL

To answer this we need to start by examining the effect that Covid-19, and what it brought with it, has had on school communities and operations.

There are some common themes for all members of our schools, largely around wellbeing and mental health. Certainly in my schools a huge amount of consideration has been given to address the levels of anxiety that the situation has caused, albeit to varying degrees. This has been measured by how well each individual has engaged with the various plans and activities that have been devised to keep our core business operational.

For students, they have gone through a period of self-reliance and loss of social interaction with their peers. Periods of isolation with only close family to interact with has taken its toll, the pressure of parents becoming sole educators has meant that we now have a cohort of young people who are not where they should be educationally. Schools have done a sterling job in trying to provide resources and support for parents while their children are learning at home but this cannot replace the benefits of learning with professional educators and with their peers. As we are all aware, not all families

have coped well with the situation and schools have been at the forefront of dealing with the consequences.

## TRAUMATIC

For staff it was an immediate and total change to teaching and learning which was both dramatic and traumatic in equal measure. Some staff were trying to support their students at the same time as becoming teachers for their own children. Juggling many roles and the anxiety of their own families, as well as taking the additional responsibility to provide home learning, has taken its toll.

Other staff, such as myself, found themselves working through lockdown. We became overnight experts at crisis management juggling the many trials and tribulations that were presented in trying to provide everything from meals to laptops, supporting vulnerable staff while keeping schools running for when they were needed. Production of risk assessments, protocols and policy addendums has given many of us sleepless nights.

So having reached this point, can we now see what our new normal consists of?

Our schools are scrubbed, hygienic to within an inch of their life, full of soap and sanitizer and adorned with columns of posters reminding everyone to 'Catch it – bin it – kill it, how to don PPE, social distance reminders and keep to the right to name but a few. We are now operating in 'bubbles' where we can, isolating our students only to watch them leave school and instantly interact with their friends from various bubbles. Our school start and end times are staggered, lunch and break times are fragmented and longer and staff are constantly chanting the mantra of 'please wash your hands'.

## CHANGE

Our staff returned with various levels of need in terms of their own wellbeing and we are busy instilling confidence in all of our school community that they are as safe as we can make them. We continue to be avid readers of the missives that are published by the DfE and other public bodies, ready to react to any



changes yet fearful that another lockdown is imminent and ready to make last-minute changes to our procedures as needed.

So what has changed for the better in our new normal? Any advocate of change will tell you that, whether forced as in this case or chosen as in some of the things that we have implemented in schools for our staff and student wellbeing, it creates a change of direction. This can be small or significant depending on the willingness of the organization to comply. While I would be the first to say that some of the changes have been knee jerk and as such will not survive, some will now doubt embed themselves into our new normality.

## DYNAMIC

Our schools will continue to offer high



level education, care for our students and support for our families. This is inherent in what we do and what we are. This pandemic has, perhaps, given us a wider focus and I hope the ability to be more dynamic and accepting of change. Our parents are certainly now more aware of the complexities faced by our staff when teaching their children, after all they have all now had a taste of how it works.

## COMMUNITIES

I think that this has made staff lift their heads and see what happens around them, perhaps moulding a better community feel within our schools and a mutual respect for one another. In life the coronavirus has brought together communities, neighbours started supporting one another, we all hailed our

NHS and this feeling has spread into school. It slowed us all down and gave many the opportunity to re-evaluate and hopefully improve. In my schools we have many staff who have taken the opportunity to take online courses and upskill. We have certainly all become much more ICT aware and also more capable of taking responsibility for ourselves. Long may it continue.



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

## CHANGES FOR THE BETTER?

- Life will return to some semblance of our old existence with no doubt a few changes.
- Is this the end of snow days? We now have the ability to take our teaching and learning online, no excuse for not accessing it at home.
- Hygiene has undoubtedly improved, particularly personal hygiene.
- We are more aware of the limitations of how we offer our service, perhaps with more improvements to come.
- Isolation highlighted, how much we need one another.
- Our consumer society will without doubt change. Money and things are of no value when you can't share or use them.
- Work life balance and well-being now has a proven record when it comes to diverse ways of working.

# EVERYONE SHOULD PLAY THEIR PART

Laura Williams explains how to get your whole staff involved in the financial well being of the school

**A**s a Headteacher, your role requires you to know your budget inside and out. You, your governors and your SBM probably spend many hours discussing it and making decisions supported by the financial information that you have.

With the funding situation being so dire, you probably also find yourself in many situations where you have to say no to staff funding requests and try to balance the needs of your students with the constraints on your bank balance.

I don't know anybody who signed up for the role of headteacher looking forward to, or feeling ready enough, to take on this level of financial accountability but this burden isn't

yours to carry alone. Sure, your name may be over the door but like Health and Safety, financial management is a whole school responsibility. Everybody has their part to play and everyone can contribute to the financial health of the school, it's just a matter of teaching them how.

## **Ensure your School Development Plan is costed:**

Every decision you make as a Headteacher has a financial implication. One way or another, all roads lead back to the budget. When you're developing your SDP with your SLT, use it as an opportunity to show them exactly how this works. An SDP should be ambitious but if the numbers don't add up, it's simply an undeliverable vision. It will also help your leadership team to understand your rationale in terms of

decision-making. While they may be thinking of the short and mid-term objectives, you need to show them why the long-term objectives are just as, if not more, important and how strategic financial management supports this.

## **Weave financial management into regular meetings and discussions:**

Introduce half-termly budget discussions into your SLT meetings where you or your SBM talk through the management accounts and highlight areas of both capacity and concern. Learning how to read and interpret a set of management accounts is a key skill that all senior leaders should develop; sooner rather than later! Provide cost centre reports to middle leaders to discuss with their teams. When staff come up with ideas, ask them if

“Everybody has their part to play and everyone can contribute to the financial health of the school, it's just a matter of teaching them how.”

they have investigated the cost of implementation. Today's middle and senior leaders are tomorrow's headteachers so exposing them to this level of financial knowledge and accountability will stand them in good stead for the future.

#### **Promote the role of your school business manager:**

The perception of the school business manager can often be negative. They can be seen as 'the person that says no' or 'blocks' whatever it is that teachers want to do. By promoting the role and giving a clearer understanding of what it is that they do will add both context and support to the financial management of the school. Direct your senior and middle leaders to discuss their plans with the SBM before bringing them to you. Ask them to regularly evaluate their expenditure and support the school through cost-saving and income generation activities. With your SBM supporting the decision making processes of your staff, you will find yourself saying no a little less often!

#### **Ask leaders to attend LGB and/or board**

**meetings to observe:** Many senior and middle leaders are not aware of the level of scrutiny a school faces in relation to financial management and accountability. By inviting them to observe this process in action, it will add context to the financial aspects of school management and help them to understand exactly what must be taken into account when making financial decisions. Also, it will give them an awareness of financial accountability to external stakeholders in terms of audit and compliance.

#### **Involve leaders in the budget setting process:**

Putting together a budget is a complex task. There are many factors to consider including revenue and capital income, staffing costs and on costs, ring-fenced and lagged funding and so on. By involving your leadership team in the detail of the budget setting process, you are actually showing them the bigger picture. This will enable them to operate more effectively on a day-to-day basis.

#### **Make finance a whole staff topic:** Include a

slot on your INSET days to deliver a brief financial update to staff. The more that staff understand the financial position of your school, the more mindful they will be when making budget requests. Once a year, ask your SBM to do a more detailed presentation to staff about the budget, how it fits together and, ultimately, how the final figures are reached. Show your staff just how much money is left after staffing, building, utilities, catering and compliance are allocated. Increasing their awareness of the financial context of your school will help them to support you to achieve not only financial efficiency but also value for money.

Being a headteacher can be lonely at the best of times and the added weight of financial accountability can make it feel even more so, especially if your school is struggling.

Through educating your staff, you can create a support system and structure around you to help both lighten the load and reach your strategic objectives.

#### **WHY YOU SHOULD EDUCATE YOUR STAFF ABOUT FINANCE**

- To prepare them for future roles by developing their knowledge and skillset.
- To teach them how to be financially strategic when it comes to future-proofing and forward planning.
- To secure collaborative working with key staff (your SBM) and external stakeholders (Governors/Trustees etc.).
- To understand the level of scrutiny and challenge that your school faces in relation to financial management.
- To understand the financial constraints of the budget and the rationale behind your decision making process.
- To increase their awareness of the financial context of the school in order to improve their own decision making and increase focus on value for money.
- So everyone can play their part to achieve financial efficiency and support the financial health of your school.



Laura Williams is an executive coach and trainer working with headteachers, SBLs and CEOs

# GETTING TO GRIPS WITH ICFP

Chris Jones explains why the Integrated Curriculum and Finance Planning system is relevant to the primary phase

**W**ithin the updated Department for Education website you will find a section entitled 'Integrated Curriculum and Finance Planning'; (ICFP). The term, designed to describe a collection of metrics used within education management for many years, introduced by the DfE as 'nothing new,' is a formalisation of existing knowledge.

The metrics include teacher contact ratio, pupil/teacher ratio, pupil/adult ratio, average class size, average teacher cost, percentage spend on teaching staff, senior staff proportion of all employees, now clearly defined calculations nationally standardised. A range of financial proportions related to total spend, roll predictions and performance measures including Ofsted rating and outcome progress scores have been added.

There has been much discussion of a single metric to describe an 'efficient school.' I wonder whether 'efficiency' is the correct term here as they are more measures of capacity to deliver state-funded education. By way of example, consider the new 'freedoms' to vary teacher salaries within maximum and minimum values rather than using nationally standardised scales. The inevitable impact of this over time has clear consequences on the budget capacity.

## TRACTION

Responses to the desire to create a universal measure all use these familiar metrics and have produced the 2013 DfE 'School Efficiency Measure,' created to provide an input/output measure, a money-in/pupil-progress-out analysis. Also, the ASCL 'Equation of Life,' a calculation based on these metrics resolves to a single measure of school capacity. Both gaining limited traction across the system.

Many have argued, quite rightly, that these metrics have been secondary phase oriented, that they do not readily apply to the primary phase structures and delivery methodology. Certainly, the early sector-led versions of ICFP did not include primary school structures in their narrative. However, the new drive toward ICFP is unapologetically phase agnostic. ICFP produces metrics of capacity to deliver benchmarked provision against the standardised grant income and, given that most of the grant funds are

calculated based on pupil numbers, this seems a positive way forward. ICFP methodology enables a broad range of practices to be considered, it does not overtly provide a 'health-check' or value-based measurement respecting different contexts and delivery strategies, it allows comparison against standardised system practice. Thus, not forcing toward a unified practice but driving toward an understanding of the breadth of what works and what does not.

## CAPACITY

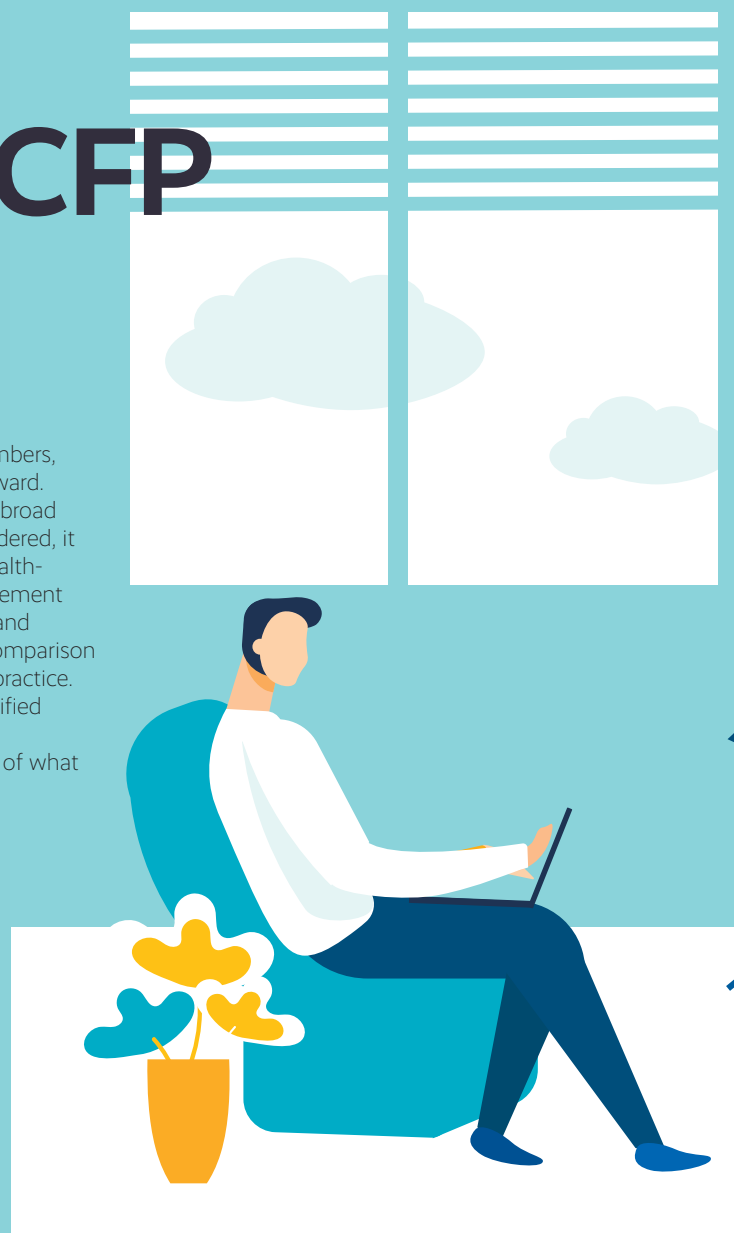
What we do know about ICFP is that the story that the metrics tell is very different between the phases. The use of the metrics on a more regular basis and widely across the system, is prompting questioning about the capacity to do what we expect of a school and distinguishes the great and the not so great practices. In conversation with primary leaders and SBMs I have found the common retort that ICFP has simply reinforced questions that they have always asked, it has brought more formality and structure to questions that school business managers have asked of education leaders and allowed governors to enter the conversation. This is probably the major strength of ICFP in that it is bridging a gap between the SBM community and the education leadership communities - providing a shared narrative about key issues and challenges that each institution faces. The shared narrative is a powerful and necessary move toward being more efficient with spending, enabling more effective use of resources to provide the best learning systems to educate our young people.

## CONTACT RATIO

Just by way of example, let us look at three and explore their application to any phase of education. Contact ratio will, at its core, question a school's capacity to provide a level of management time to its teachers

(time for teachers away from class teaching.) It forces the question 'How many non-teaching staff can we afford?' Followed by, 'Does the headteacher teach?' and 'Can I afford a non-teaching deputy or SENCO?' The contact ratio target of 78 per cent provides a metric to explore what is possible and enables evaluation of where funds are used to achieve local variations in practice. This is different from the past roundtable conversations initiating 'What do you do in your school?' ignoring all context specific rationale as to why there may be a variety of practices.

Average class size will always prompt questions of organisational methodology - single year group classes or mixed year classes? Is the latter inevitable or desirable, certainly in the village primary school or rural small school it will always be a question of capacity with available funds rather than organisational imperatives or simply historical norms. The metric opens the question of optimum class size, there is now much published research (EEF Teacher Toolkit)





and now global understanding illustrated through OECD reporting to inform good conversation. We often hear the expression of desired smaller class sizes, sadly often without specifics. So, what is the class size we are referring to? The benchmarked metric-based system allows for there to be some context to the conversation and a baseline upon which to base our understanding.

## CHALLENGE

You will be aware of the incremental drift created by the teacher salary scales and that it produces an ever-increasing wage bill. The implications of a small, very stable staff body all reaching the Upper Pay Scale 3 position. It is wonderful to have an experienced stable staff body, but the cost is much more than a staff with a higher turn-over and a representation of newly qualified teachers. In this context the percentage spend on staff over time becomes a significant financial challenge to a small primary school even if it appears desirable in stabilising the school.

So, is the ICFP system relevant to the primary phase? Yes, it provides a nationally benchmarked understanding of capacity across all primary schools. It exposes the challenges of funding capacity and increasing costs and is essential to improve the clarity of understanding and communication of the long-term pressures on the system. Significantly it also creates a basis on which a shared conversation between accountable groups can develop strategy and actions with the means to prove the impact of a chosen course of action.



**Chris Jones, CEO CJ Learning and CJ Learning Technologies, is a DfE approved Financial Advisor for schools using the ICFP methodology. In 2018 he released the SMARTcurriculum® App, an online tool enabling leaders to evaluate, analyse and model their curriculum provision.**

## SHARED UNDERSTANDING

**Integrated Curriculum and Finance Planning is nothing new, according to the DfE, but the formalisation and definition of the metrics is of benefit to primary schools in creating a shared understanding across the stakeholders of school leadership.**

**Many have used the metrics previously, but they are now brought together in a systematised form. Questioning can be formed about strategy, impact and capacity that will benefit the individual school and the education system as a whole.**

**Metrics are dangerous when they are poorly defined, the clarity we now have means that we have a baseline to consider innovation and impactful practice clearly, comparably to be understood by all. No longer the domain of secondary education alone, ICFP is phase agnostic and meaningful in the primary phase, enabling dialogue that is meaningful to ensure capacity to deliver the most efficient, effective, and ethical curriculum within the financial means possible.**

# GETTING YOUR BUDGET BACK ON TRACK

Linda Unternahrer outlines what you can do to raise money, and what to consider for the long term to increase your budget

**M**any of the typical sources of extra income for schools dried up during the last academic year due to social distancing measures and fears of infection. You were likely unable to hire out your facilities, your income from school meals and clubs might have dropped and summer fairs were likely cancelled too. You will also likely have had additional expenditure on personal protective equipment (PPE), signage, additional cleaning etc.

It might not be all bad news though. The government continues to fund schools as normal and you may have now received additional funding to cover some coronavirus-related extra costs related to deep cleaning, free school meals, opening during holidays (and certain other extraordinary expenses, in some cases). Also, you might have made some savings along the way, such as from reduced utility bills.

Consider all these points when you're figuring out how much deficit you're faced with. Although it might feel quite soon to start thinking about income generation while you're still taking your first steps on the road to normalcy, it's worth exploring the subject early on.

## INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY, WHERE YOU CAN

Try to think beyond the usual fundraisers. You could, for example, ask for direct contributions. This is fine to do, so long as you're clear to parents that it's voluntary. While there's a great deal of financial hardship arising from the pandemic, that's not the case across the board. Some people in your community might be willing to donate the cost of their weekly commute or the cost of their daily coffee or lunch. If donations are going to a charity you've set up, like a PTA, make sure Gift Aid is being claimed - it takes less admin and effort to do this if you set up donations through an online fundraising site.

You could ask parents to check with their employers for 'match funding' programmes. In these programmes, employers match funds raised by their employees for charities or community groups (often up to a certain limit).

You could also get your community to volunteer and do work that you might

otherwise have to pay for. If you have any parents who are builders, might they be able to help fix the school fence out of good will? Do any parents have website management or editing skills, and are they willing to donate some time to update the school's website, so you don't have to pay an external person?

## 1. USE FUNDRAISING WEBSITES

Sites that offer "cash back" to schools for online purchases are definitely worth exploring right now. Shops may have reopened, but there's no question that online shopping is here to stay. These cash-back programmes allow purchasers to designate a charity - like a PTA - to receive a portion of each sale. Some examples include Easy Fundraising (<https://bit.ly/3mpPt0k>), School Fundraising (<https://bit.ly/3hxGZk4>) and AmazonSmile (<https://org.amazon.co.uk/>).

## 2. APPLY FOR GRANTS AND OTHER FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

There's an array of funding opportunities that schools can apply for, as well as freebies you can take advantage of. Research which ones might be relevant for your school, being sure to note any deadlines so that you can get your application in on time.



“It’s worth developing a coordinated strategy for generating income.”

### 3. THINK STRATEGICALLY FOR THE LONG TERM

It’s worth developing a coordinated strategy for generating income. This can help you avoid a scatter-gun approach, which is both inefficient and ineffective. Consider all of the factors below when you’re creating your strategy to maximise income and minimise risk.

### 4. STAY TRUE TO YOUR VISION AND ETHOS

Make sure that any potential partnership aligns with your school’s vision and values. A lot of common sense goes into this. Before you enter into any partnership, make sure you know exactly what the other party does and how they market themselves.

### 5. CONSIDER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Some potential partnerships could have more hidden costs than possible income. Before you consider any commercial relationships, make sure you’ve thought about any hidden costs and resource implications. Ask yourself the following questions: are there going to be additional cleaning costs as a result of this partnership? What about extra caretaking costs because you need someone on site to open and close the school? Will this partnership result in additional wear and tear on the building or any of the equipment? Will we need to get additional insurance or incur extra legal costs in order for this activity to be done on our property? Will there be any workload implications for school staff?

### 6. HIRING OUT YOUR PREMISES

If your school is new to this, you can lay the groundwork by checking the providers are suitable and in line with your school values (as explained earlier). Then take legal advice and talk to your insurance provider about the potential risks and liabilities specific to your context. Finally, all being well, put together a premises hire policy and develop a marketing plan that includes which facilities to hire out and for how much.

## CONSIDER SELLING SERVICES

- You may have staff with specialist skills that might be especially useful. For example, a deputy headteacher at a school with a successful sixth form can offer advice on post-16 provision elsewhere. Or HR and premises officers at a large secondary school might advise the headteacher at a feeder primary school.
- Before you take this route, think about the following: are staff covered by your school’s existing insurance arrangements when doing consulting work for another school (e.g. professional indemnity insurance)? What’s the maximum amount of time staff can spend away from school or work outside their core role, and who can approve this? Will staff be paid extra for any kind of consultancy work? Make sure you seek HR advice and agree a clear policy.

### 7. MAXIMISE PER-PUPIL FUNDING

Attracting pupils to your school is the most obvious way to maximise income, since funding follows pupils. Also, make sure you’re getting all pupils who qualify for free school meals (FSM) signed up, to secure all the pupil premium funding you should be getting.

### 8. TRY A RANGE OF DIFFERENT METHODS

Try not to rely on just one source of income. Along with the more traditional fundraising done by the PTA, a well-designed strategy might include fundraising online, outsourcing your staff members’ expertise and hiring out the school premises, once it’s safe to do so.



**Linda Unternahrer is a Content Editor at The Key. The advice in this article was taken from The Key’s resource School reopening: ways to raise money.**





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## INSPIRATION IS THE KEY

Gary Spracklen examines what he has learned from the lockdown

In 2011, Kaufman wrote in the Harvard Business Review, 'In a culture obsessed with measuring talent and ability, we often overlook the important role of inspiration. Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations. Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility, and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities. Inspiration may sometimes be overlooked because of its elusive nature. It's history of being treated as supernatural or divine hasn't helped the situation. But as recent research shows, inspiration can be activated, captured, and manipulated, and it has a major effect on important life outcomes.'

Never has this been more the case than now, when we are facing the prospect of local lockdowns and the potential of a second peak in COVID-19 coronavirus here in the UK. Kaufman's words capture the essence of my day-to-day mission as a leader and importantly as a learner myself; to inspire and cause a major effect on important life outcomes.

Roles in various Senior Leadership Teams have taught me that education is about inspiring people to learn and to be passionate about learning myself. For too long, and in too many schools and countries around the world, a growing desire to reduce education into league tables has taken the joy out of learning. In these uncertain times, now more than ever, we as educational leaders have a duty to bring inspiration and joy back into the classroom (both physical and virtual classrooms).

In 1995, Tauber and Mester wrote, 'Teacher enthusiasm plays a central role in holding students' attention,

generating students' interest, and developing students' positive attitudes toward learning'. I don't think any of us would disagree with this?

Sometimes though it's important to remind ourselves why we chose this profession. Teachers are second only to parents in influencing the lives of most of their learners.

Governments may come and go with different policies for education, pandemics may present challenges and 'new normals' but teachers must continue to inspire their pupils by adapting to meet the needs of their pupils and modelling great learning themselves.

The impact of your learning model therefore in determining the lives of the children in your care should not be underestimated. It will influence their thinking long after they have left you. Just like parents can teach their children to lead healthy lifestyles by being intentional with them about how to make healthy choices, teachers can also be intentional about modeling the importance of learning new things, having new experiences and

"You could easily create a school-specific repository of content through the likes of Google, Facebook and YouTube."



challenging ourselves in new and meaningful ways. Here are three recommendations for being intentional about inspiring learners, based on my experiences at The Prince of Wales School.

### PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Taking on a personal challenge is perhaps the most obvious way to inspire your learners. What is perhaps more important than the challenge itself though is the intentional talk about overcoming the challenge. Model to your learners what it takes to fail, fail, fail and then succeed at something. Detail to them how the experience felt and how it has improved you as a learner. This is best done in a platform they can relate to, so why not add to your face-to-face dialogue with them by using a blog, or a twitter account dedicated to your challenge?

### STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES

Reflection is an important part of learning, so try and create opportunities for learners to slow down, practise mindfulness and reflect on the world around them. Encourage them to capture their thoughts through digital media and share with others. You could easily create a school-specific repository of content through the likes of Google, Facebook and YouTube. In all you do, seek to recognise the value of mindfulness and emotional well-being more.

### EVERYTHING IS LEARNING

Teachers need to have a bond with their learners that extends beyond the four classroom walls. This is why extra-curricular activities, trips, visits and enrichment opportunities are so important. In these moments you can model having fun but not forget to highlight to them all that they are learning. This teaches students that learning is fun, motivating and rewarding. So... go for a walk and notice the wildlife. Set up a zipline and talk about gravity and friction. Spray water out of your kitchen window during a polar vortex and talk about phase changes. Double a recipe. Pick berries. Write a letter. Dig for worms. Find out how hot air balloons work. Go to the zoo. Plant an apple tree. Just keep learning... It is our duty to bring inspiration and joy back to learning in these uncertain times.

*Gary Spracklen is Headteacher at The Prince of Wales School: Dorchester, Former Digital Educator of the Year and a member of UK Government's - Department for Education 'ETAG' (Educational Technology Action Group). He was recently named on the #Edtech50 - 'People of 2020' list by the Education Foundation.*

# DON'T FALL VICTIM TO ATTACKS

Sonia Blizzard explains the importance of cyber security as part of safeguarding

Changing government policies, panicked parents and general misinformation. When combined it doesn't just put schools that are working through COVID-19 between a rock and hard place, but under the microscope too.

As education moved into the home, parents and guardians quickly got to grips with the importance of internet and online learning as part of their children's education. Alongside access to online resources, the importance of good cybersecurity practices became a prominent talking point.

With schools opening back up, it'll be easier for teachers to deliver fairer access and ensure e-safety is observed, but all educational institutions must stay alert to potential cyber threats - and be willing to put best practices in place to avoid the loss of vital resources or exposure of sensitive student data.

Threats against schools are well documented. Like any other institution, they face countless cyber security attacks each year. In Beaming's latest report on cyber threats to UK organisations, 51 per cent of educators surveyed reported falling victim to a cyber attack within the last year. With the nature of cyber threats constantly shifting, it's important to understand what you're up against and how to tackle the problems: by training teachers, educating students and ensuring the technology you use to defend yourself is working at its best.

### WHERE ARE THE THREATS?

In 2019 there were two leading forms of cyber attack against schools. One in five suffered a successful phishing attack while just under a fifth were exposed to malware, designed to disrupt or damage a computer system with viruses. It's crucial to understand the consequences of these forms of attack - particularly with where your responsibility as an educator lies in accordance with the latest government regulations.

In one form of phishing attack, criminals send fraudulent emails that look like they are

from a reputable source to dupe victims into granting access to malware or divulging sensitive information. Personal data can be stolen, exposed and even put up for sale on the Dark Web.

Under new GDPR rules, organisations can be fined if they fail to take adequate steps to secure their systems against this. The Information Commissioner has warned that unauthorised access to personal information would be particularly harmful to pupils, parents and staff; people with a right to seek compensation if the loss of their personal data caused them damage.

The risk is also financial. As well as a responsibility to protect 'special category'

data under GDPR regulation (religious beliefs and medical history of students), schools receiving money from parents - for fees or additional service such as after-school care - must secure the financial details of parents and guardians.

Action Fraud, the UK cybercrime and fraud reporting centre has warned schools to be wary of cybercriminals

“While putting restrictive measures in place is good, schools must also educate kids on the dangers of poor cyber security practices.”

claiming to be from the 'Department of Education'. This followed a series of incidents in which bogus emails were used to infect school computer systems with malicious software that prevented legitimate users from accessing them.

As well as appearing in phishing emails, malware can also take the form of Trojans, innocuous seeming programs that are downloaded with the virus hidden inside. Ransomware is a particular form of malware that could heavily punish schools.

Once downloaded, it blocks access to computer systems or software until a ransom is paid. With schools making greater use of technology and the internet, any successful attempts to block access will have a real and immediate impact on students' learning.

### WORKING ON A SOLUTION

Teachers and students are exposed to threats like these in different ways. Without a 'silver bullet' to address any potential problems, schools have to weigh up policy, education and investment into hardware and software solutions in equal measure.

Educators must understand their role in



upholding good cyber security practices at school. The Department for Education (DfE) suggests that “as part of the requirement for staff to undergo regularly updated safeguarding training...online safety training should be integrated, aligned and considered as part of the overarching safeguarding approach.” Phishing relies on a target’s naivety. Educating all staff on how to spot this danger is the best way of guarding against it.

Governmental guidance already requires that a member of the senior leadership team is made responsible for safeguarding in schools. Cybersecurity and online safety should be seen as a serious part of this, with appropriate policies implemented and enforced by the senior leadership team itself.

While putting restrictive measures in place is good, schools must also educate kids on the dangers of poor cyber security practices. The DfE states how schools should “ensure that children are taught about safeguarding, including online safety. Schools should consider this as part of providing a broad and balanced curriculum.”

Education should extend to personal devices like mobile phones. Although this is less of an issue at key stages 1 and 2, primary schools should have clear policies around mobile technology and how it is used. Students should be taught about acceptable use of personal devices, how they interact with each other on social media and where to turn for help.

Taking steps to improve cybersecurity doesn’t always mean investment into expensive technologies. Something as simple as regularly updating the hardware and software being used on a school’s network can help. Implemented updates and patches as soon as they’re released by manufacturers helps to avoid falling victim to old insecurities.

Physical security can also safeguard against loss of data or access. Having backups of the information on a school’s system protects against ransomware but it’s crucial that these physical devices are encrypted, preventing information from being accessed in the event of loss or theft.

It’s as important as ever to be serious about cyber security. After all, it has the same end goal as any other safeguarding policy: to keep school a safe place for kids to learn and grow.



**Sonia Blizzard, managing director of Beaming, an independent Internet Service Provider offering high-performance connectivity and managed services to thousands of organisations across the UK.**

## HERE’S WHAT YOU CAN DO

Three measures schools can put in place to improve cyber safeguarding:

- Schools should monitor all of their systems continuously and analyse them for unusual activity that could indicate an attack. Criminal incidents should be reported to the police and other relevant authorities.
- Third-party providers should be checked thoroughly not just for legitimacy but for commitment to cybersecurity. Vulnerabilities can sneak in through a supply chain, so any external organisations you work with should be as committed as you.
- Establish effective processes for managing user privileges to their systems to minimise the risk of deliberate and accidental attacks.
- Users should be provided with the minimum level of access they need to do their job. When staff members leave, their access should be revoked promptly. All records should be kept up to date to prevent exploitation of old accounts.

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# EVERYONE LOVES A QUIZ

Martin Kelsey looks at the versatility of Google Forms for teaching

**G**oogle Forms is by far my favourite G Suite tool and whether you are a leader or administrator using it to gather information from parents or a teacher in the classroom turning it into a quiz for pupils, it can be a useful, flexible and powerful tool. And it's free!

During the lockdown with pupils learning from home, using google forms as a quiz was an ideal tool for checking understanding and also checking in on how they were getting on. Google marks the quiz immediately, so pupils can get instant feedback on how well they have done. The feedback tool allows teachers to add explanations to wrong answers and even link a video explanation. There are many uses such as a reading comprehension, a maths test or times table quiz. It's also useful for testing their knowledge at the end of a unit of work in history or using it as an AFL task, to find out what they know already.

## MULTIPLE CHOICE

Turning a form into a quiz is done by the flick of a switch in the settings, which turns on the answer key. You can then set up a quiz in minutes. The best way is using multiple choice questions or answers with numbers, so it lends itself to maths very well. You can upload images so younger pupils or those with additional needs can access a quiz by clicking on the correct picture. Answers that require pupils to type words and sentences are more tricky because their answer has to match the answer key exactly including spelling and capitalisation. So it is best to stick to multiple choice, numbers or images.

For the teacher, the feedback is useful on two levels. Firstly, as a class you can see the strengths and the weaknesses to inform next stages of planning. This could be a quick quiz or a diagnostic test. Secondly, on an individual level you can see all their answers and reflect on next steps for individuals. The

google form downloads all the data into a google sheet (that's Google's version of excel) so you can then organise the information as you please, putting it in alphabetical or rank order or using conditional formatting to highlight right and wrong answers.

TA, the site assistant and admin officer and asked them safeguarding questions. Thankfully they all knew the answers, showing that there was a strong culture of safeguarding. With KCSIE I devised a Google Quiz and after staff had read the documents, they took the quiz and received instant feedback. I looked at the data to see most had good knowledge, but there was some general confusion around the Prevent Strategy, which I was able to then follow up in some training.

## PARENTS

As a school leader I use Google Forms with parents, banishing the paper letters in the bin and opting for emails and hyperlinks to google forms so we can gather information quickly and have the information downloaded in one place. Although originally used for parent surveys, I now use it to gather bookings or extra details needed for school visits or the delight which is Christmas Lunch orders! By sending the link to the form by email or text or embedding it on your website, you get quick responses and generally an increase in participation. It's

not all rosy though, so expect duplication and parents using their own name rather than their child's name, giving you some head scratching moments!

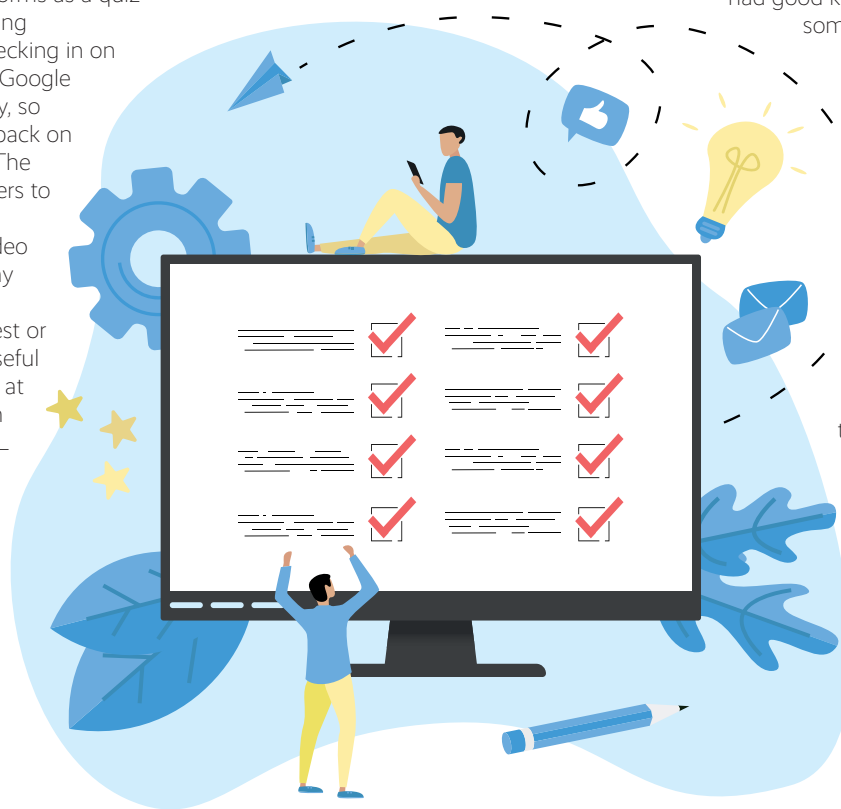
Of course Google isn't the only provider and Microsoft 365 is hot on its heels and the giant, which is Survey Monkey, offers a more sophisticated survey tool, but at a price. G Suite for Education is free to all schools and even if you don't use all of the tools, using Google Forms is highly recommended.

## SAFEGUARDING

I've even used a Google Quiz with teachers! Every year we have to re-read the updated version of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) and as the Designated Safeguarding Lead for my school I have to know that everyone has read the document. In a recent OfSTED inspection, the inspector randomly selected staff including a kitchen assistant, a

*"I've even used a Google Quiz with teachers!"*

**Martin Kelsey is the Headteacher of The Raglan Schools in Enfield, a Federation of an infant and junior school. He is also a certified Google Trainer.**



# TAKE AN ONLINE CLASS TRIP

Dr Hilary Leever explains how to deliver transformative careers experiences in a time of Covid-19

**T**hink back to your time at primary school, what are your standout memories? For many it was the days when normal routine went out of the window and we left the classroom for local museums, when real life scientists wowed us with colourful experiments or when the travelling theatre took over assembly. School trips and other enrichment experiences are a hugely formative part of school life, making memories, shaping ambitions and allowing us to dream big.

The sad reality is that the probability of such external experiences going ahead in the autumn term is low. Although the latest government guidance suggests that schools can now undertake Covid-secure day trips, many teachers and parents may still have concerns about children undertaking trips. But we must make sure that children don't miss out.

At EngineeringUK our mission is to inspire and grow the next generation of engineers and our work spans across STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). Some of our most important work is supporting teachers to deliver extraordinary STEM experiences inside and outside of the classroom and our focus on this hasn't lessened since lockdown.

## CREATIVITY

During the coronavirus crisis a spotlight has shone on the great work of engineers. For example, The Royal Academy of Engineering's Special Awards for Pandemic Service highlighted exceptional examples of engineering across essential services and infrastructure - from the design and delivery of thousands of ventilators to the building of NHS Nightingale field hospitals.

Hopefully, a greater visibility of the creativity and problem-solving of engineers will provide an opportunity to broaden society's understanding of engineering and provide inspiration for a new generation of engineers. With so much discussion and debate surrounding the STEM skills gap, now is the time to capitalise on this interest. Educators have an opportunity to highlight engineering as the relevant, pervasive and exciting sector it is. It will be hugely important in responding to national and global challenges, from the pandemic to

climate change, and, because of this, it will continue to receive government support and offer valuable careers. It is a great time to build the children's aspirations and help them look positively towards the future and their possible roles in it.

## INSPIRATION

I am keen to stress the huge role primary schools have to play in sowing the seeds of engineering inspiration.

Earlier this year we published research into students' perceptions of engineering and its attractiveness as a career. The good news was that half of seven to 11 year olds reported a positive view of engineering, but we must work harder to inform and inspire the other half. Positive views of engineering were notably lower than those of science, technology and maths. Students aged seven-19 were less likely to understand what those working in the engineering industry do and were less likely to believe it to be a desirable career.

Crucially, research shows that children's experience of engineering during the primary years plays a pivotal role in shaping positive perceptions. A 2008 study into the attitudes of Year 5 children showed that their perceptions had already developed into narrow understandings of what STEM subjects mean. Science is seen as investigative, engineering as repairing and technology as creative. Our research suggests there have been improvements but that misconceptions still exist.

## PERCEPTIONS

Gender differences in perceptions of engineering start young - boys have more positive views of engineering than girls even in primary school. As they grow, these perceptions solidify into girls being less likely than boys to know about engineering, to view it positively or to consider a career in the industry. Girls are also less likely to believe they could become an engineer if they



wanted to, even though they perform as well as boys in the subjects that typically lead into engineering pathways.

We must work against societal norms and ensure that children from all backgrounds can see themselves as future engineers.

What is encouraging is that research shows that children who take part in engineering experiences have vastly more positive outlooks. Experiences have the power to change perceptions, for boys and girls. But what does this mean at a time when school trips and external activities might be curtailed? We must do what engineers do best - be creative and innovate!

## ONLINE

The engineering community's desire to ensure children still have access to high quality experiences means that more and more organisations and institutions are moving experiences online. From the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 'Great Exhibition at Home' (<https://bit.ly/3hwhwaQ>) to 'Bring it on!' there continues to be opportunities for primary schools to engage in STEM and engineering experiences digitally. We are working alongside many other organisations and employers to increase the number of digital experiences available. Importantly these experiences will join other Covid-secure 'real life' experiences on our brand-new Neon platform, launching this month to support teachers seeking impactful STEM and engineering activities.

A free online platform, Neon, helps teachers quickly find quality-assured STEM and engineering outreach activities in their area and inspiring careers resources in one

place. It has been developed with support from a huge range of leading organisations. Crucially, it is teacher-tested to ensure that it meets their needs. In response to Covid-19, Neon lists the latest online experiences to allow for remote access alongside local experiences designed with current safety concerns in mind. Neon also provides inspiration and opportunities for teachers to plan longer term experiences when the current need for digital-first experiences lessens.

It is worth saying that when it comes to online versus face-to-face experiences, online activities shouldn't be viewed as 'second best' to 'real life' trips. Online alternatives can provide schools with different opportunities and greater accessibility, breaking down geographical boundaries, providing access to experiences and engineers from around the world. Reduced cost and less admin make such experiences attractive and they can engage large numbers of students, including those who, for a range of reasons, may not engage as well in face-to-face events.

For example, when those working in STEM visit a school it might be students already engaged by STEM or those with confidence who will speak up. Moving to an online environment can encourage those who are less forthcoming to engage. For example, the 'I'm an Engineer, Get Me Out of Here' (<https://bit.ly/2RsPjaq>) project that connects engineers with classes via online Q&As, reports that commonly 90 per cent of students actively engage in the activity, asking multiple questions via the portal. Being online democratises the experience.

## HOW TO ENSURE AMAZING EXPERIENCES

- In considering digital experiences, seek out social and interactive options. Digital doesn't just mean watching videos and passively listening. Encourage online activities that support group working and discussion.
- Connect engineering to real-world role models that your students can relate to. Look for activities that promote engagement with real engineers – with online experiences there are opportunities to access engineers from around the world, and with Neon we are making it even easier to connect to local engineers.
- Share ideas, encourage discussion and set time aside for teachers to think creatively about how to bring STEM activities into the classroom.
- Bookmark Neon ([www.neonfutures.org.uk](http://www.neonfutures.org.uk)) as the online hub where teachers can easily find a fantastic range of inspirational STEM and engineering experiences and content.

## POWERFUL

We know that the next year will continue to present challenges for school leaders and teachers who will rightly be focused on ensuring children are safely closing any vital gaps in knowledge that have resulted from lockdown. There will be many competing priorities, including the need to bring students together through exciting shared experiences, and motivate them through building their aspirations for the future.

We should be more determined than ever to ensure that students have powerful experiences that build positive perceptions for all. No matter the logistical challenges our current world presents us with, my plea to school leaders is to join us in supporting teachers to continue to deliver transformative experiences in creative ways. 2020 will be a year to remember. I hope that the work the STEM and engineering community is doing to support schools helps them give students an array of inspirational memories.



**Dr Hilary Leever, Chief Executive Officer, EngineeringUK.**



# PLAN FOR EFFECTIVE REMOTE LEARNING

Al Kingsley provides guidance for primary schools making contingency plans for continued coronavirus lockdowns

**W**ith government guidance that schools should prepare for potential local lockdowns in the coming months, the possibility of primary schools having to revert to remote learning is still very real. For teachers, the last six months has presented a steep learning curve, not only in terms of getting to grips with new technologies but also in the challenge of keeping younger primary students engaged at distance. It's much harder to keep children engaged in remote learning than in a classroom, especially for younger students where parents play an increased role in the success of home-learning.

While we are hoping that classrooms remain open and safe, contingency must be in place for remote teaching. So, what are the key considerations primary schools need to take to ensure that, should the worst happen, they are in the best position to deliver for their students?

## 1. COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION, NOT JUST CONTENT

Much has been made of the vast amount of useful and quality content available for teachers to utilise throughout lockdown - Oak Academy, BBC Bitesize to name but two. However, while the government's approach seems to be that 'content is King', it fails to recognise there is a lack of direction on how schools should effectively deliver that content while promoting communication and collaboration. If the pandemic has taught us anything it is that having access to tools that promote collaboration and communication at their core is vital. Content is nothing without the mechanism to deliver it remotely. Teachers need to collaborate not only with each other but with students and parents, while also having the ability to communicate with distinct groups and individuals safely.

Having one platform that the whole school community can use to communicate and collaborate is vital. Schools should consider cloud-based teaching and classroom management platforms that build in security and easy communication tools. Making sure teachers are aligned on the platforms and technologies they are using also provides much needed continuity for young students.

## 2. KEEP IT SOCIAL, KEEP IT INTERACTIVE

According to the Educational Development Trust, "good remote learning needs to be understood as a social phenomenon and not an exercise in supported self-study. Aspects of social interaction which can be taken for granted in face-to-face teaching situations need to be explicitly built into the design of remote teaching approaches in a highly intentional way for them to be effective."

Thanks to technology, it's very easy to make social interaction a big part of your lessons. Instead of expecting students to sit and listen to you talk about a topic, come up with lesson plans that involve sharing videos and pictures. For example, if you are teaching children about pollination, you could ask them to take photos of bees in flowers and share them with the group. It doesn't always need to be about lessons and learning. Ask each child to make a short video of what they did each weekend - it's a fun way to keep children connected with each other.

Interactive learning is also important and there are technologies that can help encourage online interactivity. Ask open-ended questions, encourage everyone to take part in group discussions, and create simple quizzes and fill-in-the-blank activities. Use remote in-class surveys to encourage participation and gain feedback.

Look for the right cloud platform learning tool to ensure younger children can access lessons quickly and easily. If they are not concentrating, you can gently draw them back in and keep them on task using communication and feedback tools. Finally, encourage students to partner up online to tackle larger tasks. Give them projects to work on in their own time and provide breakout spaces where they can chat about tasks they are doing. Keep lessons short and try to avoid anything that involves you talking at the screen for an hour.

## 3. LACK OF CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE

A lot of the control teachers take for granted over students comes largely from the environment. Eliminating outside stimuli and being in a space dedicated to learning puts students in a much different

frame of mind than at home close to all the creature comforts they're accustomed to. The only solution here is to be equipped with tools that allow you or your staff to control activity online and eliminate distractions. Tools like our classroom.cloud, for instance, make managing online learning much easier by allowing teachers to see how students are using their internet during classes. Such tools allow teachers to lock certain apps completely or certain pages. They can also allow for easy direct communication between students and teachers and to test the progress of students through small surveys among other things.



“Having one platform that the whole school community can use to communicate and collaborate is vital.”

## FOUR FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

- Does the platform support blended learning? Maintaining continuity and consistency is so important – for both learners and teachers. Having one platform that can seamlessly switch between in-class and remote learning provides that continuity and helps minimise disruption.
- How does the platform help students stay on task? Cloud platforms can help teachers easily monitor students' screens, the applications they're using, websites they're visiting, what they're typing, who they're collaborating with – and help out swiftly when support is needed, in class and remotely.
- Does it support interaction and feedback? Using chat and messaging tools to interact with the class and giving every student a voice, using quick polls to gain an insight into everyone's topic understanding can be used in both the classroom and in remote settings to great effect.
- What features does it have to help manage behaviour? Choose tools that focus students and keep them safe online by controlling web and application use – removing distractions and preventing access to unsuitable content.

collaboration. School leaders have a massive role to play in supporting teachers by ensuring they have access to technologies and tools that promote effectiveness. Don't leave your teachers to figure it out for themselves. Adopting a school-wide strategy underpinned by platforms designed for class and home will ensure that teachers, students and parents are ready for any learning scenario.

To support schools with the ongoing challenge of providing remote and blended learning NetSupport has launched an easy-to-use, cloud-based teaching and classroom management platform, [classroom.cloud](https://classroom.cloud/) (<https://classroom.cloud/>), free to try for 30 days.



**Al Kingsley, MD at NetSupport, school governor for 15 years and Multi Academy Trust Chair**

## 4. ENGAGE PARENTS

For the very youngest KS1 students it is often too much to ask parents to dedicate the time and attention needed to ensure they engage in an online lesson. This can lead to a lack of communication and feedback between parents, children and teachers. The usual progression observations that teachers and TAs will monitor in the classroom can be lost at home.

Here is where technology can play a pivotal role. Platforms and tools designed specifically for KS1 and KS2 should be considered – especially where they allow for

parents and carers to contribute photos, videos, audio and text notes for their child's learning, complementing classroom observations. Using platforms such as ReallySchool can allow teachers to easily give individual parents and carers specific guidance for their child such as suggested support, resources and challenges. Using such tools can also provide parents with a clear framework for supporting their children, encouraging greater engagement and useful communication with teachers.

Ensuring effective remote teaching takes preparation, planning, creativity, and

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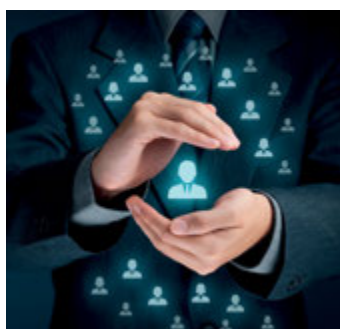
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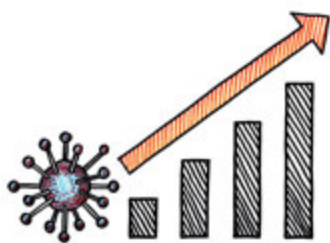


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# ESSENTIAL FOR EVERY PUPIL

EdTech in school is as important as tables and chairs, says Matthew Tragheim

**O**ur school, Wayfield Primary, is a school of 260 pupils aged three to 11 based in Chatham, Kent. The school's motto 'Proud to Achieve' is reflected through the leadership team who work together to ensure that every pupil in every class reaches their full potential.

## EDTECH FOR 'GOOD'

In September 2016, when I joined Wayfield, we had been rated as inadequate in the recent Ofsted and my mission as IT lead, was to support the headteacher to turn the school around. Once we had sorted out the priorities, we looked at how technology could help. Our school sits in an area of the country which is mixed-income but has a fairly high level of deprivation and it was important to me that children at our school don't miss out on future opportunities due to lack of technology.

## AFFORDABILITY

I wanted to use technology to support pupils learning both in the classroom and at home, but affordability was a key factor for us. We needed to look at how we could deliver technology for all, without parents going over budget. We came up with a £5 per month payment scheme, which was fund matched by the school for any children receiving pupil premium. This meant that every pupil had their own iPad to use in school but also to take home for extra learning outside the classroom.

## LITERACY MATTERS

Writing is one of the key foundations in a child's education, and Wayfield was on a mission to ensure that every child's writing ability was assessed so that any pupil's needing support got the interventions they needed sooner rather than later. We immediately looked to see what apps were available to help us improve outcomes for literacy.

## CLASSROOM APPS

Once you have your tech in place, the next minefield is what apps to put on them. As a starting point, we looked to other schools to see what they'd been using and why. We also looked at apps to help with screen time usage as it's imperative that we teach our children when and when not to, use technology.



Today, children need to have an element of independent learning. At Wayfield, pupils are given an apple pencil and have the freedom to go onto many approved apps on their iPads, such as sketches, Kaligo etc.

A few tools are available that can regulate screen time and downtime with individual apps and devices. For example, the 'classroom' app on the iPad can lock down all iPads in the classroom when the teacher does not want to use technology.

The apps we've found that add value in the classroom are Kaligo, which is an intuitive, self-improving and monitoring AI handwriting tool. Times Tables Rock Stars, which is brilliant for bringing pupils on with their timetables. We also use Literacy, spelling and maths Shed resources which provide creative and fun ideas for the classroom.

## TRANSFORMING LEARNING

We made a conscious decision to monitor the impact of any EdTech introduced, and we're delighted that we can clearly see from our results that the impact has been a positive one. Increased collaboration using technology certainly engages the pupils

more, and we've seen an improvement in results and homework completion has significantly improved.

But the most important impact has been that our pupil's wellbeing has improved. They tell us that they aren't as anxious about learning and are keen to take on new ideas.

During the COVID pandemic, we were able to maintain handwriting skills. As the quality of content on the Kaligo platform is so high, our teaching teams find it very helpful. But perhaps one of the best outcomes is that pupils get immediate intervention without adding to teacher workload. A teacher can easily see what progress every pupil is making and whether they are where they should be. We've already seen that as our pupils head back to the classroom, the lockdown has had little impact on handwriting and their writing is still on track. Technology isn't just a gimmick and introducing iPads for every pupil and giving them full ownership has been worthwhile for learning.

**Matthew Tragheim teaches at Wayfield Primary School in Chatham and is also Kent ICT Champion of the Year.**

# LEARN FROM WHAT WORKED

Using edtech to plan lessons for a blended learning approach is explained by Richard Slade

**T**he last six months have been particularly challenging for those working in the education sector. The ongoing pressure to find innovative, yet practical, solutions for learning continues as the new term begins and teachers face the possibility of local lockdowns and some of their students learning remotely while others remain in the classroom.

Teaching in its traditional form is no longer the only option for any school. We have to be flexible and adapt to an evolving situation. At Plumcroft we have had to think carefully about this Autumn term and beyond. Attendance in the first week back has been above 93 per cent and so the vast majority of our 900 plus pupils are back in school. Planning for learning in school is therefore reasonably straightforward when combined with an effective Assessment and Gaps Analysis process to ensure we meet the individual needs of all children returning to school. However, we still need robust and live distance learning capacity for any children needing to self-isolate or in the event of a partial or full school closure.

The challenge is to continue learning, provide structure, and maintain standards for every child. We have many Pupil Premium, Free School Meals and English as an Additional Language pupils at our school, so effectively supporting all groups is a key focus in our planning.

## UTILISING EDETECH

Fortunately, we have the experience of the last few months to guide our planning for this term. When schools closed earlier this year, our attention quickly turned to how to engage pupils remotely and the different edtech tools available to support us to do this effectively.

Having already dismissed the idea of photocopying work packs for sustainability reasons, it was the teaching team who drove the research into what digital platforms were available. We were already using a number of tools produced by Renaissance Learning, one of which is myON. myON is an online personalised literacy platform that offers each of our students unlimited access to over 6,000 digitally enhanced books. Our



teaching staff felt it could be a great tool to engage pupils in a variety of online learning from home. We are also using robust online learning systems such as Mathletics, Spellodrome, Bug Club and 2Simple.

We explored myON as our core delivery platform as the 'Projects' function allows teachers to set project work even when pupils aren't together in the classroom. Each of our teaching year teams created projects suitable for each class during school closures. We also created the Plumcroft Distance Learning Portal on our website to provide parents with regular updates as well as well-being support, music lessons and videos from staff. We have had fantastic feedback on these two systems over the past few months and they have formed a core part of our planning for this September and beyond.

## PLANNING FOR THE NEW TERM

From a school perspective, using an online system helps us to track engagement in the event that some of our pupils stay in the classroom and others learn from home. If pupils are learning remotely we can use the data from the system to identify the pupils who aren't successfully engaging at home and plan a suitable intervention to avoid long term learning loss.

This is one of the main reasons why we are going to assign projects through myON going forward. The system allows us to assign work on an individual basis as well as a whole class basis in an efficient way. myON itself has such a vast range of books to cater for so many abilities, not to mention interests, that we are able to offer our children projects that are fun and interesting. We have been using this system throughout school closures so our pupils are already engaged with learning online in this way.

One project we set during school closures was the NHS Nightingale Project. The whole school took part and the children were assigned age-appropriate books to read along with a variety of tasks, including art projects that could be supervised by parents at home.

“The challenge is to continue learning, provide structure, and maintain standards for every child.”

The completed tasks were submitted online enabling the teachers to provide valuable, motivating feedback that is beneficial to both the child and to parents and guardians.

For our teaching staff, this system can be used to support both the children in the classroom who can complete the work together as well as those learning from home who are still engaged in the activities being done in the classroom. The projects set can range hugely from research tasks, poetry and art tasks, to more formal writing tasks. We have also found that being able to set the children more creative-based tasks has the advantage of engaging most children, from the more academic ones, to the harder to reach pupils.

## MANAGING FUTURE SCENARIOS

My long term hope is that despite the fact we may face a number of obstacles, from potential local lockdowns to the worry of Covid-19

cases in the classroom, we can ensure that whatever happens all our pupils remain engaged and connected to the school and keep learning. Our teaching staff are working hard to plan lessons that can be adapted and delivered both online and in the classroom as they make their way through the curriculum and edtech will be a key delivery tool to aid this process and protect the education of those who may have to continue to learn from home.

Every school will have a different experience of the last six months, but my advice would be to learn from what

worked and embrace the ‘blended learning’ approach so learning both in the classroom and at home can be normalised for teachers and their pupils as we as a sector navigate the ongoing uncertainty of the pandemic.

## HOW WE COPED

Schools across the country will be facing a wide range of challenges as the new term begins from potential local lockdowns to the worry of Covid-19 cases in the classroom. It's important we all learn from the lessons of the past six months and continue to adapt our approach.

There are a number of edtech tools available to schools, at Plumcroft we have used Renaissance Learning's myON Projects to engage pupils who must work at home. myON is an online personalised literacy platform that offers each of our students unlimited access to over 6,000 digitally enhanced books. Our teaching staff have worked hard to plan lessons that can be adapted and delivered both online and in the classroom as they make their way through the curriculum. By setting varied projects, from poetry and art tasks, creative-based tasks to more formal writing tasks. We have found the myON Projects format has engaged both the academic pupils as well as the harder to reach pupils.



**Richard Slade** is the head teacher of Plumcroft Primary School, in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, London.

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## KEEPING YOUR STAFF AND STUDENTS SAFE

Laura Kearsley shines a light on how senior leadership teams (SLTs) can best support employees as schools are urged to return to normal

As the autumn term approached, schools across England were working around the clock to ensure the safety of both students and staff as the government proposed they reopen as normal for pupils. On Monday, August 24, Prime Minister Boris Johnson directly appealed to parents to send their children back to school – stating it was “damaging” for a child’s development to be away from school any longer and the risk of contracting coronavirus while in an educational setting was “very, very, very small”.

As it had been more than six months since schools were open as normal, SLTs undertook risk assessments and put in place various measures to protect their staff and students from contracting coronavirus. From heightened cleaning regimes to staggered school hours and bubbles to ensure social distancing between different classes and year groups – the list of modifications to normal school life was an extensive, but necessary, one.

However, despite this push for normality, it’s important to bear in mind that members of your staff may well have concerns and questions about the logistics of returning to work when the pandemic is still ongoing.

### FOLLOW THE GUIDANCE

The Department for Education (DfE) has compiled guidance, including a system of controls made up of prevention and response measures, for schools across the country to ensure the safe return of both staff and pupils. The arrangements adopted by schools for minimising contact and maintaining social distancing between individuals are of vital importance for staff and student safety.

The overarching principle is to minimise contacts and mixing by keeping groups separate – the bubble approach – and

maintain social distance between individuals where possible. The point of a bubble is to minimise the risk of infection by reducing contact and mixing at all times and to allow easier identification of contacts. For this to work, groups need to be as consistent and as small as possible.

Some other key points include that staff should not be asked to attend in-person

full staff meetings unless social distancing can be maintained and it should be considered whether other on-site/in person activities are necessary as they could increase the risk of exposure to the virus. Frequent cleaning regimes should be adopted, especially for regular touchpoints around the building.



## BE REALISTIC

Ideally, adults should maintain two metres distance from each other and from children. However, this may not always be possible, particularly for those working with younger children or children with additional needs.

The DfE's advice is to minimise contact between individuals and practise social distancing wherever possible through the combination of bubbles and maintaining distance. It's likely that for younger children, there'll be more of a focus on bubbles and for older children, there'll be more of a focus on distancing.

There is no blanket requirement that employees attending work in primary schools need to wear PPE, however, the DfE's list of preventative measures includes to wear appropriate PPE where necessary. It's crucial to keep an open dialogue with your team and try to manage any concerns they might have as best as possible.

## WHAT ABOUT SELF-ISOLATING?

At the moment, the government's advice is for anyone experiencing symptoms of coronavirus to self-isolate immediately and get a test as quickly as possible. If a test comes back positive, that employee will need to self-isolate for at least ten days, meaning they're unable to go to work, school or public places. Usual sick pay rules will apply with the exception that those who are only entitled to SSP will be entitled from day one.

If a member of your team contracts coronavirus, it's of paramount importance they inform you immediately, as the students and staff in their bubble may need to self-isolate and get tested as well.

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY

These are unprecedented times of massive upheaval in schools across the country, therefore, it's natural that employees may well have questions and concerns. Keeping your staff updated regularly with any updates or changes to your ways of working is crucial to ensure they feel at ease, which, in turn, will help your pupils settle back into the new school environment.

*Laura Kearsley is a partner in leading East Midlands law firm Nelsons' employment law team.*



# KEEP TO THE POINT

Simon Hepburn explains how to save time and effort by focusing your COVID communications

**T**he last few months have been overwhelming for many schools – and one key aspect of this challenge has been the need to constantly communicate with a wide range of anxious and uncertain stakeholders – parents, pupils and teachers as well as your wider community.

It's very difficult to take a step back at the moment, but if you have time, here are some actions that you can take to make your communication more efficient and effective – and hopefully less stressful for all involved.

## SHARE THE TASK

It's taken as read in many schools that the headteacher is responsible for all communication – both outgoing and incoming. This places a huge burden on one person in a time of crisis – it's no surprise that research by Teacher Tapp found "throughout the crisis period, headteachers and private school teachers have shown the highest levels of anxiety and the longest working hours. The pressures on both groups appear to have been felt more greatly than those felt by state classroom teachers".

The way to solve this is to 'segment' the different audiences you are communicating with and give responsibility for each to a different member of staff. You might be able to give heads of different phases responsibility for parents and pupils in their

year groups, your deputy head might handle staff communications and the school business manager might communicate with the local authority or your trust. This is also a great way of giving people responsibility and preparing them for leadership roles in the future.

## USE YOUR WEBSITE TO ENSURE EVERYONE IS UP TO DATE

For the step above to work, it is of course vital that the messages you are communicating are consistent and updated. Many schools I know have resorted to sending almost daily emails, but as things change that means that parents can miss one communication and take the wrong action in response.

An alternative is to use your website and update it at regular and consistent times. For example with parent communication, unless there are urgent changes I'd recommend holding a meeting of all staff involved on Friday morning to agree updates needed and how they will affect different groups, updating a specific COVID page on your website during the day and then sending out an update (perhaps as part of your regular newsletter) on Friday afternoon so parents can consider changes over the weekend.

Two other huge advantages of using a



“The better your initial communication the fewer responses you will get, but there will always be questions!”

## SIX KEY POINTERS

- Use your website as a key central point of information and update it at regular intervals – don't feel pressured to respond to everything immediately.
- Involve more people to reduce stress on the headteacher.
- Work as a team to check responses are clear, accurate and positive – avoid communicating in frustration or anger (it's fine to have those emotions!).
- Watch your social media – both open and 'dark' – and only use it for COVID communications if you have the time and capacity to do it properly
- Be open to questions and feedback – but don't answer immediately unless you have to.
- Don't focus all your communications on COVID – celebrate the great things your school is doing as well!

website over letters are that weblinks can be sent through almost all school communications – text messages, social media, Class Dojo, ParentMail and so on – removing the chance of parents being unable to access a Word document or similar – and it is also much easier to translate a website using Google Translate or equivalent than for example a PDF document.

Other urgent changes can also be added to the website and updates sent – and then reinforced in the weekly update.

## FOCUS ON A FEW KEY MESSAGES

Communication is difficult. Winston Churchill famously said, “if you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time - a tremendous whack.” A good way to ensure this is that when you update your website, identify what is new or different to previous versions and put this in bullet points or bold (or both!) at the top of the page. You can then share the new information and a link to the rest of the website. Parents who want more information will be able to read more, but all will see the key information.

Another way to ensure that key messages are heard (for example the importance of

handwashing) is to record a short, punchy video (perhaps involving pupils!). Don't try to get too much information across and limit the length to around a minute for the greatest impact.

## TEST EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO SEND

The biggest problems with school communication always arise from misconceptions. That's why you should always ask a number of people (ideally from the group you're writing to – perhaps ask a parent governor?) to check through anything you are sending out and feedback anything they don't understand.

The time to do this can also remove tension or frustration from a reply – these feelings are understandable but are never productive!

## LISTEN AND RESPOND (BUT NOT INSTANTLY)

The better your initial communication the fewer responses you will get, but there will always be questions! Rather than responding to everyone immediately, it's worth setting expectations with stakeholders – for example letting parents know that classroom staff will be able to answer emailed questions from 4-4.30pm each day and that if there is anything more urgent they need to phone the school office.

Another tip to reduce the number of individual questions is to create a 'question and answer' section on your website where you post the most common questions you are asked – this will reduce similar questions in the future.

It's also important to talk about social media. There are two types to consider:

Open social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. This is a great way of sharing links to new information, but you need to think carefully about whether you will be able to respond to questions through the platforms. If you are able to, make sure that they are regularly checked, and ideally that any replies you make are tested for accuracy, spelling and grammar! An alternative is to switch off messaging or to make it clear that you will not respond to messages posted.

So-called 'dark social' – especially WhatsApp. While this can be a great support for parents, it is also a place where rumours and misinformation can flourish. It's worth asking your PTA reps (or similar) to share any issues that they see popping up – and also to encourage and remind all parents (and older children) to check with you rather than relying on online rumours.

**Simon Hepburn is Founder of Marketing Advice for Schools, which offers online and face-to-face training in school communication, social media management and marketing.**

subordinate cause

As she saw Baba Yaga for the first time, Blanka trembled.

use of synonyms

She was a gruesome sight.

ambitious adjectives

Warts covered her chin and her teeth were black as ~~night~~ a starless sky.

editing to improve a simile

Oliver, Year 3

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# Teacher Burnout: THE MENTAL HEALTH PANDEMIC

Steve Waters explains why there is an increased risk of burnout due to Covid-19 and how to tackle it

Schools have never before faced the challenges that Covid-19 has produced. Caring for pupils and staff; supporting disadvantaged communities; implementing remote learning; and being pressurised to 'make up' the educational ground 'lost' during partial opening between March – July, have increased an already excessive workload.

## THE RISK OF BURNOUT

There is an increased risk of teachers and headteachers burning out. Christina Maslach, an expert on burnout, produced this definition: '[Burnout is] a psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment that [occurs] among various professionals who work with other people in challenging situations.' (Maslach, 1982).

## MASLACH IDENTIFIED SIX FACTORS THAT CAUSE BURNOUT:

**Work overload:** When the quantity of work required exceeds the time available, or when a job is simply too difficult for an employee's current resources.

**Lack of control:** For example, over decision-making, resources, curriculum design, data collection and how to teach.

**Lack of reward:** Not necessarily pay – social recognition, praise and thanks are just as important.

**Absence of community:** Maslach identified that employees thrived in communities where there was praise, personal comfort and people were happy.

**Lack of fairness:** For example, a belief that promotions are biased.

**Conflict of values:** When your values as a teacher don't match those of the government and/or your school.

## PREVENTING AND TACKLING BURNOUT

Maslach believed that workload, by itself, would not cause burnout. It was the interaction between workload and the other five factors that led to breakdown. In other words, if none of the remaining factors were present, work overload was better tolerated.

Below, I set out how you can reduce the risk of burnout by addressing Maslach's six factors. Create a six column grid in Google Docs so that you can make changes online.

- Put Maslach's factors in order in the second column, based on the extent to which each is adversely affecting you. The factor affecting you the most should be listed first.
- In the far left-hand column, write each factor's rank order number from 1-6. Beginning with the first factor, write down what action you can take to reduce its impact or to negate it.
- In the third column, enter why each of the factors is negatively affecting you.
- In the fourth column, make a note of actions you will take to/prevent tackle each factor.
- In the fifth column, enter what is outside your control.
- In the sixth column, write a deadline date by which you will complete the action.

**Steve Waters has over 40 years' combined experience in teaching, LA school improvement and independent consultancy, and is founder of the Teach Well Alliance and a Founding Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching.**

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# A DEMANDING ROLE

When deciding on an acting headship, Pete Crockett looks at the who, how and ending

“...Chatteris fell ill during the winter of '17 and again, for the second time in his life, Chips became acting head of Brookfield...the Governors asked Chips if he would carry on 'for the duration.'” (James Hilton - Good-bye, Mr. Chips)

The governors in Hilton's story took the option of appointing the most senior colleague to fulfil the acting headship and, in the fictional Brookfield School, Mr Chips rose to the challenge with aplomb. Oh, that real-life was so easy! I believe acting headship is one of the most demanding roles in education. I say that having been an acting headteacher; having been a coach to acting headteachers; and having served as a governor in several schools that have undergone periods of acting headship. It strikes me that there are several key considerations around acting headship which include: who should be selected to fulfil the role, how an acting headteacher can be effectively supported, and how an acting headship is constructively ended.

## WHO?

An external acting headship appointment is logical where the senior team of a school is inexperienced or under-performing. Conversely appointing an internal candidate is a demonstrable vote of confidence in an existing senior leader. It offers an internal candidate a chance to demonstrate their suitability for substantive headship and deploys a colleague versed in the school's modus operandi, priorities and micro-politics. My preference would be to err towards an internal appointment wherever this is feasible.

How the vacancy arises can matter. In an unexpected crisis the priority may well be a resilient and experienced hand on the tiller. However, where there is scope for an extended formal handover the opportunity to look at headship potential across the whole senior team may become a feasible option. In extended leadership teams the colleague with the greatest leadership potential may, or may not, be the colleague with greatest seniority.

If more than one person can fulfil the post

then a formal and open selection process does allow governors to question and scrutinise. I tend to think a process is fairest where all interested in the role are asked to submit a statement of interest and are formally interviewed.

## HOW?

At the outset of an acting headship it is paramount that the governors are crystal clear that their core duty for the vacant substantive headship is to appoint the best candidate via a rigorous recruitment process. This should be welcomed by the acting headteacher as, if successful, they will have succeeded against a nationally advertised field. It will be imperative that those overseeing the recruitment process are assiduous in keeping the acting headteacher updated on timescales.

The working relationship between the chair of governors and the acting headteacher will be pivotal. The chair of governors needs to meet regularly with the acting headteacher. These meetings need to walk a delicate

“In an unexpected crisis the priority may well be a resilient and experienced hand on the tiller.”



## A DIFFICULT DECISION

- Acting headship is one of the most demanding roles we can ask a colleague to fulfil. It can be tempting for schools to see it as an inconvenient interregnum to be survived until a substantive appointment can be secured.
- This though does a disservice to the colleague who has summoned the courage to commit to this exacting role. It is beholden on a school's decision makers to earnestly reflect on who is best suited to the role; how that colleague can best be supported; and how an acting headship can be brought to a constructive end.



empathetic towards the unique stressors of an acting headship. These include, if the acting headteacher is applying for the substantive post, a sense of undertaking a never-ending audition, with every action and decision being scrutinised. Additionally, there is the frustration of “leading on a leash” with some decisions being held in abeyance until the substantive headship is filled - this can, on occasions, be frustratingly disempowering.

## THE ENDING

There are several ways an acting headship can end. The first is that the acting headteacher is not an applicant for the substantive post deciding either headship is not for them or that they would prefer a headship elsewhere; the second, and in many respects least stressful, is that the acting headteacher is successful in their application; and the third is that the acting headteacher is unsuccessful and another interviewee is appointed.

Where an acting headteacher is interviewed but not appointed to the substantive headship it is vital governors, and close colleagues, recognise that rejection hurts. The next days will be daunting for the acting headteacher having to lead a school that has declined to appoint them. Their morale may be low and their self-confidence

brittle. It will be difficult but governors need to publicly show support and compassion at this time. There may well be tensions, even an atmosphere, but avoiding working through this will ultimately help no one.

If unsuccessful the acting headteacher will have to undertake a great deal of thinking. Are they comfortable returning to their previous role - or has acting headship whet their appetite to secure a headship elsewhere? Governors should ensure the acting headteacher has access to a trusted expert with whom they can confidentially review lessons learnt and explore how this will shape their future professional development. If they do decide to use their acting headship experience as a springboard to apply for headships elsewhere the school, and its governors, should recognise that growing aspiring school leaders is a service to the wider educational community of which they should be justifiably proud.



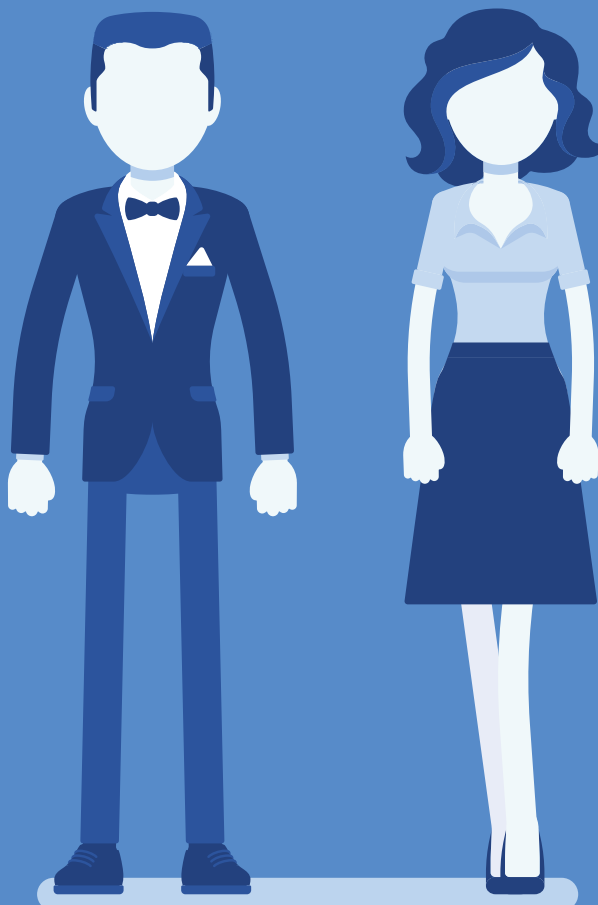
**Pete Crockett is a retired special school headteacher who, prior to that worked as a senior leader and**

**SENCO in mainstream education. He has extensive governor experience and currently is a governor of two special schools. He regularly undertakes coaching and consultancy work with school leaders.**

tightrope. There will be times when constructive challenge is required. There will also be occasions when an ounce of empathetic kindness will be worth far more than a pound of criticism. What is crucial is that the chair avoids trying to micro-manage the acting headteacher. It is also imperative that they permit the acting headteacher to showcase their own modus operandi without too many references to how things were done by the previous incumbent. Governors should ensure that the acting headteacher has access to expert support. This may include those offering more formalised monitoring being deployed alongside a personal mentor/coach who acts as a confidant and source of counsel. Getting the right expert support in place, even if it costs, is imperative.

What is not needed is governors, or colleagues, offering public comment on the acting headteacher's chances of securing the substantive post. Cheerleading; trying to be the power broker; or looking to undermine the acting headteacher's destiny by injudicious comment serve no one well. A school community should be able to be supportive without crossing the line into any of those three roles.

Governors should be particularly



# A GUIDE TO LEADERSHIP

Sir David Carter looks at why some Academy Trust leaders fail but most don't

**S**o, you want to be an academy trust leader?

For the past 13 years the academy sector and multi academy trusts in particular have been my professional world. I began my career as a music teacher in 1983 and then spent the next 37 years in the education sector before becoming one of the first Regional Schools Commissioners and then National Schools Commissioner. This journey is the one that inspired me to collaborate with Laura McInerney on the writing of the book 'Leading Academy Trusts - Why some fail but most don't', published by John Catt Educational.

If I reflect on my own leadership journey from the point at which I became a headteacher in 1997, I would say that there are three features that the most effective leaders have in their personal portfolios that enable them to make a difference to the lives of the communities that they serve.

- They understand how to turn the language of moral purpose into the actions that create more socially just communities.
- They recognise that their core business is school improvement, but that improving the quality of teaching is the only intervention strategy that makes a lasting difference.
- They value and thrive on the oxygen that meaningful collaboration presents to them, their teams and their schools.

It is these three features that underpin so many of my beliefs about leadership in the academy trust sector and I believe there are six critical factors that, from my experience, create the culture for improvement to be established and maintained.

1. Firstly, we need to understand what a multi academy trust is and how as an educational charity the organisation operates. The occasional opaqueness in the system about this sometimes confuses parents and staff, and we need to be better at explaining how



the structure works. The best starting point for this is that the identification and articulation of the values that underpin the leadership and governance of the trust is essential and if ignored, can create immense challenges around confidence and trust in the organisation and the people who run it.

2. Secondly, the role of the strategic leader, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), is a relatively new one in the system, yet it is the anchor around which the success of the trust revolves. I wanted to explore the difference between single and multiple school leadership and the routes that different leaders have taken to arrive in this role.

3. The third critical area I wanted to focus upon in some detail focuses on the need for trusts to build their school improvement strategies based upon the unique performance challenges of each of their schools. My view is that every school in the country requires improvement and the truth is just a matter of scale and challenge. Whether you are leading one of the most outstanding schools in the country or a school that has been placed in special measures, the need to plan the support and improvement that reflects the trajectory of each school is vitally important.

4. The fourth area that the book addresses flows from this last point and is related to the way that a trust identifies and develops the talent of its workforce. I called this chapter "Why should anyone work for you?" because I wanted to focus not only on the professional nurturing of individuals but also how as an employer, the trust takes care of its workforce and looks after their wellbeing. When such a large percentage of a trust's budget is allocated to the workforce, why would any credible organisation not have a talent management strategy that helps every adult to be the best professional version of themselves that they can be?

## FIVE TIPS FOR LEADING A MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

1. Make sure that the trust has a clear set of values and behaviours that drives the culture and decision making processes across the organisation. Setting the tone for the most important behaviours between adults and adults and children helps to embed the practices that lead to sustainable improvement.
2. Build a school improvement strategy that takes as its starting point the exact stage on the improvement cycle that each school in the trust has reached. Make sure that the support from the trust is responsive to the needs of each individual school.
3. Reinforce the message that the trust is responsible for every child's educational outcomes and safety and

the development and progression of every adult employed. The trust is its schools and the schools are the reflection of the trust.

4. Governance should be open, transparent, challenging and supportive. Everyone engaged in governing across the trust needs to be clear about their role and the responsibilities delegated to them.
5. The trust has to be a focus for collaborative energy. The most effective staff should have the chance to have a positive impact on as many children as possible and the best ideas that work should be shared and embedded widely so that all children benefit from the best thinking and strategies available.

5. Governance is one of the most important aspects of successful trust leadership. When I have seen trusts fail, it is usually down to a failure of governance and leadership. I turn my focus in this section of the book to these four areas:

1. How the trust board builds and develops its strategy.
2. Building a successful board.
3. The scheme of delegation between the board of trustees and the local boards at the academies.
4. The questions that trustees and governors need to ask when focusing on the school improvement capacity of the trust.

6. The final critical area and the last chapter is built around two themes. Firstly, what are the risks that trusts need to focus upon and what might be the mitigations to resolve them? Developing a healthy attitude towards risk that does not reject creativity and opportunism on the one hand or reduce every decision to a tick list risk register for approval on the other, is the nub of this

debate. The second theme is both topical and current and addresses the challenges and priorities that the education sector needs to think hard about as we move towards a post-pandemic era. Schools that are members of strong trusts are, in my view, better prepared than stand-alone schools at building this resilience. Over the past six months some of the barriers between the academy and maintained sectors have been reduced with a different type of collaboration and support becoming evident across the sector.

So there it is! A leadership journey and one that I hope others will find helpful.



**Sir David Carter, former National Schools**

**Commissioner and author of *Leading Academy Trusts - Why some fail but most don't* with Laura McNerney.**



# A VERY DIFFERENT LANDSCAPE

Emma Hollis asks what does 2020-21 hold for teacher training?

In a time of local lockdowns and ever-changing local circumstances, we do not and could not have a definitive answer as to what teacher training will look like in 2020-21 – but what we can say is that while Initial Teacher Training (ITT) will vary across the country, providers are working really hard to ensure that trainees have a fantastic experience, whatever that involves.

Providers are aiming to get trainees into school wherever possible but all have contingency plans in place in the event of further lockdowns, including for wholly distanced learning should that be necessary, as well as offering online professional development from the word go. Even if trainees cannot get into school straight away, or their school placements are interrupted, there will be a high-quality training programme available to them with directed activities and time for reading, research and online learning.

We know there is going to be variety in terms of whether training days are face-to-face or distance learning – and this will again depend on local context such as the number of trainees in a cohort and the relative size of training rooms. Some have access to large rooms where socially distancing is entirely possible so these providers are able to bring trainees in, others are planning remote training sessions for the first half-term, but there are two possible practical changes around the ITT year to be aware of.

The first change is that many programmes are being developed to give trainees more explicit experience of how to manage online learning for pupils. This can only be a positive thing. It has been on the periphery of training for a long time now – ‘flipped learning’ has been a phrase which has been talked about for a while – and now it is central to programmes of ITT rather than seen as an afterthought. Not only are we teaching professionals online, we are also educating them to teach their pupils in this

way, and these are skills that will be entirely beneficial in our ‘new’ or future world.

The second possible change relates to schools, and some providers may change the way they are offering their placements. It might be that trainees are attached to one school for the duration of their programme with the potential option of an alternative placement at the very end of the academic year (should circumstances allow) rather than the more typical alternative placements earlier in the year. Trainees might also find they are attached to a particular year group or bubble so they fit with the staffing structure of the school they are placed in.

Part of NASBTT’s focus is in supporting ITT providers to develop flexible programmes which suit their particular context; for example, through paired/rolling/shared placements or by front-loading distance learning programmes and delaying placements until later in the year. I have seen trainees given the opportunity to ‘team teach’ on placements, going into the same class together or teaching

separate classes using a lesson plan and resources they have created together.

This is not the only solution but is one which allows trainees to share ideas, workload and resources whilst building a strong cohort community.

It is important to remember that while all programmes will not look and feel the same, there will be equity of provision giving trainees all the knowledge, skills and resources they need to meet the Teachers’ Standards and be ready and raring to teach in their NQT year. Arguably this cohort could be better prepared than any other year, given they will be teaching and learning in a variety of different ways. They will likely experience both receiving and facilitating online learning, as well as more traditional face-to-face teaching, so they should be prepared for anything.



The 2020-21 cohort will also be the first to benefit from national roll-out of the Early Career Framework (ECF), and the entitlement to two years of professional development that this brings. There are four providers currently piloting the ECF in the early roll-out phase, but the expectation is that this will consist of a blend of online and face-to-face professional development. The mentors that trainees work with in school will have a concurrent professional development programme to develop the skills and knowledge they need to support early-career teachers through the framework.

As we embark on the new school year, everybody going into school feels like a novice (even the most experienced teacher) because they are walking into a situation they have never experienced before. So those going into school for the first time as a trainee teacher, or as an NQT, can take comfort from the fact that, strangely, they are on a par with everyone else in a way that has

never happened in the past. However, the advice we have given the Department for Education centres on how the ECF can help NQTs who have had interrupted training years to identify where they need additional support. In particular, we have advised that attention should be paid to the management of trauma, bereavement and other consequences of the global pandemic that staff are going to need to respond to as children return to school. These 'new' areas should be woven into the ECF so trainees have access to training and resources at the right time over the early years of their careers.

Finally, trainees should recognise that, despite the common rhetoric, not every child they are teaching this year will come back with a gap in their learning, and in fact the opposite may be true. There will be pupils who have made great strides with their learning in lockdown. For some children home learning, and the ability to learn at their own pace, at a distance and without

### WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH TRAINING?

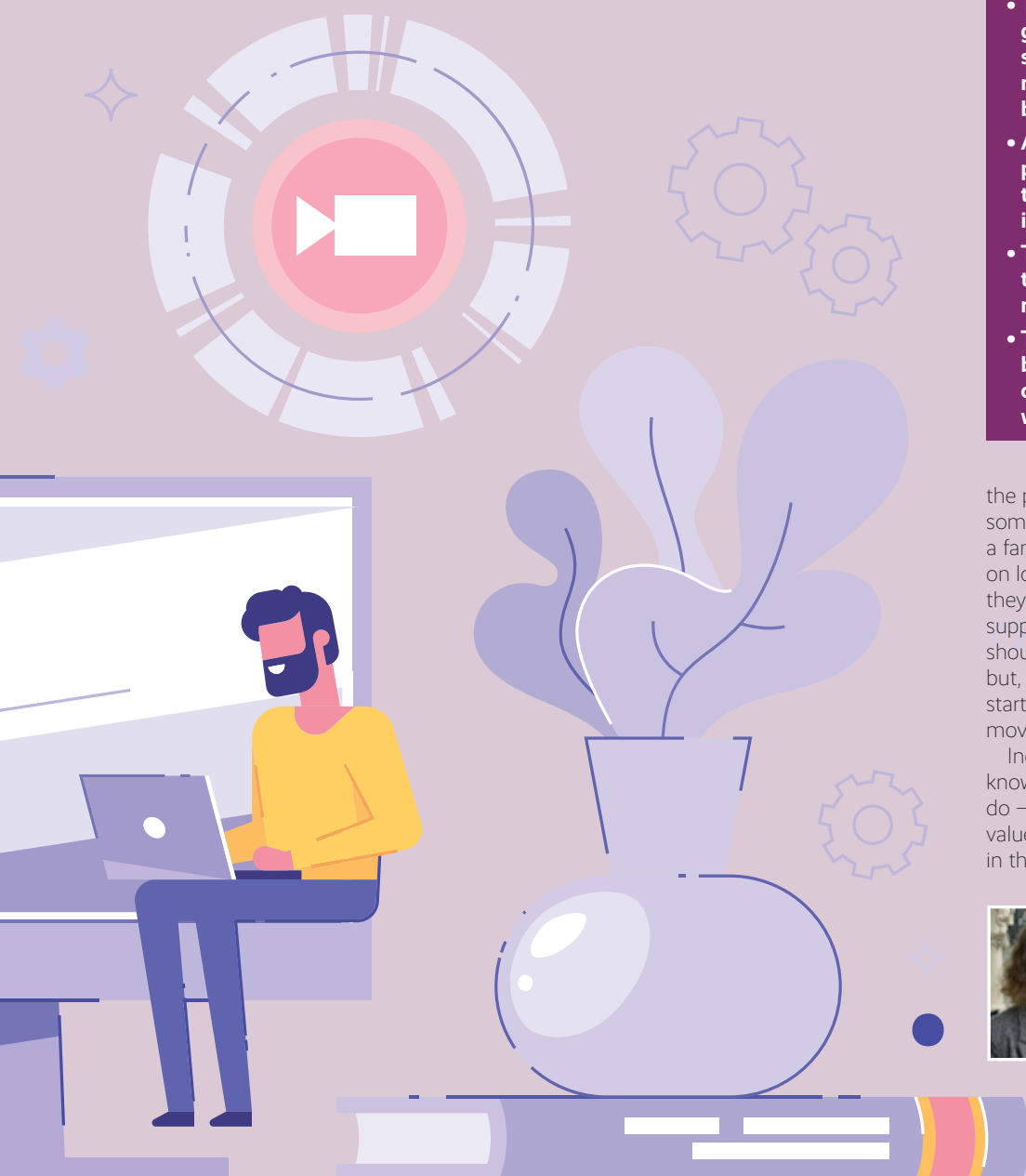
- ITT will vary considerably in 2020-21 but providers are working really hard to ensure that trainees have a fantastic experience.
- Trainees will go into school wherever possible but there will always be a high-quality training programme available to them.
- Many programmes are being developed to give trainees more explicit experience of how to manage online learning for pupils.
- Some providers may also change the way they are offering their placements.
- There will be equity of provision giving trainees all the knowledge, skills and resources they need to meet the Teachers' Standards and be ready for their NQT year.
- Arguably this cohort could be better prepared than any other year, given they will be teaching and learning in a variety of different ways.
- The 2020-21 cohort will also be the first to benefit from national roll-out of the ECF.
- The management of trauma, bereavement and other consequences of the global pandemic should be woven into the ECF.

the pressure that a school environment can sometimes bring for some children, has been a fantastic opportunity. It will really depend on local context for each child, the resources they have had access to, and the level of support they may have had at home. We should not just assume a deficit model but, as teachers always do, we should start from where the children are and move forward from there.

Individual schools and individual teachers know their pupils best – this is what we do – and trainees can be a trusted and valued resource in taking them forward in their learning.



**Emma Hollis is Executive Director of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT)**



# Key messages moving forward

Jill Berry offers advice to school leaders in these challenging times

One headteacher observed to me at the start of this term, "This is September on steroids." The beginning of the school year always brings its challenges, in addition to its opportunities. The Autumn Term 2020 has presented school communities with a task of a quite different order. By the time you reach October half term you will, no doubt, be ready to take a huge collective breath and stop to reflect. What has been achieved? What unexpected difficulties have arisen and how have you navigated them? What have you learnt, and how can this learning support and sustain you in the weeks and months ahead?

*Listening to school leaders and other educationalists over the course of the last few months, and reading what they have written, a number of key messages have emerged. What tips have been exchanged and how can we benefit from the experiences and the advice of others leading schools and educational organisations in, perhaps, different contexts, but facing similar challenges? As a profession, what can we share and how can we benefit from this collaboration?*

## The crucial importance of setting clear values:

Michael Pain of Forum Strategy wrote in July about how crucial it is for organisations to be clear about their sense of purpose. All school leaders will inevitably have been considering their priorities: What matters most to you and to your schools at this point in history? What do you need to focus on in the weeks ahead? In such uncertain times it may be difficult to be specific and definitive about your future strategy, but concentrating on your vision and values, and communicating these clearly both within and beyond your school community, should help you as you make the difficult decisions you are being called upon to make.

*Is your purpose transparent, widely understood and does it inform all elements of your professional practice?*

## The importance of a collective team effort is vital:

The primary headteacher who tweets at @Southgloshead reflected on what he had learnt about leadership during the previous 118 days. The lessons were numerous, but from his reflections emerged a clearer sense of the contribution of all members of the school community, including the school site staff, and the TAs. In retrospect, he felt he had perhaps failed fully to appreciate the potential of the whole school community in the past, but when it came to stepping up to tackle the challenges COVID presented, everyone had played their part.

*Do you make the most of the complementary skills across your wider school team, and do all recognise that they are productive and very much valued?*

## The importance of constantly evaluating and adapting your approach to changing circumstances:

David Bell, former Ofsted Chief Inspector and Permanent Secretary at

the DfE, has written for Big Education about the difficulty of making the 'right' decision in such uncharted territory, and how leaders need to accept that, although they may use their best judgement, as the landscape keeps shifting they may, in fact, be as likely to be wrong as to be right. This requires the confidence to accept our own fallibility, to keep checking, recalibrating and altering our course if new evidence emerges.

*Can you accept that changing your mind, in the light of new information, is a strength and not a weakness?*

## The importance of being able to embrace complexity and uncertainty:

Professor Alma Harris, writing for the Chartered College Journal, 'Impact', reflects on the fact that nothing is predictable, and leaders are called upon to negotiate situations for which they may feel totally unprepared. It is certainly a leadership challenge to process and accept this, to find a way of becoming comfortable with discomfort. When those we lead seek reassurance and structure, it can be tempting, but may be unwise, to offer promises to make them feel more secure.

*Are you able to model how to face the unknown with a degree of calmness and a quiet confidence that the school community, working together, will find a way forward?*

## The importance of balance, self-care and compassion:

Executive Principal at the Cabot Learning Federation, Sally Apps, has written about the process of moving towards recovery, and the necessity of finding a sense of control, achieving balance and showing compassion, including for ourselves. School leaders have to be able to pace themselves so that they exemplify the manageable and sustainable professional practice which they need others to emulate. They have to safeguard their own well-being while overseeing and supporting the well-being of those they lead.

*Do you know when you need to, and how you can, rest, refresh and re-energise so that you have the stamina you need to face future challenges?*

After the collective breath and the reflection, now exhale....

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



# THE NEW NORMAL

Lesley Birch reflects on the full re-opening of schools after lockdown

**A**s the leader of a five-school primary multi-academy trust and a teacher for over 30 years it is fair to say that I have not experienced anything close to what we have gone through over the past six months. None of us have, of course, and this is a first for everyone going into school this Autumn regardless of level of seniority and level of experience in the profession.

The commentary around schools 're-opening' from September is a little misleading. Throughout the lockdown period, all of our schools within the Trust remained open providing education facilities and support to those children whose parents are key workers. Like other Trusts, we prepared diligently for the phased return of Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils from early June, and this duly happened. We also continued home learning for those children who did not return and remained at home.

As is the case during 'normal' times, the protection of pupils, colleagues and their families has been the single most important priority for us – but this has taken us all into uncharted new territory, and has been an education in itself. Initially, in preparing to welcome back larger numbers of pupils in June there was clearly a lot to consider to ensure a safe environment for everyone. We enhanced our rigorous risk assessments to reflect Covid-19 and how we re-open our schools in a safe manner. This included, but was not limited to, issues such as staffing, class sizes, social distancing, PPE, cleaning, catering, first aid, fire safety, dealing with waste, reporting incidents and behaviour.

## BUBBLE

Each returning child – and we had 330 at the highest point – was allocated a 'social bubble' with a teacher and teaching assistant overseeing that bubble. All schools ensured that their staff were familiar with all new procedures and protocols. Those children in school received a focused curriculum which included the core subjects, foundation subjects as well as PSHE and PE. For those children who did not return to school, our teachers provided work and had regular conversations with children and their families. It was also wonderful to have children participating in 'Classroom Teams' video calls and interacting with their teachers and peers as well as completing their online and paper packs.

Then, in preparing for the return of all year groups in September, we had to revisit everything with central government guidance ever changing and external perspectives often adding confusion. The Trust, and all our schools, have developed a robust risk

assessment that has been personalised for each school. All of our schools have prepared their environments; updated their health and safety arrangements to ensure that social distancing can be adhered to; revised

their cleaning arrangements; purchased PPE and additional cleaning products; and ensured that their staff are familiar with all new procedures and protocols such as increased hand washing and cleaning. We can honestly say we have left – and will continue to leave – no stone unturned in our pursuit of health and safety.

## CONVERSATIONS

We have continually reviewed and reflected on this guidance and met with our Trustees regularly to agree a course of action. We have also been grateful to be able to take part in a variety of external meetings to discuss the way forward. Through conversations with the DfE, Cambridgeshire Local Authority, Confederation of School Trusts and other multi-academy trust leaders and school headteachers

we have been able to share ideas about organisation, policies and procedures, which

"All schools ensured that their staff were familiar with all new procedures and protocols."



has been both reassuring and thought-provoking. Over the summer holidays all this work continued and we updated parents and carers across our five schools on our plans for September. From the logistical challenges of staggered start and finish times, different breaks, lunchtime and toilet use arrangements and managing social bubbles, to quarantining, use of bikes and scooters and parental social distancing there has been lots of information to try to get across via newsletters and explanatory videos.

## ASSEMBLIES

At the same time there are things we will all miss which are just not possible at the current time – large gatherings, such as assemblies, in particular. From the children's perspective, yes it is a different environment to one they are used to (and there is lots for

us adults to continue thinking about) but the main thing is that the children are back within our schools. As we look ahead to the 2020-21 school year we feel as ready as we can possibly be and, while this is something we are excited about, protecting all is paramount. We desperately missed the 'buzz' of day-to-day school life as we know it, but on that first day back – Monday, September 7th – it was heart-warming and very emotional to hear the joy of children playing in the playground again and the chatter within classrooms.

## EXPECTATIONS

We continue to set high expectations in terms of school operations, curriculum, behaviour and pastoral support, and assessment and accountability. At the same, we will also react to whatever comes next, and provide whatever support is needed for our children now they are back as well as continuity of education in the case

of a local outbreak. We are aware that some staff and children are anxious about everyone returning and we are doing our best to alleviate their anxiety and fears by continuing to listen and offer assistance where needed. We are looking forward with huge positivity and optimism.

Finally, I wish to reserve special praise for our staff for their unwavering commitment throughout the period of lockdown. It has been an extremely difficult and challenging time for everyone but their hard work, resilience and ongoing good humour has been quite remarkable. What has also been remarkable is the messages of support we have had from parents and families. Our children have been absolutely fantastic and we are so very proud of them all.



**Lesley Birch** is executive principal/CEO of Cambridge Primary Education Trust

## WHAT WE DID AND HOW

- The protection of pupils, colleagues and their families has been the single most important priority for us – but this has taken us all into uncharted new territory.
- We have developed and enhanced our rigorous risk assessments to reflect Covid-19 and how we re-open our schools in a safe manner.
- This included, but was not limited to, issues such as staffing, class sizes, social distancing, PPE, cleaning, catering, first aid, fire safety, dealing with waste, reporting incidents and behaviour.
- From staggered start and finish times, different breaks, lunchtime and toilet use arrangements and managing social bubbles, to quarantining, use of bikes and scooters and parental social distancing there has been lots of information to try to get across.
- On our first day back it was heart-warming and very emotional to hear the joy of children playing in the playground again and the chatter within classrooms.
- We continue to set high expectations in terms of school operations, curriculum, behaviour and pastoral support, and assessment and accountability.



# COLLABORATION AND JOINT PROBLEM SOLVING

A strong working relationship with the unions can support the wellbeing of school leaders and staff, says Claire Livingstone

**H**aving worked in HR for the best part of 25 years, almost eight of which has been as part of a multi academy trust, what is clear to me is that although the makeup of a teaching trade union is different from that of a leadership of a trust, their fundamental roles should, in theory be highly complementary. They both have a duty to put the wellbeing of their teaching and support staff members at the heart of what they do, with a view to championing change that improves the lives of those involved, ensuring they are recognised and rewarded and that they are able to focus on their core role as educators. At Focus Trust, we have placed considerable emphasis on the wellbeing of our teachers and support staff and have invested heavily in a whole host of tools and tactics to ensure staff feel connected and supported.

## IDEAS

This includes scheduled, termly meeting opportunities for members across all of our 15 primary academies to meet up face to face (or via remote technology if more appropriate under current circumstances) to share their ideas, learn from one another and implement different ways of thinking; to take the opportunity to share their experiences, and explore how different ways of working are affecting them both positively and negatively. Feedback is taken on board, and where necessary changes are made. In doing this, and in order to be an employer of choice, we have recognised the role of the unions and embraced a collaborative approach. We make every effort to interact with our trade union representatives to not only respond and react to concerns raised, but to genuinely engage on the key topics and potential changes that affect members and teaching and support staff.

We can only succeed if we work as a team. Where we want to adopt new policies and new ways of working, we have a system by which we consult with them beforehand to get their views. It's proved invaluable in the past and demonstrates to our staff that we are listening.

With the support of our unions we were



able to develop our appraisal policy into a more developmental process underpinned by coaching and all staff and leaders have engaged positively with this. These relationships are, arguably, now never more important as staff members return to school.

## REQUIREMENTS

Over the last six months support and teaching staff have had to put themselves on the front line, work through holiday periods and adapt to be able to support children both in and outside the classroom. Their working terms and requirements were turned upside down and previously set plans and objectives became obsolete overnight.

While we do our utmost to adopt policies and ways of working that are right for all, and our open relationship with our teaching and

support staff means that they can feed in and speak to us about any concerns, the additional input of the Unions is greatly valued. Over the last term and in the runup to all pupils returning, we worked to put measures in place to provide support and reassurance to staff, including individual risk assessments and one-to-one video meetings to discuss individual needs.

The Trust has now also developed orientation videos for teaching and support staff, children and families to show how the layout of facilities has changed to respond to the need of social distancing and where facilities such as hand sanitiser can be found in the building. PPE has also been made available alongside comprehensive training given to provide staff with the knowledge and skills to support as safe a return to work as possible. What is important to us as a trust is that we want to do more than just tick boxes when it comes to meeting

## STEPS YOU SHOULD TAKE

- **Communication is key and it is never too late to review or change a policy if it is in the best needs of your teaching and support staff. As we all return to school things are going to be very different from before and it will not only be disconcerting for pupils but staff as well.**
- **Make it a priority to meet with your representatives from different unions and work to establish new ways of working this year. I'd recommend focussing on one area at first, you will see results this way and it will encourage both parties to focus on a continued improvement process rather than a quick fix or change.**
- **If there are schools within your Trust which demonstrate stronger working relationships than others focus on a peer review learning where both schools can benefit from one another.**
- **Ultimately, we are all in this together and only time will tell what the upcoming term will bring. So, we all need to continue listening and communicating to one another to help support our entire networks to help improve lives and ensure excellence in the provision of education.**

the needs of our teaching and support staff – both as we return to school, and beyond.

## RELATIONSHIP

Due to our established formal and informal relationship with representatives, we feel we can be transparent when speaking to them, ultimately learning, and benefiting from their knowledge and experience of where things have not gone so smoothly elsewhere.

Equally, this helps identify any problems early on and doesn't let them fester. That's why I am now having weekly meetings with representatives over video to make sure we can continue to monitor the ongoing situation.

Unfortunately, I'm aware there is still evidence to suggest that in many cases the interaction between trade union and trust representatives does not always run as smoothly as it should. Obviously, the success of any collaboration will not grow overnight, but that shouldn't discourage you and your team in looking at ways you can strengthen your relationship to help you both achieve.



**Claire Livingstone, Head of HR at Focus Trust**



# Complete Comprehension

A series of books that provide everything you need to develop pupils' comprehension skills from Y1 to Y6

- Thorough teacher notes
- Well-chosen texts that are thoughtful, engaging and comprehensive
- Photocopiable resources
- Resources to support reading from KS1 to KS2
- Closely follows the requirements of the national curriculum

Reviewed by: Mike Davies



Teaching reading is one of those things that can be a lot more appealing in anticipation than practical reality.

Even book lovers with the most encyclopedic knowledge of children's literature can spend hours searching for the perfect extract. For teachers more comfortable with other parts of the curriculum, the nitty gritty of reading pedagogy can seem rather overwhelming. Fortunately, Schofield and Sims has created a series of reading resources that are a godsend, regardless of length of teaching experience or depth of love for this subject.

The Complete Comprehension series is a structured programme for teaching reading comprehension skills from Y1 to Y6. The centrepiece of each year group's resource is a bulging book of instructions, lesson plans, texts and assessments. Sensibly ring-bound to aid photocopying, the book begins with a comprehensive introduction that details precisely how to use the resources. There is also a thorough breakdown in the skills guide of the different elements of reading, from retrieval to summarising. The sections correspond to the SATs content domains.

The texts themselves cover an impressive breadth of genre, subject matter and style, including a range of extracts from popular contemporary authors and an appropriate sprinkling of classics. What's more, they offer a good balance of challenge and

accessibility, fine-tuned for each year group. It was also interesting to see texts with linked themes. For example, in Y2, a unit on a non-fiction text about lions is followed by a humorous fiction text on the same theme. Similarly, in Y6, a non-fiction unit about Shakespeare is followed by an extract from Macbeth.

The teaching element itself is well-structured and authoritative, yet accessible and user-friendly. I like the way each unit starts with a discussion of key vocabulary and ends with ideas for what to do next, such as linked writing tasks. Including a reading list of related texts to explore for each unit is a work of genius. Just as appealing is the way it uses different texts to teach and assess specific skills, while also including a 'Mix it up' set of questions to keep a running check of age-appropriate comprehension skills. Furthermore, this is all backed up by free online resources such as modelling slides to show pupils how to approach each type of question. In short, this resource provides everything you need to ensure your teaching of comprehension is, well, comprehensive.

**PSM**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## VERDICT

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Thorough coverage of age-appropriate reading skills
- ✓ Excellent range of texts
- ✓ Equally suitable for NQTs and experienced teachers
- ✓ Free supporting resources available online

## UPGRADE IF...

You want to ensure your reading lessons address every reading skill with a range of engaging texts

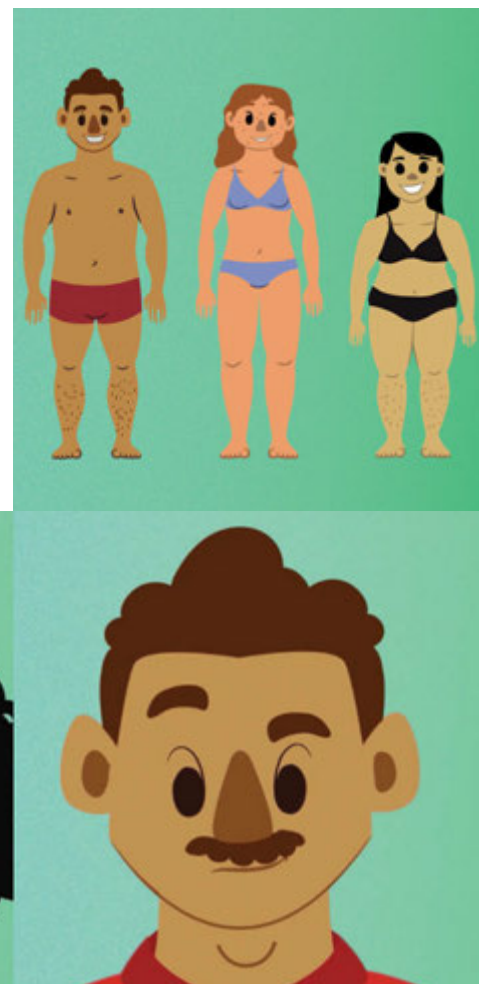
£50 per year group,  
[schofieldandsims.co.uk](http://schofieldandsims.co.uk)

# Kapow Primary Relationships & Sex Education

Scheme of work for KS1 and 2 featuring animated puberty videos and over one hundred lesson plans

- Lessons, resources, classroom presentations and videos all in one place
- Easily navigable resources via an online platform
- Exceptional breadth of topical content around relationships and sex, giving children rounded knowledge
- Sequential overview allows for interweaving of content and ideas

Reviewed by: Adam Riches



The educational landscape is flooded with systems that promise to help schools comprehend the volumes of data they gather, but only a few deliver. One that certainly does that is Pupil Asset, which aims to put schools at ease with the process of using data to improve pupil achievement, and support them in running their schools more efficiently.

This is a super-sophisticated and fully customisable system developed by teachers, for teachers. Its functions range from helping SLT track the effectiveness of their Pupil Premium spend, to supporting office staff in the managing of attendance registers, school meals and DfE returns. Everything is accessed via a top-notch and highly intuitive dashboard with various widgets that can be easily switched on and off.

The Pupil Asset MIS comes with an enormous number of features designed to help your systems run more smoothly. These include the 'Teacher' mobile app, result tracking for summative assessment, achievement tracking for formative purposes, behaviour tracking, progress reports, attainment reports and advanced data analysis.

Out of the box, users receive an SMS text allowance and unlimited emails, and can start using Pupil Assets in relation to attendance registers, school meals, extra-curricular activities, staff and pupil census returns, office reports and the requesting

and receiving of electronic payments. There's also a 'Parent' app for those important home/school communications, event sign-ups and online payments.

One particularly superb feature is 'Live School', which renders your school onscreen as a 3D model. Hovering over the different buildings and parts of the school site, it can tell you who's taken their attendance register and highlight any areas of repeated behavioural incidents. The key benefit here is what it can do to help spot patterns and trends, and identify what might be going on and where.

Data doesn't typically jump off the page and make itself available as easily digestible and useful information – but it does if you have a system like Pupil Asset to hand that does all the work for you. It can synthesise and organise data in a host of different ways to stimulate reflection, while ensuring the reliability, validity and integrity of the data in question.

It's the perfect tool for SLTs that frequently find themselves delving into school improvement minutiae. It makes data management less of a dark art and more of a science, while helping to streamline your daily processes and making it easier to keep your finger on the pulse. Its creators seem to have thought of everything, and delivered a system that's very impressive.

**PSM**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## VERDICT

- ✓ Designed with pupils and teachers in mind
- ✓ Exceptionally well thought through resources
- ✓ Well-designed platform with embedded videos and easy printing functions
- ✓ Huge breadth of topical content
- ✓ Online nature means that the resources are accessible at your convenience

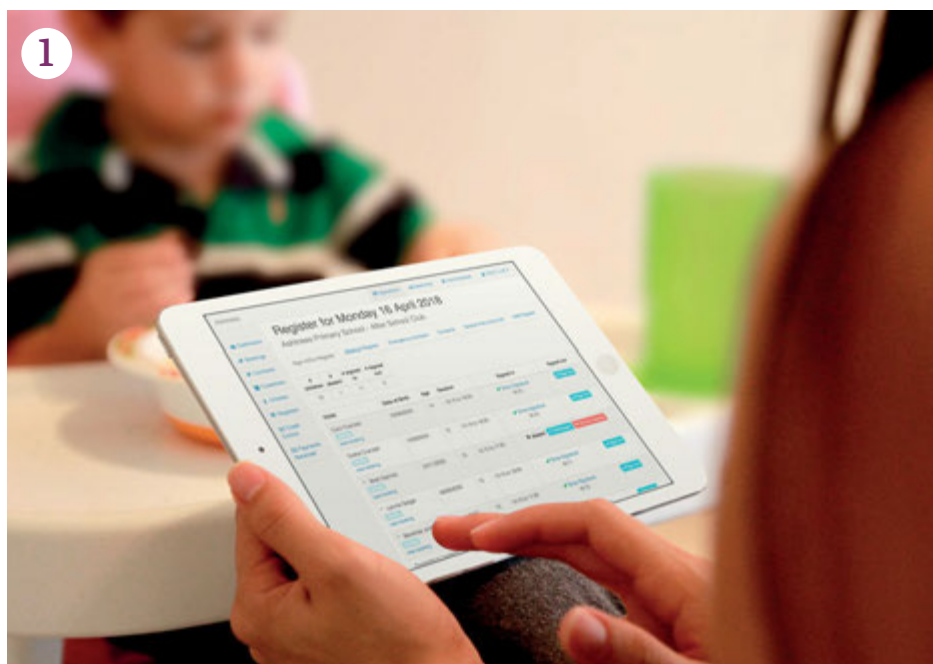
## UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for a fully-loaded RSE curriculum with excellent resources that covers KS1 and 2. Perfect for teachers who don't have a wealth of experience in planning and teaching RSE topics.

£185-£300 depending on school size, seven-day no-obligation free trial available, [kapowprimary.com](http://kapowprimary.com)  
To learn more, visit [pupilasset.com](http://pupilasset.com), follow @PupilAsset, call 01603 631436 or email [sales@pupilasset.com](mailto:sales@pupilasset.com)

# NEW FOR SCHOOLS

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



## 2 ASSESSMENT ALTERNATIVES

More Than A Score is a coalition of heads, teachers, education experts and parents campaigning to change the current system of high stakes assessment in primary schools. They point out that government policy presently focuses on accountability to the detriment of children's education, and that the time has come to debate alternatives which would better serve schools and, most importantly, pupils. This term sees the pilot of reception baseline assessment, which is opposed by an overwhelming majority of primary school leaders. Over 5,000 schools have opted not to participate – to find out more, email [campaign@morethanascore.org.uk](mailto:campaign@morethanascore.org.uk), [morethanascore.org.uk](http://morethanascore.org.uk)



## CUT THE ADMIN

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

Automatic invoicing and payment reminders, along with up to date registers, mean that schools like yours can save lots of time previously spent on various administrative tasks. For more details, contact [hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk](mailto:hello@kidsclubhq.co.uk). [kidsclubhq.co.uk](http://kidsclubhq.co.uk)

## 3 HYGIENIC GRASS

Combat the spread of viruses and bacteria with Nomow's Pure Play Artificial Grass! This is a revolutionary new artificial grass which is made using the breakthrough material, PURETi. The grass has a number of unique characteristics and exceptional qualities which include air purification, anti-pollution, anti-odour, anti-static and the ability to act as a catalyst in destroying bacteria, fungi and viruses. Pure Play is safe and already used in a number of applications including suntan lotion and food packaging and it is supported by the world's top institutions. Pure Play is a high-quality artificial grass that provides a safe, durable and fun environment for children to play on. Please call 0808 501 7092 for more information. [www.nomow.co.uk](http://www.nomow.co.uk)



## 4 ONE OF A KIND SIGNS

We specialise in creating eye-catching, bespoke signs for schools, academies, nurseries and children's centres. We pride ourselves on providing high quality, creative products at competitive prices, along with our all-important and very friendly personal service. Our signs are entirely custom made to customers' specific requirements, and we are also a leading provider of road safety parking products for use in schools. [signs2schools.co.uk](http://signs2schools.co.uk)



5

## WHAT WILL PARENTS' EVENINGS LOOK LIKE?

Parents' evening - it's never easy. This year, social distancing and new health and safety policies could make the event particularly complicated.

Fortunately, with a little help from Parents' Evening Manager, it doesn't need to be.

- Eliminate paper and improve hygiene with online appointment bookings.

- Offer video and telephone appointments instead of face-to-face meetings.
- Automate reminders to parents yet to respond.
- Collate appointments and review timetables quickly and easily.
- Involve all parents so no one misses out on the opportunity to meet.

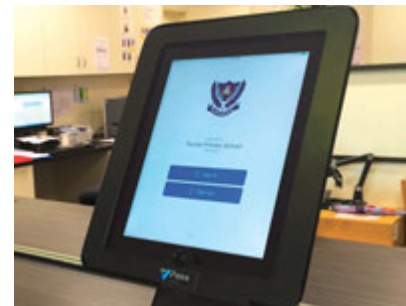
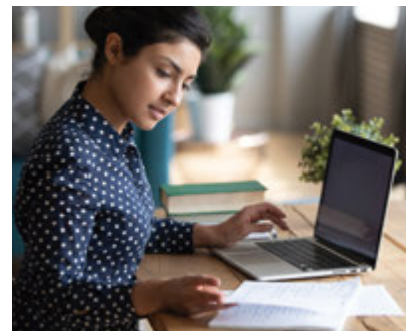
Book a free demonstration and get parents' evening ready.

[parentmail.co.uk/parents-evening-manager](http://parentmail.co.uk/parents-evening-manager)

## 7 MANAGE YOUR DATA EASILY

TALAXY is an intuitive online pupil data management software solution for schools, academies and MATs linking with your MIS. TALAXY helps schools manage pupil data effectively in one complete solution and share information with parents and pupils. With more than 20 years experience in pupil data management, TASC Software designed TALAXY to reduce teacher, SLT and administration work, save money as well as further promote parental engagement in schools. A cloud-based progressive web app, TALAXY is multi MIS, multi-operable and multi-device.

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



## 8 VISITOR MANAGEMENT

VPass is your visitor management system that takes care of anyone needing to enter your school. As a fully customised system VPass allows you to create all the questions you need to ask from your visitors, contractors, staff, students etc. With this flexibility you can now be Covid-19 compliant. Since launching at BETT in the UK in 2015, VPass has been a leader in visitor management and we are now about to take it to a whole new level with CONTACT-LESS sign in and Wonde integration for Arbor, Bromcom, Engage, Facility, Integris, iSAMS, Progresso, PupilAsset, ScholarPack, SIMS, Teacher Centre, WCBS, SchoolBase, SchoolPod.

[www.vpass.io](http://www.vpass.io)



6

## ACCESSIBLE AND FUN

Alderman Tooling has launched a new cost-effective portable handwashing station for schools. Requiring no plumbing, the sinks can be deployed quickly wherever they are needed. Indoors, staff and students can wash their hands near their classrooms, without needing to leave their designated areas or bubbles. Outdoors, students can

wash their hands in the playground as soon as they arrive, or before returning to classrooms after breaktimes. With an easy-to-use foot pump, and accommodating soap and a mirror, handwashing becomes a fun experience for all ages, and minimal supervision is needed.

[www.aldermantooling.co.uk/jengu](http://www.aldermantooling.co.uk/jengu)

# Will there be festive fun?

Hilary Goldsmith has some thoughts on a socially distanced Christmas

**B**y now we're pretty much used to social distancing in schools, and having to accept that some things just can't happen the way they used to do. But one thing we haven't really thought about yet is Christmas and how our winter-term celebrations might have to take another form.

So how will we deliver a celebration of joy, tradition and wintery wonder for students and their families with so many rules preventing us from being close to each other at what would usually be our most affectionate time of year?

First off, think about your audience capacity. If you can normally fill your school hall four times over with the Nativity Show audience, you're going to have to re-think the number of shows you put on. Even if you put a sprig of holly on every other seat to deter buttock-spread, you're going to have to think about crowding - especially given the enormous stage you're going to have to build to fit all the children on. After all, no-one wants to see a pantomime Rudolph with his shiny red nose on stage, and his backend stuck in the infants' toilets.

## Digital

Of course you could think about going digital, but are you really brave enough to write the Zoom instructions for the local community, and handle the backlash of the unmuted frustrations of those parents, carers and grandparents with technological challenges? We all want our school shows to be memorable, but do you really want to see your Instagram profile heading up the Daily Mail story of how seven year old Amelia's 'Little Drummer Boy' solo got spammed by a russian porn-bot? (The 'Rumpy-pum-pumpy' headline alone is the stuff of nightmares). Online live shows are a bad idea, move on. If collective singing is still banned in December, you could try teaching the

children a festive song in sign language. A lovely idea until you realise that 'those' year 5 boys will absolutely and undoubtedly slip a few extra hand signs into the performance that definitely weren't on the script. It's a political minefield!

So the Christmas play has to be where it's at. A modern take on an ancient story. The story of how three wise men followed a GPS location track-and-trace system to visit a new-born child. The child that had been born in a stable due to the hotel's capacity limitations, and where the wise men, unable to see the clinically-isolated child, leave their gifts of gold, meal vouchers and disinfectant wipes in a touch-free drop box, cleaned every hour by the hotel's dedicated sanitisation team.

## Problem

But then there's the Santa problem. No matter how you spin it, there's no way round the quarantine restrictions from the North Pole, and even if old Papa Claus did set off early and spent two weeks isolating in a Premier Inn in Didsbury just for your event, what's he going to do when he gets here? There'll be no room in the car park for sleighs

because that's now the Year 6 playground. Any jingle bells will have to be disinfected in advance of any jingling, candy cane licking is strictly prohibited and even an elf of the highest order would struggle to manage the 62 metre gaps in the queue for the Santa's cabin. The best we could hope for is some kind of catapult system where hermetically-sealed presents are launched towards children from a safe distance, but the risk-assessment alone makes that a bit of a nightmare. This one definitely needs more thought.


## Goosey

And even the half-time refreshments will have to be re-thought. While a bring-your-own mince pie scheme might just about pass muster, giving guests free rein to bring their own drinks can only end in tears. No one needs to see the Year 3 mums' group after downing a crate of home-made mulled wine, things could get very ugly. And if the PTA are fundraising at the carol signing, remember to clearly mark the collection buckets as 'cash only' to avoid them being used for the disposal of winter-cold masks and goosey tissues.

This year's winter concerts will be like no other, and the challenges we face will be ones we haven't even thought of yet. But one thing we do know is that up and down the land our teachers, TAs, site teams, office staff, canteen teams, IT technicians and pastoral managers will do everything they can to make Christmas 2020 as magical and memorable as it possibly can be for the wonderful children that are entrusted to our care.

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

 @sbl365

 sbl365.co.uk

"There'll be no room in the car park for sleighs because that's now the Year 6 playground."



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**Schools**

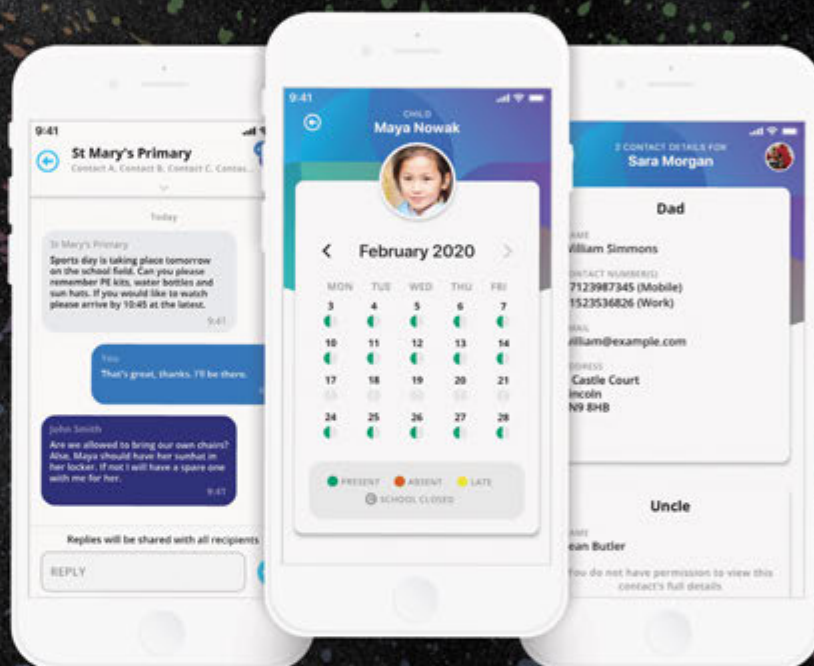
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