

February 2026

# *The Independent Schools Magazine*



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# In this issue...



## New dyslexia provision

Moon Hall School, Surrey, a specialist school for dyslexic pupils, is set to open a new satellite school, Moon Hall Copthorne, for children aged 7 to 11. Accepting its first pupils in September 2026, the school will be located within the Copthorne Prep campus on the Surrey/Sussex border.

Welcoming partner Moon Hall School to its campus, Copthorne Prep, which is part of the Caterham Family of Schools, will continue to operate as a growing prep school in its own right, with no changes to its educational provision, its admissions or current operation.

Moon Hall Copthorne is a direct response to the lack of mainstream dyslexia education across London and the South East. It will have a separate dedicated base within the Copthorne campus, complete with its own classrooms, parking, and access.

Moon Hall Copthorne pupils will receive Moon Hall's specialist teaching and support while benefiting from being part of the wider life and community at Copthorne Prep, with access to Copthorne's facilities, including outdoor learning spaces, sports grounds, performing arts facilities, swimming pool, and specialist teaching rooms.

Head of Copthorne Prep, Kylie McGregor, commented: "We are delighted to welcome Moon Hall as partners on our large campus. This partnership will bring additional expertise into our wider school community with partners who share our values of excellence in education and ensuring young people can reach their full potential.

Above all, it enables Copthorne Prep and Moon Hall pupils to learn, play, and thrive, and opens up additional co-curricular opportunities for both organisations."

Pictured (l to r): Kylie McGregor, Head of Copthorne Prep with Michelle Catterson, Executive Head of Moon Hall

### Cover background

## AI in education

With artificial intelligence (AI) looking like it's here to stay, read about how schools can enhance rather than replace the human connections that make great teaching possible, and find out more about the issue of bias in GenAI and how it's possible for schools to address it.

See the feature on pages 4 to 5.

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## Is your school mentioned?

### Schools featured in this issue include:

Abbey Gate College; Alleyn's School; Banstead Prep School; The Beacon School; Belmont School; Bishop's Stortford College; Bosworth Independent School; Bromley High School; Bryanston; Clifton Hall School; Copthorne Prep School; The Croft Preparatory School; Dame Allan's Schools; Duncombe School; Embley School; Exeter Cathedral School; Fairfield Prep School; Francis Holland Sloane Square; Gordonstoun; Ghyll Royd School; Haberdashers' Elstree Schools; Haberdashers' Monmouth School; Haileybury; Hall School Wimbledon; The High School of Glasgow; Highfield and Brookham School; Hunter Hall School; Kimbolton School; Kingham Hill School; Kingswood School; Lancing College; Leweston School; Loughborough Grammar School; Moon Hall Copthorne; Moon Hall School; Monkton Combe School; Morrison's Academy; Newcastle High School for Girls; Oakham School; Palmers Green High School; Priory School of Our Lady of Walsingham; The Purcell School; Queenswood School; Rendcomb College; RGS Worcester; Russell House School; St George's, Ascot; St Mary's School, Colchester; Tring Park School for the Performing Arts; Tudor Hall School; Westbourne International; Westholme; Woodbridge School; Wyldcliffe College; Wycombe Abbey; York House School

# Independent schools, AI, and the human core of education

How can schools use AI to enhance – rather than replace – the human relationships that make great teaching possible? Vice Principal of Westbourne International, Ed Swanwick, examines how the sector's independence can enable innovation.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant concept; it's a present reality reshaping industries at extraordinary speed. In the workplace, AI is automating everything from data entry to complex analytical tasks, often performing them more efficiently than humans. This shift will change the kinds of jobs available to today's students. Technical know-how will still matter, but the skills most in demand will be those that make us uniquely human: empathy, creativity, adaptability, and the ability to collaborate.

The challenge for education is clear – adapt, and quickly. Here, independent schools have a unique advantage. Relatively free from the constraints of government bureaucracy, and certainly more so than the maintained sector, we are able to respond with agility, experimenting with new approaches and, in doing so, adjusting our course rapidly. This independence makes our schools well-placed to lead the way in shaping an education system fit for the AI age – while protecting the human heart of learning.

## Why independent schools can lead the way

Independent schools can and should be laboratories of innovation. Despite the numerous challenges facing our sector, our most valuable attribute, our independence, affords us the freedom to pilot bold curriculum reforms, integrate new technologies, and reimagine assessment without waiting years for policy change. This ability to pivot means we can not only prepare our own students for the future but also provide a model for the wider education sector.

This future-ready approach to education is something Westbourne International has been leading for many years now, not just since the mainstream adoption of AI. Indeed, our approach has seen us win numerous awards for innovation such as the Independent Schools Association award for innovation in 2024.

Visit: [www.westbourne.international](http://www.westbourne.international)

But leadership in this moment is not just about adopting the newest AI tools. It's about setting the example for how technology can be harnessed to strengthen – not erode – the personal connections and social learning that make education transformative.

## The human core: why teachers remain irreplaceable

Decades of educational research affirm what every great teacher already knows: learning is deeply social. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, show that students learn best when guided by a more knowledgeable other who can adapt support moment-by-moment.

Motivation studies reveal that persistence comes less from grades or automated prompts than from the belief and encouragement of a trusted teacher. Research into metacognition and growth mindset confirms that reflective questioning, feedback, and modelling of learning behaviours are most impactful when they happen in the context of genuine human relationships. Even neuroscience tells us that rich, in-person interaction stimulates brain networks essential for deep learning.

AI can simulate aspects of this, but it cannot authentically replicate it. A teacher's ability to inspire, notice subtle shifts in mood, and build trust is still beyond the reach of algorithms.

## AI as a powerful partner, not a replacement

When used well, AI can free teachers from repetitive marking, offer instant personalised feedback, and make resources more accessible. It can identify learning gaps quickly and suggest targeted practice, allowing teachers to focus their time where it matters most – guiding, inspiring, and connecting with students.

Independent schools have the scope to design AI strategies that deliberately keep the teacher at the centre. In this model, AI amplifies a teacher's reach and effectiveness

rather than replacing the human presence that makes learning meaningful.

One such project we have undertaken at Westbourne International that harnesses the power of AI to compliment the work of our teachers is an AI Tutor, affectionately named KnowVie (short for KnowVa Coach). The project, spear-headed by our Digital Director, Stuart Ayres, has involved designing an interface to an existing Large Language Model, that we have subsequently "taught" the intricacies of the IB curriculum and the syllabi of each of the subjects we offer at Westbourne. We have then programmed KnowVie to produce a range of IB exam-type questions in any given subject, to review the students' responses, and then to ask a series of socratic questions that challenge the students to think more deeply about their responses, developing a greater analytical depth to their understanding.

Far from replacing the teacher, the AI tutor compliments the learning that takes place in lessons. This enables students to complete more exam-style practice tasks, receive feedback and deepen their thinking, whilst affording our teachers more time to focus on designing rich, engaging and well-structured lessons.

## Preparing students for the AI-era workforce

As AI increasingly takes over routine and even some complex cognitive work, the careers that remain will increasingly involve human-to-human connection: healthcare, education, social work, leadership, and creative industries, for example. These roles demand not just knowledge, but emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and the ability to navigate complexity.

Independent schools can be pioneers in aligning curricula to this reality. By blending AI-enhanced learning with rich teacher mentorship, they can equip students with the adaptability, empathy, and collaborative skills



they will need to thrive – and to contribute meaningfully to society.

## Innovation with integrity

For independent schools, the opportunity is twofold: to be at the forefront of educational innovation, and to safeguard the irreplaceable human relationships at its core. By piloting AI tools responsibly, sharing our findings openly, and modelling how to integrate technology without losing the human element, our schools can provide a genuine public benefit.

This is one of the key motivations behind our decision at Westbourne International to make KnowVa Coach freely available to any educator or student wishing to trial it. Our mission is to develop future-ready leaders with the curiosity, creativity, and capability to shape a rapidly developing world. We see no reason to limit that vision to our own students, and we welcome all to share in that journey.

## Conclusion: a dual role for independent schools

The future of education will not be defined by AI alone, but by how well we combine the speed and efficiency of technology with the empathy and adaptability of human teachers. Independent schools, with their freedom to innovate and their commitment to excellence, are ideally placed to lead this transformation.

In the AI age, one of the most valuable skills in education leadership will be knowing what not to automate. And that, perhaps, is the greatest opportunity independent schools have: to show that the path forward lies not in replacing teachers, but in empowering them – and their students – through technology used wisely.

# AI bias: notice, mitigate, and educate

School leaders are increasingly called upon to navigate the opportunities and risks of generative AI (GenAI) in schools. One of the most pressing – and often overlooked – challenges is bias: the ways in which GenAI can reinforce stereotypes and even exclude certain individuals and communities. But what can schools do to address it?

Director of Innovation at Haberdashers' Elstree Schools (Habs), Hertfordshire, Clare Jarmy, who recently co-authored a chapter on the topic with Sabrina Nanji (Habs EDI Lead and Head of Geography) and Enora Hauduc (Student AI Champion) for a book, offers some thoughts and outlines the approach they are taking.



## Why does GenAI bias matter in schools?

At Habs, our community is richly diverse, with students from a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. We have worked hard to foster a sense of belonging, but our experience with GenAI has shown us how easily technology can undermine this work.

Take a simple example: we asked GenAI to create a game using girls' names. The names it generated – Olivia, Sophia, Alice – did not reflect our student body at all. Where were Aalia, Saanvi, or Yasmine? Names are deeply tied to identity, and their omission sends a powerful message about who is seen and valued.

This is not just about names. When we used AI image generators to create pictures of certain professions or successful students, the outputs almost always depicted white males. Only by explicitly asking for diversity did we see any change – and even then, the results often felt tokenistic or stereotypical.

## What causes GenAI bias?

GenAI systems do not “think” like humans. They generate outputs based on patterns in the data they have been trained on. If that data is biased, overrepresenting certain groups and underrepresenting others, the outputs will be too. As more online content is generated by AI, these biases can become amplified in a feedback loop.

This matters for all our students. When GenAI repeatedly centres certain names, faces, or stories, it narrows the knowledge base our students are exposed to. It can subtly signal who “belongs” in certain spaces, undermining confidence and participation for those left out.

## What can schools do? Notice, mitigate, educate.

At Habs, we have adopted a three-pronged approach:

### 1. Notice the bias, and help others notice it.

We make GenAI bias part of the conversation. It features in staff training, parent evenings, student assemblies, and our AI guidance. We are introducing

an “AI Concern” button on staff and student dashboards so that anyone can report biased outputs, helping us monitor trends and respond quickly.

### 2. Mitigate the bias while being critical of the need to do so.

Staff are encouraged to specify diversity in their prompts and to critically evaluate GenAI outputs. While it is frustrating that we still have to ask for representation, we have turned this into an opportunity: for example, creating images for a fairy tale set in a South Asian context. The key is to be proactive and intentional.

### 3. Educate students so they can spot and challenge bias themselves.

We embed these conversations in lessons. In a Sixth Form elective on Prompt Engineering, students explored different causes of GenAI bias and ran simulations to see how bias can creep into decision-making. We are currently working to build this awareness across the curriculum, so that all students learn to question and critique AI outputs.

## A final thought

If you are in a school that appears less diverse than Habs, it is just as important to take these steps. First, the GenAI bias will affect your students too, even if these particular biases seem less acute in your context. Try creating an image of a couple holding hands, and you will probably see a young, able-bodied, straight white couple. Second, students growing up in a less ethnically diverse community will likely encounter a more diverse community later in life, at university, or in the world of work. Third, we feel strongly that GenAI bias is not just a problem for those directly affected by it. It is society's problem. Evolving societal awareness of these issues is key to addressing the negative legacy in the dataset which is causing so much of the bias we see.

By noticing, mitigating, and educating about GenAI bias, we can help ensure that all our students feel seen, valued, and empowered to shape the future.”

To see the chapter written by Clare Jarmy, Sabrina Nanji (Habs EDI Lead and Head of Geography), and Enora Hauduc (Student AI Champion), you can find it in the book 'AI Bias in Education: Performing Critical Oversight: Perspectives and Practical Approaches for Educators' (ed. Hedlund, published 1 December 2025).

## AI conference

Pupils from St Mary's School, Colchester, Essex, have taken part in a bespoke Artificial Intelligence Conference, delivered through a collaborative partnership between the school and the University of Essex.

Hosted at the University of Essex's Colchester campus, the event offered girls from Years 9 to 11, the opportunity to explore the

fast-growing world of AI while experiencing university life first-hand.

Designed to provide girls with a realistic and informed understanding of AI and its real-world applications, the conference opened with an address from Dr Haidar Raza, Senior Lecturer in AI at the University of Essex's School of Computer Science and

Electronic Engineering. Dr Raza set the scene for the day, offering insight into the current landscape of AI and the opportunities emerging within the field.

Pupils then engaged in a series of interactive workshops and mini seminars covering topics such as AI in Security, AI in Travel and Tourism, and Evolutionary Theory with AI and Machine Learning.



Pictured: St Mary's girls took part in mini seminars and workshops to learn about artificial intelligence and its real-world applications

Read about Championing the Case for Humanity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (Future First Conference) on page 41

# Independent schools: thinking like a business without losing heart

In an era of change, independent schools are having to adapt. Head of The Croft Preparatory School, Warwickshire, Marcus Cook, considers how while schools are needing to increasingly think like business entities to command a market share, it can be done without turning education into a transaction, or mean that a school has to lose its core sense of purpose.



Marcus Cook

In today's educational landscape, independent schools can no longer rely on tradition or reputation alone to attract and retain families. Competitive pressures, political scrutiny, and changing parental expectations mean that schools must increasingly think like businesses: organisations that need to operate strategically, articulate their value clearly, and secure their place within a local (and national) market.

This is not about commodifying education. It is about sustainability, credibility and influence. Schools that are well-run, self-aware, and outward-facing are better placed not only to thrive individually

but to strengthen confidence in independent education as a whole.

## More than a logo

Brand positioning is often misunderstood as marketing alone. In reality, it defines how a school behaves, communicates and makes decisions. It is the compass that guides leadership through both stability and uncertainty. Every interaction, between staff and parents, teachers and pupils, schools and their communities, either reinforces or undermines that identity.

Our role is not just to run an excellent school but to show, every day, what independent education

can achieve when it combines rigour, values, and vision. By being clear about who we are and what we stand for, we can strengthen both our community and the broader sector we are part of.

This in turn builds trust. And trust, particularly in the current climate, is not just an institutional asset; it is a sector-wide necessity.

## Excellence, character and public value

Commercial awareness should never eclipse a school's core purpose. Academic rigour, character education and emotional intelligence remain non-negotiable. The true measure of success lies not only in examination results, but in curiosity, resilience, creativity, and young people's readiness to contribute meaningfully to society.

These outcomes matter because they speak directly to the wider public value of independent schools. At a time when the sector is under increasing scrutiny, schools must be able to demonstrate – confidently and credibly – why what they do matters beyond their own gates.

## Schools as systems

Like any effective organisation, a school functions as a system of interdependent parts. Teachers, support staff, administrators, and leaders all play essential roles. When these elements work in alignment, the result is not only a stronger school but a more professional, coherent model of independent education.

This operational clarity matters. Well-led schools set standards – internally and externally – that raise expectations of what the sector can and should look like.

## Culture is strategy, lived daily

A school's identity is ultimately experienced in its daily routines and rituals. Consistent behaviours

– how pupils are welcomed, how staff interact, how traditions are honoured – create belonging and reinforce values. These lived experiences do more to define a school's reputation than any prospectus ever could.

Such coherence sends a powerful message: independent schools are not just places of academic success but communities with purpose, continuity and care.

## The data behind the debate

Independent schools educate fewer than one in ten children in the UK yet their contribution is disproportionate in impact. The sector generates over £16.5 billion in Gross Value Added, supports more than 328,000 jobs and contributes in excess of £5 billion in tax revenues. These figures underline an often-overlooked truth: independent schools are not peripheral to the national conversation; they are part of the economic and social fabric of the country.

Understanding this context places a responsibility on schools to lead thoughtfully – recognising that individual success is most secure within a healthy, well-understood category.

## A shared responsibility

At The Croft, we believe that strong schools have a responsibility not only to serve their own families well but to contribute positively to the narrative and future of independent education. Strategic thinking, clear identity, and values-led leadership allow schools to do both.

Independent schools face a choice: to drift on reputation or to engage proactively with the realities of the present moment. Those willing to combine commercial awareness with moral purpose will not only protect their own futures but help ensure that independent education continues to be understood, valued, and trusted in the years ahead.

## Bring on the girls!



The Beacon, Buckinghamshire, which was founded in 1933 as an independent school for boys, has announced that from 2027 the school will be welcoming girls to its pupil community, at the usual entry points of Reception, Year 3, and Year 7. Little Beacons Nursery will continue to register boys and girls from September 2026.

This co-educational transition has been fully endorsed by Headmaster Nick Baker, the Senior Management Team, Governing Body, and colleagues.

They believe that the opportunities, facilities, and

Pictured: Boys and girls at The Beacon

ethos of the school today are as relevant to girls as they are to boys, and this development will enhance and enrich the educational experience of all Beacon pupils.

Headmaster Nick Baker commented: "It is entirely appropriate and exciting that we embark on a co-educational structure going forward. The opportunities in the classroom, sports field, theatre, music school, art room, workshop, and kitchen will enhance the experiences of all pupils in the coming years... Bring on the girls!"

# Effective branding: mixing commercial and educational gains in the independent school sector

In the current market climate, many independent schools are exploring new revenue streams. In the first of two articles, Director of Commercial Partnerships at Alleyn's School, London, Phil Clegg, examines the value of building commercial partnerships that strengthen (rather than dilute) educational outcomes.

There was a time, not so long ago, when "commercial" was a bit of a dirty word in education (something I never understood, but then, you'd expect that). It was believed that the dirt would rub off on the pure and wonderful education we were delivering in schools and somehow taint it. It always was an ideological viewpoint and one that was perhaps linked to the fact that there has always been someone else footing the bill and the bill was a rather remote thing (and kept that way). This, perhaps, was especially true in independent schools where budgets were often mere guidelines to be occasionally revisited, expenses could be signed off by someone you were having coffee with in the common room and meals (notice the plural, daily) were there to be thoroughly enjoyed and only really commented on if not quite up to the usual standard. How times have changed.

It isn't my place to pass judgement on the VAT issue in this article, but it has forced schools to make decisions around jobs and even their very existence, whilst they continue to do their best for the young people in their charge. I must move on as my aim with this piece is to hopefully provide a starting point for a discussion that links commercial benefit with educational gain, which, in turn, may just lead to a positive education evolution.

The first point I think we all have already accepted is that, for the vast majority, there is a need to diversify income streams, so add to fee income and income from non-school site use. I should add that it is important to recognise that both these elements need to be maximised, the most obvious element being having a full school which maximises fee income. Obvious, I know, but hold this in your mind as the rest of this article also feeds back into these primary income sources making you more likely to do so, if you are not already.

Moving on. We all know our schools are great. OK, a little bias here, but actually, the demand globally for British independent school brands tells us that the world does indeed think we're pretty 'great' (even if our own government doesn't; oh, the irony). But what specifically makes your school 'great'? And specificity is important here. Let me give you an example from close to home: at Alleyn's we are justifiably enormously proud of being named Independent School of the Year Independent Co-educational School of the Year 2025 which, I can safely say, means we offer an outstanding all-round education and that is a fantastic thing to be able to talk... rub that... shout about! But that is the result of all the specifics that make up the unique Alleyn's educational experience.

Specifics: pastoral wellbeing, academic achievement (all, area or specific subject), drama, music, sustainability, sport, technology, classroom design, work with community (local to international), history and/or careers are but a few of the areas of education you may excel in, and you will be able to narrow it down within any category. Those specifics are the start of your brand: the reputation, profile and values that your school is known by, and will kick open doors to commercial opportunity. However, as with most schools, you have to go down at least one corridor before arriving at the desired entrance (and apologies to those of you who I am asking to suck eggs as you journey).

So, you may have the greatest football or maths programme on the planet. Three questions you have to answer:

1. Can you prove it?
2. How is it unique?
3. How can anyone outside your school instantly identify that the programme is from your school?

Without answers to all these three, you are at a roadblock.

Think through inviting a potential commercial partner to your school – they are going to have a "great" experience (accepted) but when they come to your "showstoppers": what makes your school special amongst so many other great schools, you want them to see their unique brilliance and the fact they are very clearly, visually and in action, yours.

By identifying these, you also have a focus on where to potentially keep developing to ensure you remain a market-leader. In this you will be pushing the education envelope in one or more areas which, I promise you, will have a ripple effect elsewhere. Education benefits.

But your outstanding expertise lies in what has made your specific offerings so utterly brilliant in the educational sense, not in commercialising them. This is where partnerships come in. There are clear benefits to both parties in finding a commercial partner who shares your values (key) and is looking to develop their market share in the education sector that aligns with your unique knowledge. You have the educational expertise, whilst they have the business, marketing and sales expertise. But



Phil Clegg

be prepared to give and take as you would with any partnership and, believe it or not, more often than not, your educational offering will get better. Crucially this applies to a whole school offering e.g. a branded international school, as well as individual elements. Where there is genuine education excellence, there is commercial opportunity.

My allotted words have run out and I've only just scratched the surface! There is so much more to think about, from managing reputational risk to ensuring you have the relevant in-house expertise to develop brand and commercial partnerships to sorting/developing the partnership to maximise both revenue and educational returns to. These I will consider in the next article. Any questions on those get in touch.

In the meantime, remember commercial and education impact can make wonderful bedfellows as long as their bed has been prepared perfectly.

## Silver Equalities Award

Kingswood School, Somerset, has been awarded the Silver Equalities Award by Equaliteach, in recognition for the school's sustained commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Over an 18-month process, the school reviewed policies and processes, evaluated curriculum content across all subjects, and considered the experiences of multilingual and international students. Staff undertook training in unconscious bias, anti-racism and supporting neurodivergent



learners, while students contributed through assemblies, events and student-led groups.

Pictured: Kingswood's EDI Lead, Emma Brown, with the Award Photo credit: Kingswood School

# VAT: the regional impact

Department for Education (DfE) data for the 2024–25 academic year has shown that rising numbers of pupils at state schools that correspond with a falling number of independent enrolments was found in fewer than one in seven local authorities<sup>1</sup>. However, analysis of the data has shown that the Home Counties have been the most affected by the introduction of VAT on fees, with areas around London worst impacted. Surrey and Hertfordshire have also seen numbers go down by

about 800 in comparison to state numbers which have dropped by about half that.

The research<sup>2</sup>, conducted by The Financial Times, also reports that the fall has been concentrated among primary-aged children where a 3.4% drop has been recorded in comparison to a 1.4% fall in the state sector. It has been suggested that alongside falling birth rates this could be in part due to parents foregoing independent primary education to concentrate

on secondary schooling, with the numbers for secondary (pupils aged over 12) showing a 0.4% drop compared with a 0.7% fall for the state sector.

Commenting on the findings and warning that the numbers leaving the independent sector are likely to increase, ISC chief executive, Julie Robinson, said: “We know from the previous economic crash, that parents do all they possibly can to get their children through to the next transition point, so that’s why

it takes a few years to work through the system.”

Acknowledging that VAT was “not going to decimate the sector”, Julie Robinson also said that: “Certainly, it [VAT] has caused some damage, and that’s patchy and in some local areas worse than others. And at the same time, the sector is definitely adapting to this new era.” Independent schools have “a really good, positive, confident future,” she continued.

## Closure announcements

The Governors from **Palmers Green High School (PGHS), London**, have announced that they are proposing to close the school in August.

In a statement, PGHS Chair of Governors, Melanie Curtis, said: “Palmers Green High School

has experienced a sustained and significant decline in pupil numbers over many years, and the school does not have the financial capacity to continue to operate for another year.

“This is not the future any of us had hoped for. However, as

trustees of the school we have a responsibility to act carefully and responsibly in the best interests of the school, its pupils, and its staff. Our absolute priority throughout this process will be the wellbeing of our community. Subject to consultation with staff, the Governors are proposing a

planned, orderly closure. This approach will allow our families the time and support needed to make informed decisions about future schooling, and will ensure that staff are given time and assistance as they seek new roles for September 2026.”

**Rendcomb College, Gloucestershire**, has announced that, despite exploring every feasible option including mergers and other forms of funding, the school will be closing at the end of this academic year.

Citing current and projected pupil numbers, alongside the economic situation facing independent schools across the country, as not making the school financially viable, the college has said that despite the efforts of staff and governors the decision to

close is “highly unfortunate but unavoidable.”

The operation of the college has been made possible for a number of years as a result of funding from the Rendcomb College Foundation. However, a significant increase in the deficit for the current year, and the anticipated financial picture for next year, has meant that support is no longer sustainable,

Four schools in the area, including Wycliffe College, have been selected to partner with Rendcomb to support pupils and families as

they consider their next steps.

Headmaster of Wycliffe, Christian San Jose, commented: “We are deeply saddened to learn of the closure of Rendcomb College.

“We are honoured to be working alongside Rendcomb during this period and to be entrusted with supporting pupils through what will be a significant transition. Our priority is to ensure that any pupils and families affected by this decision are met with care, clarity and reassurance.

“Our thoughts are also very much with the staff at Rendcomb, both teaching and support colleagues. Many are known to us personally, and we recognise the uncertainty they are facing. We wish them all the very best for the future and will offer support wherever we can during this difficult time.

“At a time when independent schools are facing considerable challenges, it is more important than ever that schools work together in a spirit of collaboration and mutual support.”

## School saved

**Hunter Hall School, Cumbria**, has been saved from closure following an urgent fundraising appeal to secure its continued operation.

The school faced unprecedented financial pressure due to national changes affecting the independent education sector, including the imposition of VAT on school fees, the removal of charitable business rate relief and recent increases in National Insurance contributions.

The school, of nearly 80 pupils, 20 staff and more than 50 families, has taken significant steps to reduce costs over the past year, including a negotiated rent reduction and staff voluntarily accepting a 7.5% salary cut, but was left with a financial gap when several expected savings did not come through.

The Board of Governors after exploring all possible avenues to secure a sustainable long-term solution to save the school concluded at a recent Board

meeting that the school will be forced to close unless £180,000 could be raised by 3 December to secure the future viability of the school.

Following support from over 350 families, alumni, neighbours and well-wishers across the UK, the school’s long-term viability has now been secured with the full amount reached with just under 24 hours to spare. Head, Paul Borrows commented: “We are hugely grateful for, and have been truly humbled by, the



warmth and generosity shown by our school community, as well as the kindness of strangers from across the UK”.

Pictured: Paul Borrows

<sup>1</sup> DfE, Schools, pupils and their characteristics, 25 September 2025, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>

<sup>2</sup> The Financial Times, Home counties most affected by VAT on private school fees, data suggests, 2 January 2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/c9790a94-5110-4369-b866-22f6e537a6f8>



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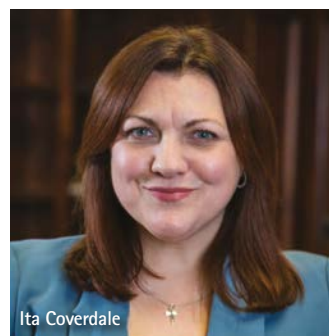
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# The case for proactive pastoral care: why wellbeing must be the heart of school culture

With the national issue of rising stress, academic pressure, and global instability impacting the wellbeing of young people today, Assistant Head, Pastoral Care & Personal Development at Bosworth Independent School, Northamptonshire, Ita Coverdale, discusses how by taking a proactive approach to pastoral care the school is developing a culture that nurtures resilience, built on emotional literacy and belonging.



Young people today are navigating a world that feels more complex, demanding and unpredictable than ever before. Academic expectations, online comparison, cultural identity, global conflict, and social pressure are no longer fringe concerns – they are the daily backdrop of school life. As pastoral leaders, we have a choice: we can wait for these pressures to manifest as crisis, or we can meet them proactively by developing a culture that nurtures resilience, and built on emotional literacy and belonging.

If there's one thing I wish every school leader understood about student wellbeing, it's that children can only truly learn when they feel emotionally secure. A school culture that prioritises connection, safety and belonging is not a luxury; it is the foundation of academic progress, character development and long-term resilience. The dichotomy between "pastoral" and "academic" is entirely false.

This belief underpins the pastoral strategy we have built at Bosworth Independent School. When I joined the school three years ago, I wanted to navigate away from the idea of wellbeing as a set of reactive interventions. Instead, our approach is rooted in daily routines, proactive goal-setting, and respectful relationships.

One of the most effective ways we do this is through our whole-school Emotional Literacy programme. Every tutor has weekly resources designed to help students understand and manage their emotions, with topics ranging from sleep hygiene, understanding boundaries, grounding and emotional self-regulation. Our daily tutor sessions, weekly wellbeing check-ins and Personal Tutor One-to-Ones, ensure that all children are seen, heard and supported. Our Personal Development programme offers bespoke PSHE packages that recognise young people arrive to us at different stages, not just ages, in their personal development. Our school staff and boarding teams are tuned into the ways that engage different children within a range of contexts. Inductions and daily interactions are about understanding the child and creating a sense of belonging.

We also embed reflective spaces into our routines – "quiet" tables in our restaurant for students who need a calm space to dine, mindfulness lessons for our younger pupils, and an open-door counsellor (with therapy dog) who is part of everyday school life rather than a specialist outsider bolted-on to school care.

Our Wellbeing centre, places student health and emotional nurturing, at the heart of the

school and has allowed safe spaces to triage social, emotional and physical needs. The impact on student attendance, engagement and safeguarding remains crucial. School Nurse and counsellor are valued and recognisable members of our Pastoral team and students find support in a number of ways; making self-referrals, peer referrals, and staff signposting.

These may seem like small details, but culture is built through just such small details. When wellbeing is normalised, students recognise emotional need as something to manage rather than hide. They ask for help earlier. They talk to one another more openly. They develop the tools to navigate pressure before it escalates.

In recent years, I have noticed clear shifts in the skills young people struggle with most. Many wrestle with managing expectations, both those they place on themselves and those they believe adults place on them. Emotional regulation and healthy boundaries have become core competencies we must explicitly teach. Global instability has at times affected our international students and required sensitivity, space for reflection, and enhanced pastoral access. Young people are also forming identity in online spaces that can amplify comparison and anxiety. Pastoral Care helps create cyber wisdom, vital to managing the online world.

But alongside these challenges, I see enormous strength and potential. At Bosworth, we have developed peer mentoring, specialised Prefect roles and student leadership initiatives that encourage pupils to support and signpost each other.

Pastoral leadership itself has changed, too. Ten years ago, most of us were defined by our ability to handle behaviour, safeguarding or emotional distress in the moment. Today's pastoral leaders need a far broader toolkit including understanding of trauma, cross-

cultural and global intelligence, digital literacy, coaching practice, and data awareness. I've seen the power of this approach through our local community partnerships, multi-faith, charitable volunteering, mental health campaigns, and student led initiatives designed to build resilience and belonging.

Where I still see misunderstanding is in policymaking. Too often, wellbeing is treated as a timetabled intervention, but wellbeing cannot be outsourced, it must be embedded. The most meaningful transformations in pastoral care rarely show up in spreadsheets. It can be seen in daily interactions and through student outcomes.

Independent schools have a unique opportunity to lead the sector in this space. Our flexibility allows us to experiment, refine and personalise approaches to wellbeing. Smaller communities foster the relationships that make pastoral care effective. Our diverse international cohorts offer rich opportunities for cross-cultural empathy – a skill I consider fundamental for the next generation. And our community partnerships, from charities to faith groups to frequent cultural events, allow us to teach belonging in action.

The impact of a proactive model is clear. We have seen a reduction in stigma around mental health, increased self-advocacy and students are developing resilience, empathy, and communication skills that will serve them long after they leave our classrooms.

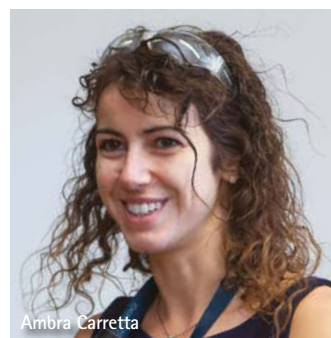
If schools want young people to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, wellbeing must sit at the heart of school culture. Our job is not simply to prepare students for exam success, but for life. And that begins with teaching them to know themselves, support one another, and know that they belong.



Pictured: Therapy dog and pupils

# Primary enrichment: growing community, curiosity, and confidence

Woodbridge School, Suffolk, has developed a Primary Enrichment Programme that enables schools from their locality to come into the school for events and activities that feature on the primary curriculum. A community partnership, the idea is to enhance children's learning, make sure they have fun, support teachers with the use of facilities, and to inspire everyone to learn in different ways about different subjects. Assistant Head (Academic) and Head of Primary Enrichment at Woodbridge, Ambra Carretta, explains.



Ambra Carretta

Eight years ago, I joined Woodbridge School with a clear sense of purpose, having previously begun developing small-scale enrichment opportunities by connecting students with local businesses and industry experts, often under the STEAM umbrella.

I continued to evolve and build something even more ambitious for our school community, the result being our Primary Enrichment Programme, a highly sought-after programme that now welcomes around 1,900 children each year from at least 20 local primary schools.

Offered completely free of charge, the sessions support teachers in delivering key areas of the curriculum while giving children the chance to experience hands on learning across a wide range of subjects. For us, this is not an outreach "initiative", but a genuine partnership with our community.

## Community

Community is one of our school's core values, and this programme brings this to life. We're incredibly fortunate to have beautiful grounds and excellent facilities; sharing these with local schools is a responsibility we take seriously; not only ensuring children feel welcomed and included, but that teachers see us as collaborators in the shared work of educating young people.

Central to this impact is the involvement of our own students. Our students volunteer to support the workshops, from chaperoning, leading activities, demonstrating equipment, or simply welcoming visiting children with warmth and enthusiasm. Through this, they learn what it means to contribute positively to the community they live and learn in; developing leadership, teamwork, communication, and empathy.

Our teachers also contribute generously, designing sessions that ignite curiosity and help children see themselves as scientists, artists, explorers, musicians, or engineers. Visiting teachers frequently remark on the richness these workshops bring, not only for their students, but for their staff; benefitting from fresh ideas, new approaches, and shared expertise.

## Joyful enrichment

The workshops themselves are varied, lively and purposefully designed to strengthen and broaden children's learning. With over 25 different sessions on offer, the programme spans STEAM subjects, the arts, sport, humanities, and more. From Crime Scene Investigation and Computational Thinking, to Drama, Photography, Field Studies, Music, Design Technology, Languages, Netball, and Chess tournaments, as well as motorised LEGO engineering and our ever-popular Science Shows during British Science Week. Every event is planned with age-appropriate challenge and genuine joy at its core.

## Impact and the decisions

Since the programme began in 2017, an estimated 13,342 children will have taken part by the end of this academic year. At a time when financial pressures affect every sector of education, our decision to continue offering the programme free of charge is deliberate and values driven. Its impact, human, educational and relational, far outweighs its cost. The programme is fully booked every year, with additional sessions often added to meet demand.

This commitment was recognised nationally when I was awarded a "Highly Commended" Pearson National Teaching Award in the Unsung Hero category, an honour that reflects not individual

achievement but the collective dedication of the entire Woodbridge community.

## Growth and evolution

As with any successful educational project, evolution is essential. Building on the impact of our primary work, we have now launched our Secondary Enrichment Programme, extending opportunities to even more young people in our region. With a specific focus on Year 9 students, the programme aims to provide hands-on experience across various curriculum subjects and beyond, strengthening and

broadening their knowledge of possible career prospects.

Looking ahead, we are on the brink of an exciting new development within the Primary Enrichment Programme; an initiative currently being piloted in schools and already showing enormous promise. It represents the next stage in our mission to widen access, deepen curiosity and strengthen our ties with the community. Although it is early days, the potential is significant... and I look forward to sharing more about this in the future.



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# Strengthening inclusion: a sustainable approach

How can independent schools build inclusive cultures that are aligned with their values, pastoral systems, and high expectations for the long-term? Education consultant, Krystian McInnis, explores how instead of relying on short-term initiatives, leadership teams can develop a more coherent, year-round approach by embedding inclusion into curriculum design, staff development, student experience, and whole-school culture.



Krystian McInnis

Independent schools are often ambitious in their approach to inclusion. Many have well-established pastoral systems, rich co-curricular programmes and strong relationships with their communities. Yet leaders frequently describe a familiar challenge: how to sustain progress across the year, rather than relying on one-off initiatives, themed weeks or the enthusiasm of individual champions.

In my work I have seen that inclusion succeeds when it is strategic, distributed and woven into the everyday life of the school. The most effective schools do not create more initiatives; they align with what already exists. When this happens, inclusion feels coherent, purposeful and deeply connected to the school's identity.

## Where momentum is often lost

There is rarely a lack of will. Heads, governors and staff care deeply about fostering a sense of belonging. The challenge is capacity. Inclusion touches curriculum, pastoral care, safeguarding, HR, student voice and community engagement. It is not the responsibility of one person; it is a shared way of working.

Three patterns appear frequently:

### 1. Responsibility sits with a single lead or committee

They work hard, but genuine change requires broader ownership.

### 2. Activity centres around events rather than systems

Events can be inspiring, but without follow-through they remain isolated moments.

### 3. Teachers are motivated, but unsure where to start

Most colleagues want to do the right thing, but need clarity and tools.

These patterns are not signs of failure. They reflect the reality of busy, high-performing schools, and the breadth of what inclusion demands.

Krystian McInnis is an education consultant and co-founder of Reimagining Education, supporting schools with strategic inclusion, curriculum, and whole-school culture. He works with independent, MAT, and faith schools across the UK. Visit: [www.reimaginingeducation.uk](http://www.reimaginingeducation.uk)

The schools that move forward most confidently tend to focus on three areas: strategic alignment, staff capability, and culture.

## 1. Strategy and alignment

Schools with strong inclusion programmes often begin with a simple but powerful tool – a one-page strategic plan.

Typically, this includes:

- three to five priorities for the year
- a clear rationale rooted in the school's values
- named responsibility
- indicators of success
- a review schedule

Crucially, the plan is shared. It appears in leadership meetings, governor reports and staff communications. When everyone understands the direction of travel, they are more likely to contribute. When they do not, work becomes fragmented and progress stalls.

Termly reporting to governors strengthens accountability and keeps inclusion part of the school's improvement narrative. Rather than broad statements, schools share:

- concrete actions taken
- emerging impact
- evidence from students and staff
- next steps

## A practical starting point

If you already have an EDI committee, give them a short strategic plan to steer. If you already have a plan, make it visible and review it together.

## 2. Staff capability

Teachers often describe inclusion as something they are committed to, but not always confident in. They worry about "getting it wrong", saying the wrong thing or unintentionally causing harm. Very few need more enthusiasm; they need support and confidence.

Sustainable inclusion requires staff development that is:

- ongoing rather than one-off

- practical rather than theoretical
- connected to classroom practice

Short, focused sessions for middle leaders can be especially powerful. When middle leaders are confident in embedding inclusion into schemes of work, assessment and departmental culture, the impact multiplies.

Some schools also use peer coaching to good effect. A simple cycle of co-planning, observation, feedback, and reflection builds capability without adding undue pressure.

## A practical starting point

Invest in middle leadership. They are the bridge between strategy and everyday practice.

## 3. Culture and community

Inclusion is only sustainable when it is experienced. Students often describe inclusion through small, everyday interactions rather than large events:

- how teachers respond to mistakes
- whether their identity is acknowledged
- whether assemblies feel relevant
- whether they can express themselves safely

Strong cultures build these moments deliberately.

In my work with independent schools, three approaches consistently help inclusion move from intention to experience.

### a) Student voice with structure

Not just a council, but:

- focus groups
- feedback sessions
- involvement in committees
- transparent communication about actions taken

Young people notice when their voices make a difference.

### b) Events linked to follow-through

Events matter when they are part of a wider cycle.

For example:

- Black History Month followed by curriculum review
- Pride Month followed by staff guidance on language and environment
- a visiting speaker followed by tutor-group reflection

## c) Partnerships with purpose

Independent schools often have strong networks. Partnerships with universities, businesses, or community organisations can enrich culture when they are purposeful, not performative.

## A practical starting point

Look for small, consistent behaviours that make students feel seen and valued. These often matter more than occasional spectacles.

## What successful schools do differently

Across diverse settings, three behaviours stand out:

### 1. They design inclusion into structures, not schedules.

There is time allocated, ownership shared and progress reviewed.

### 2. They build capability gradually.

Confidence grows through coaching, not compliance.

### 3. They prioritise belonging as much as achievement.

Students feel known, not simply taught.

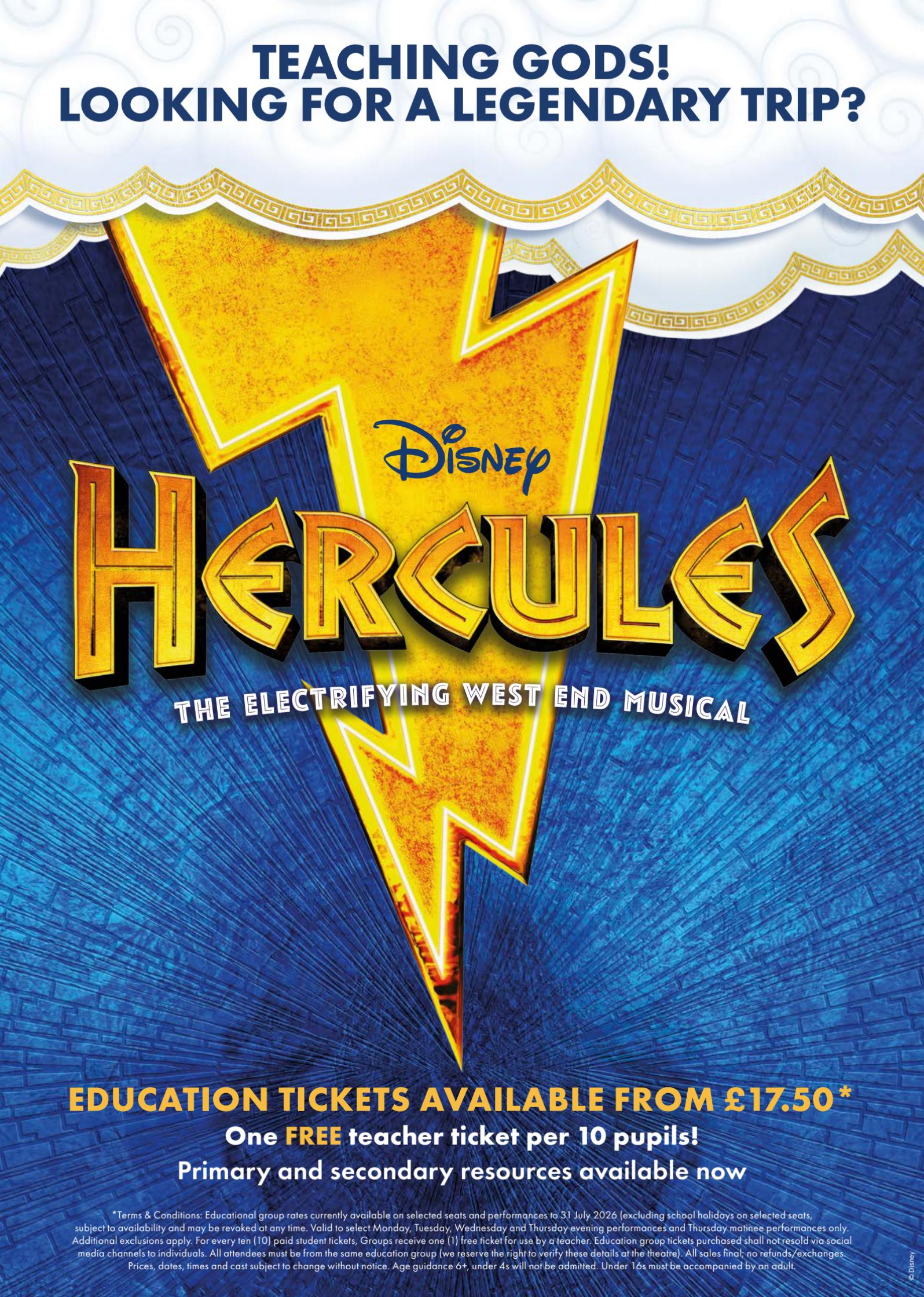
Inclusion is not an add-on. It is an expression of the school's values.

## Conclusion

Independent schools are strongly positioned to lead the sector in inclusion. They have engaged communities, robust pastoral systems, and autonomy in curriculum planning. When inclusion is strategic, sustained, and shared, it strengthens the ethos and identity of the school.

The most successful schools approach inclusion as a long-term investment: not a series of events, but a way of being.

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# How to spark excitement for climate literacy in schools

Learning about the environment is not new in schools. However, following the Curriculum and Assessment Review<sup>1</sup>, the UK government is now looking to embed climate literacy and sustainability across the national curriculum in England.



Head of Geography and Sustainability Lead at Fairfield Prep School, Leicestershire, Alex Alves, discusses why climate literacy has to play part of the curriculum and considers how teachers can help young people develop the knowledge, curiosity, and confidence to engage with climate issues from an early age, both in and beyond the classroom.

With reforms to both primary and secondary education expected from 2028, there is a growing recognition that understanding our planet must become a core part of learning, not an optional extra.

The thing that stands out to me most about the community of children at Fairfield Prep, which is part of the Loughborough Schools Foundation (LSF), is their curiosity and passion to care when it comes to discovering the world around them; the hallmarks of great young geographers.

Through the newly introduced Geography curriculum at Fairfield, and also our outdoor learning curriculum, Outdoor Odyssey, written exclusively to fit our school's core values, I've positioned this sense of curiosity at the very centre of their learning. UNESCO's

17 sustainable development goals have been deeply embedded within this learning, so discussion around climate and sustainability feel relevant and intuitive, rather than imposed. In addition, outdoor learning and forest school lessons make science-based sustainability issues meaningful to the children, linking classroom learning to real-life experiences outdoors. Children are enthused to care because they are connected to their environment through various local investigations and enquiry projects.

By adding strong links to the local environment and involving more practical fieldwork, children are encouraged to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills at every turn.

These changes have proved directly relevant to the global agenda, with 2025 marking the 30th UN climate conference (COP30), bringing renewed focus to issues such as energy, biodiversity, agriculture, and social development. With mandatory climate education in science and geography, the responsibility on educators to lead meaningful change is clearer than ever.

At Fairfield, we believe there is no better place for these roots to be developed than in, and beyond, the classroom.

While research in this area is still developing, a Department for Education climate literacy survey in 2024 revealed that only a small proportion of teachers regularly use outdoor learning or feel prepared to teach climate literacy,

citing gaps in teacher training, confidence and access to resources.

At Fairfield Prep School, these challenges are met with opportunity for the children to flourish. From Forest School to Eco Club, pupils are given space to explore, question and take ownership of sustainability in action.

One example is the development of an outdoor curriculum known as "Outdoor Odyssey" at the Forest School. This programme uses nature as a classroom to build skills such as communication, teamwork and resilience. Pupils learn practical skills including shelter building, knot tying, fire safety, tool use, and risk management, alongside a deeper understanding of how to care for ecosystems and the environment.

The Eco Club is another driving force for sustainability within the school, empowering pupils who are passionate about the environment to take the lead. A standout initiative focused on improving biodiversity across the school grounds, with pupils building bird and bug houses and planting flowers to support wildlife.

These projects are shining examples of children who are becoming increasingly more mindful about the spaces around them and their responsibility to protect them – an awareness nurtured through thoughtful teaching and a curriculum that encourages engagement.

Beyond the classroom, I also like to use my own life experiences

to broaden pupils' horizons by encouraging them to explore different cultures and understand their role in creating positive change. During the summer months, I work as an expedition leader, supporting conservation projects around the world with secondary school students and last year I led an expedition to Tanzania and Zanzibar.

In Zanzibar, we learned about turtle conservation, working alongside local organisations to support population preservation. We monitored coral reefs through snorkelling, contributed to reef restoration projects, and took part in beach clean-up initiatives to tackle marine litter washed ashore from across the globe.

It is essential to prepare pupils for the world they are inheriting, therefore collaboration between colleagues and institutions is key to helping pupils connect classroom learning with real-world situations.

Teachers are, in many ways, architects of the future. They shape emotional resilience, intellectual growth and a lifelong love of learning. As the world continues to change at pace, it is vital that we prepare young people for careers and climate challenges that may not yet exist.

This work begins in the classroom, by nurturing care for the environment, encouraging mindfulness about the wider world and cultivating curiosity that lasts well beyond the school gates.



Outdoor learning at Fairfield Prep

1 Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report, DfE, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-final-report>

# Future Roots Festival

Last year, Bryanston School, Dorset, hosted their inaugural Future Roots Festival. Centred around creativity, collaboration, and systems thinking, the event aimed to engage and inspire pupils on the topics of sustainability and regenerative design. Art teacher and festival organiser, Charlotte Mason, outlines explains more.

At Bryanston, we are committed to helping pupils develop and entrepreneurial and enquiring mindset. By integrating this with a deeper understanding and appreciation of sustainability and regenerative design, we believe they will enter the professional world with a forward-thinking perspective, a commitment to supporting local communities, and the ambition to challenge conventional ideas.

And the school has always provided pupils with opportunities to deepen their understanding of ecological systems all while contributing in practical ways through the numerous extracurricular activities and projects. These include our Beekeeping programme, Kitchen Garden and Orchard Projects, as well Forestry and the Nature ECA where pupils and staff participate in nature walks around campus, bird watching and documenting seasonal changes in flora and fauna throughout the year.

These have all contributed to the school receiving an “Eco Warrior Award” at the Tatler Schools Award Ceremony 2026.

Reflecting on this achievement, we wanted to create more moments where we could acknowledge positive environmental action and the many individuals within our Bryanston community who embody what it means to be forward thinking and entrepreneurial – and the Future Roots Festival was born! This event marked the beginning of a journey to raise awareness and garner more attention from the staff and pupils on sustainability within and beyond our community.

As part of Green Careers Week, the festival was an evening dedicated to the celebration of regenerative practices and the role young

people can play when embodying a Systems Thinking Approach. Notably, the values embodied by regenerative practices align with our School Pillars in the following forms: creativity, adopting forward thinking approaches, community, and multidisciplinary collaboration.

In preparation for the festival, pupils were invited to create a visual or written art piece that celebrated “nature and the environment around us.” Then on the night, 40 pupils from Year 9 to Year 13 exhibited a variety of fine art and sculptural pieces alongside a range of photography and poetry. It provided a moment in the middle of a busy term for pupils to not only celebrate each other and the connection many of them share with the natural world but to be inspired and reflect on how much the local environment shapes us.

When looking to select keynote speakers for the event, it was also important that to make sure pupils could feel a connection to those on stage and experience a sense of pride when hearing the talks throughout the evening. We therefore, not only targeted those within our community, but those who could harness and kick start passion and interest to learn more about what it is to work with nature rather than against it.

The three speakers were:

Elsa Kent, who reflected on her time at Bryanston and her work in regenerative projects in Kenya and England. She challenged pupils to think critically about food systems, travel with curiosity and purpose, and support schools and communities in adopting regenerative approaches.

Connor Bryant, who spoke about his love of Design and Technology (DT) at Bryanston and his journey to redesign how music festivals

and sporting events manage waste. He invited pupils to reimagine the circular economy on campus and set them a live challenge to design solutions for the thousands of tents discarded at festivals each year.

And Ben Keene, who explored how AI can accelerate climate solutions, from mapping environmental risks to building new eco-tech ventures, while stressing that technology must always be guided by human values, creativity and collaboration.

The talks demonstrated how sustainability and regenerative practices are central to high-growth green industries and is becoming embedded across all sectors, alongside a rise in new eco-focused ventures.

Pupils were also encouraged to develop both technical expertise for green careers and human skills, including systems thinking across environmental, social, and economic impacts: innovative design and problem solving: effective advocacy and dialogue, but most importantly, adaptability and resilience.

The Future Roots Festival concluded with the message that sustainability and regenerative practices are reshaping the future of work. There is a heightened demand for young people to enter the workplace with an eco-conscious mindset, paving the way for companies to adopt more proactive and adaptable approaches to minimise their environmental impact. With the ways climate action can be fulfilled, this presents a significant opportunity for entrepreneurial innovation in sustainability and every pupil should feel empowered to engage with this potential.

Going forward, we want to build on the momentum of the festival, developing and implementing new projects.



Charlotte Mason

A highlight from 2025 was the Plant a Tree Campaign, where in collaboration with the Development Team and pupil support, the campaign was able to fund 250 saplings across the school site. With guidance and assistance from the Grounds Team, pupils planted part of this collection in the summer term, combining environmental action with hands-on education about land stewardship. Their work has been vital in bringing pupil-led projects to life.

Also, with the support for our Rewilding Project in the BryGIVING fundraising campaign 2025, funds have also been raised for a bird hide and educational signage by the river which flows through the estate. Pupils are going to work with the DT Department to design and construct these features, ensuring that learning remains rooted in collaboration and practical action.

Looking towards the summer term, we are also planning to host our annual Eco Week. This will consist of house challenges, workshops, art displays, catering theme nights and visits from keynote speakers.

As the Future Roots Festival continues to grow, it is a reminder that change begins with collective action. By giving pupils the space to explore, question, and design solutions for real-world environmental challenges, you can not only equip pupils with knowledge, but with the confidence and compassion to lead. Future Roots will continue to inform learning, inspire innovation, and ensure that sustainability remains embedded in the life of the school.

# Preparing young people for a global future: what we can learn from the IB

Haileybury, Hertfordshire offers both A Level and the International Baccalaureate (IB) to its students, but what can be learnt from the IB approach? Master of the school, Eugene du Toit, assesses the role the IB has in providing breadth, independent learning, global awareness, and social responsibility, discusses the importance of offering choice of pathways, and how they have taken elements from the IB to widen opportunities for their A Level students.



As schools consider how best to prepare young people for an increasingly global world, the principles underpinning the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB) offer valuable insights.

At Haileybury, our purpose is to develop the mind, body, and spirit of our pupils, and we have seen first-hand the positive impact of the IB approach. The qualification opens doors internationally and, importantly, helps young people become confident, rounded, and resilient learners. In fact, we are bucking the trend, with more of our pupils than ever taking the qualification this year.

However, at its heart, the IB represents more than just a qualification; it represents an educational philosophy. Its emphasis on breadth, global awareness, and independent learning provides a useful lens through which to consider Sixth Form education, not only at our school but across the sector.

## The importance of educational breadth

In a world of growing connectivity, breadth remains a vital component of a strong education. The IB is distinctive in offering a wide scope, with pupils studying six subjects, including Language and Literature, Language Acquisition, Mathematics, Individuals and Societies, and Science options. Pupils also complete a 4,000-word research essay, a Theory of Knowledge course and a Community, Activity, Service

programme. Together, these elements encourage pupils to think beyond subject silos, make connections between disciplines and engage with ideas from multiple perspectives.

This balance importantly develops not only academic knowledge, but critical thinking and social responsibility. In an era when employers and universities seek adaptability and empathy, these qualities are not optional, they are essential.

## Developing independence and global awareness

Another defining feature of the IB is its emphasis on developing independent learners – something our pupils increasingly require to be successful in their next phase of education. Through extended projects and inquiry-based learning, IB pupils are encouraged to take ownership of their education, ask thoughtful questions and pursue areas of genuine interest in depth.

At the same time, the IB places strong emphasis on global awareness. Pupils are encouraged to explore different perspectives and ethical challenges through the IB's Theory of Knowledge and community service requirement. This helps them understand their place within a wider global community and equips them with the ability to contribute positively to society.

## The importance of choice for young people

However, choice plays an important role in supporting

young people to thrive. No single educational pathway suits every pupil, and good educators recognise the different strengths and interests in their learners.

Therefore, at Haileybury, we offer both A Levels and the IB, enabling pupils to select the route that best aligns with their learning style and ambitions. For some, the depth and specialisation of A Levels provides the right path; for others, the breadth and international outlook of the IB is more appealing. What matters most is that pupils are supported to make informed choices and feel confident in pursuing the pathway that suits them best.

## What we can learn from the IB approach

Whichever path our pupils take, we are committed to ensuring they experience the same level of personal development. At Haileybury, we have reflected the ethos of IB by offering A Level pupils additional opportunities. For example, the extended essay project allows A Level pupils to pursue a topic they are passionate about through independent research. This spirit of inquiry has inspired pupils to explore everything from renewable energy in Zambia to perfectionism and sporting performance.

We have also built a rich co-curriculum that helps pupils build their confidence and resilience. This includes the Combined Cadet Force; Duke of Edinburgh Awards; Model United Nations; and our Adventure

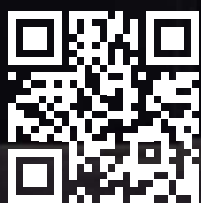
Skills programme, alongside sports, music, and drama. The key is building in dedicated time during the school day, so pupils consistently benefit from these alongside studying their A Levels. Every Wednesday, for instance, some of our pupils take part in service activities and opportunities; they teach sign language in our community, maintain allotments for local charities and create educational resources for children without access to learning. These experiences sit alongside academic study as an integral part of school life.

The result is that all pupils, whichever qualifications they pursue, benefit from a holistic education grounded in critical thinking, intellectual curiosity and social responsibility. They go on to leading universities in the UK, Europe, and the US, often choosing diverse and stretching courses and careers.

## Preparing young people for a global future

Education must do more than prepare pupils for examinations; it must prepare them for life in a global and rapidly changing world. This requires a sustained focus on breadth, independence, and responsibility, alongside academic excellence. If we can help pupils to think broadly, learn independently, and act compassionately, we will be equipping them well for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

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# From structure to connection: lessons learned moving from mainstream to specialist education

After making the move from mainstream education into specialist education, Headteacher at Belmont School, Lancashire, Devin Cassidy, reflects on the lessons that can be learned from both settings and how bridging them can better inform the future of education.

After more than 30 years in mainstream selective education, including two headships, I believed I had justification to say I understood the components of teaching pretty well. My career had been developed around high standards, academic rigour, and the rhythm of schools where participation, character, and achievement define success. In such settings, lessons flow to a broad academic timetable, expectations are clear, and progress is relatively easily measured. Relationships, with pupils, although of paramount importance may not always be prioritised by all staff and pupils can sometimes feel the school regime unfair – something that the inspectorate probe during inspections.

Yet, moving into a specialist Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) school has necessitated me rethinking many assumptions held about what makes education meaningful. Here, relationship is the curriculum. Everything begins and ends with connection between young people and staff. Progress only happens when trust takes root – when a young person, often bruised by previous experiences of school, begins to believe that the adults around them see them not as a problem to be solved but as a person to be understood. Many of our pupils arrive with a significant number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and conventional behaviour management approaches are understandably less effective.

In mainstream education, behaviour management typically sits within a system of rules, sanctions, and rewards – necessary

tools for order and fairness in busy classrooms. But in SEMH settings, behaviour tells a story. It is not something to be managed; it is something to be interpreted. A child's anger may mask anxiety. Refusal may signal fear. Defiance may simply be self-protection. To respond effectively, staff must learn to see beyond the surface and to meet the underlying need. That demands a very different kind of professionalism – one that is calm, reflective, and rooted in empathy. There is no place for raised voices or overt expressions of anger. This is not to say that firm boundaries can't be established, indeed they are essential.

Trauma-informed practice is a vital foundation for the ethos of SEMH schools. It asks us to understand that many of our pupils carry experiences of instability, loss, or fear that shape how they engage with the world. Pupil behaviour is regarded as communication and the traditional tools of control or sanction are rarely enough; what they need first is safety. And that safety begins with us. We cannot expect children to regulate their emotions if we, the adults, are not regulated ourselves. I often remind staff that a regulated adult can help to calm a dysregulated child – but two dysregulated people will only escalate each other. In specialist education, emotional composure is not just a professional quality; it is an intervention in itself. Natural and logical consequences then follow. A natural consequence which are real-life outcomes that occurs directly from a child's actions, helping them learn responsibility safely through experience rather than

imposed punishment, fostering reflection and self-regulation rather than shame. A logical consequence is a fair, connected response to behaviour, designed by adults to teach accountability. It's respectful, predictable, and directly linked to the action, promoting learning rather than punishment.

Teaching in this context requires patience, consistency, and a willingness to see success in new forms. Progress may not come as a jump in test scores, but as a conversation held without confrontation, a day without crisis, a flicker of self-belief in a child who once gave up trying. These are not minor victories – they are profound shifts in a young person's sense of belonging.

At times, this work is emotionally demanding and certainly not for the faint hearted. It asks teachers to show vulnerability, to model calm under pressure, and to accept that real change takes time. But it is also deeply restorative. The relationships built here are genuine, unconditional, and transformative. The staff who thrive in this environment do so because they understand that learning cannot flourish without emotional security – and that the heart of behaviour management lies not in control, but in connection.

There is nothing new to this approach: the best teachers have always prioritised relationships, subject knowledge, and enthusiasm and such teachers are likely to be successful in either setting and indeed disadvantaged pupils need the very best teachers.

Our approach is, by its very nature, inclusive. Inclusion here is



not a project or a policy, it is the fabric of everything we do. Every lesson, every conversation, every strategy is built on the belief that every child belongs. Inclusion is not a badge we display; it is the culture we live.

Reflecting on both worlds – mainstream and SEMH, I've come to see how much they can teach one another. Mainstream education's structure and aspiration can bring valuable clarity to specialist contexts, while the compassion and relational depth of SEMH practice could transform the way mainstream schools understand behaviour and wellbeing. The future of education, I suspect, lies in bridging these worlds, in combining academic rigour with emotional intelligence, structure with humanity.

After eight years of headship in one sector sphere and now leading in another, I've learned that teaching, at its best, is not about what we deliver but about who we are to our pupils. When we offer stability, authenticity, and respect, learning follows naturally. In the end, great education, whether mainstream or specialist, is built not on policy or pedagogy alone, but on the steady presence of adults who stay calm when others cannot, who listen before they judge, and who never stop believing that every child is capable of achieving great things and going on to make a meaningful contribution to society.

## Running challenge



Two teachers from Abbey Gate College, Chester, have successfully completed a 31-mile running challenge, raising over £3,200 for the Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association.

Helen Kitchin and Jude Lloyd-Johnson, undertook the challenge of running 31 miles throughout January.

The fundraising effort holds particular significance for Mrs Kitchin, whose mother was diagnosed with MND two years

ago. The MND Association has provided vital practical help and guidance to the family during this difficult time.

The response from the school community and wider supporters has exceeded expectations, with donations surpassing £3,200 so far. The funds raised will help the MND Association continue providing essential support to families affected by the condition, while also contributing to research aimed at finding a cure.

Pictured: Jude Lloyd-Johnson and Helen Kitchin

## 'Tour de Kent'



Staff from Russell House School, Kent, have completed the first of two events this year in support of Demelza Hospice Care for Children, a charity which delivers care to children facing serious or life-limiting conditions throughout Kent, South East London, and East Sussex.

Inspired by the spirit of community, Russell House staff took part in a full-day sponsored indoor cycling challenge, virtually circumnavigating the county of Kent on a Peloton bike stationed in the school's front porch, raising over £3,900 towards their £5,000 target.

Pictured: Tour de Kent staff participants

The virtual 'Tour de Kent' marks the first of two major fundraising initiatives for Russell House this year. Looking ahead, a team of staff will be taking on the iconic Ben Nevis via the Càrn Mòr Dearg Arete in June.

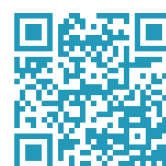
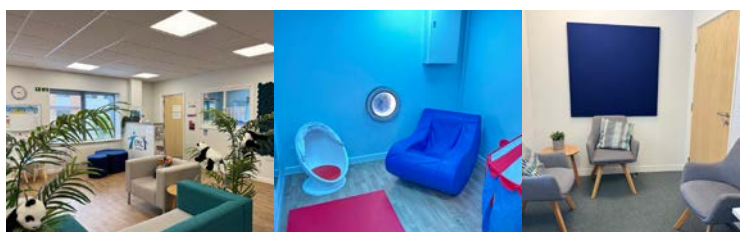
Funds raised through both events will go directly to supporting Demelza's work caring for children and their families.

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# Why the "demographic cliff" may be overstated: why independent schools still can't relax



What do birth rate figures mean for independent education and enrolment stability in the coming years? What do schools need to think about for the future? Educationalist, Andrew McEwen, considers the data and discusses how while the figures suggest birth rates will stabilise in the coming years, schools still need to be aware of a changing market picture.

Birth data suggests the size of the school-age population over the next decade may be more stable than commonly assumed. But for independent schools, enrolment stability will depend far more on culture, economics, and strategy than on demography alone.

## The demographic cliff reconsidered

For several years, commentary on the future of UK education has been dominated by a single, ominous phrase: the demographic cliff. Falling birth rates, it is argued, will inevitably lead to a shrinking school-age population and intensifying competition for pupils. For independent schools in particular, this narrative has often been framed as an existential threat.

Yet a closer examination of the underlying data suggests a more nuanced – and far less dramatic – picture. Birth rates have certainly fallen from their early 2010s peak, but they have not collapsed. What appears to be emerging instead is a prolonged period of lower, but relatively stable, cohort size.

## What the birth data actually shows

Between 2012 and 2022 there were roughly 6.5 million live births in England and Wales. Over the same period, birth numbers declined steadily, reflecting later family formation, economic uncertainty, and changing social norms.

Looking ahead, the Office for National Statistics' most recent population projections estimate around 6.8 million births across the UK in the ten years from mid 2022 to mid 2032. While these figures are not perfectly comparable – the latter includes Scotland and Northern Ireland and is projection-based – adjusting for this actually strengthens the conclusion. Once births in those nations are accounted for, the total number of births across the UK between 2012 and 2022 would have been broadly comparable to the decade ahead.

In other words, once like is compared with like, there is little evidence of a sudden demographic cliff. The size of the school-age population over the next decade is likely to look broadly similar to that of the last.

## Why stable births do not guarantee stable demand

This conclusion, however, should not be misread as reassurance for independent schools. Birth rates define the size of the potential market, not how families behave within it. School choice is shaped by economics, values, cultural attitudes, and perceptions of value – all of which are shifting.

The parents of children entering schools over the next ten years will not be the same as those of the past decade. Younger parents are more likely to have experienced state education

themselves, to question traditional institutions and to be sensitive to debates around fairness, inclusion, and inequality. There will be far greater cultural diversity, leading to a decrease in familiarity with, and recognition of the value of, the private sector. Even where families have the financial means, some may actively choose not to engage with fee paying education.

## Affordability, elasticity and marginal decisions

Affordability remains a critical factor. Independent school fees have risen much faster than inflation for much of the past 20 years, while household incomes have come under sustained pressure. As a result, demand has become increasingly elastic.

Families may delay entry, choose independent education only for certain phases, or withdraw earlier than planned. These marginal decisions matter. Even small shifts in behaviour can translate into significant changes in enrolment numbers when aggregated across the sector, regardless of whether the overall population is stable.

## Competition, geography and uneven impact

Stable national birth numbers also mask sharp local variation. Some regions face falling cohorts, while others benefit from migration and housing growth.

Schools drawing from narrow catchment areas may therefore experience demographic pressure even when the national picture appears benign.

At the same time, competition within the independent sector is intensifying. Where pupil numbers are flat, market share becomes a zero sum game. Larger, well-capitalised schools with strong brands may consolidate their position, while smaller or less distinctive schools face growing strain.

## A strategic challenge, not a demographic one

The real challenge for independent schools, then, is not demography but strategy. Stable birth cohorts remove one convenient explanation for falling rolls, but they do not remove the underlying pressures reshaping the market.

In the decade ahead, schools that can articulate a clear purpose, demonstrate value, adapt to changing parental expectations and manage affordability creatively are likely to remain resilient. Those that rely on inherited assumptions about demand may find that demographic stability offers little protection.

The demographic cliff may be overstated. The strategic test facing independent education is not.

Andrew McEwen MA, FRSA, has been Director and Chairman of IES (International Education Systems Limited) responsible for the development of schools in new markets, and Trustee and Director of three independent schools in the UK and two in South Africa, and is a member of BELMAS (British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society). He has also served on the Board of ISA (the International Schools Association) and the Advisory Board for the MA programme in International Education at NHLStenden University in the Netherlands. For nearly 20 years he has worked as a partner with National School Transfer where he helps buyers and sellers achieve their goals in the schools acquisition market.

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# Before bonjour: why culture should come first

Subject leader of languages at Banstead Prep School (BPS), Surrey, Helen Abbott, explores the rationale behind introducing Cultural Studies instead of a foreign language in the Early Years and KS1 as a foundation for later language learning.

Do you fancy teaching your Year 1s some flamenco dancing?

Creating masks inspired by Spanish carnivals, making a Greek salad or reproducing mosaics, reading stories about Chinese mythical dragons and making Chinese lanterns are all activities bound to encourage learning through narrative, play, sensory experience, and social interaction. Children in the Early Years, in particular, learn best through meaning-making: role-playing daily life in another country, exploring food, music, clothing, and celebrations, and connecting these experiences to their own lives.

Teaching the language of ordering food abroad, on the other hand, demands abstract thinking. How many 4-year-olds order their own meal in their native language? Repeatedly learning the culturally thin vocabulary of greetings, numbers, and colours also requires sustained attention and working memory beyond the typical capacity of very young children.

And that, in a nutshell, is why, at BPS, we have decided to introduce Cultural Studies from Reception to Year 2.

So often, when I talk about teaching languages in primary schools, I hear familiar clichés about young children being “sponges” and how important it is to start early if native-like pronunciation is the goal. Of course, it is absolutely true that the brain shows high neural plasticity for speech sounds between the ages of 3 and 7, making this a particularly sensitive period for phonological awareness. Children at this stage pick up sounds intuitively, rather than analysing their relationship to their mother tongue.

But – and this is the important

bit – consistency of exposure is essential. Thirty minutes a week, with long gaps for holidays, does not equate to consistent exposure. A child who hears a language spoken by a native speaker every day at home will, of course, pick it up with reassuring alacrity, but a weekly “bonjour, salut et merci” is not going to have the same result. Research into early language acquisition repeatedly highlights that frequency, quality, and meaningful use of input matter far more than age of first exposure alone.

Added to this, the range of language that can realistically be taught to a group of five-year-olds is fairly limited, as any language teacher who has attempted topics prematurely will acknowledge. “The weather is changeable” is, apparently, not common usage among early learners.

Research shows that social identity awareness begins around the ages of three to four. It therefore makes sense to harness this emerging empathy by building curiosity about other cultures – seeing their differences as exciting features rather than as, well, differences. The questions that follow arise from genuine curiosity, without an ounce of malice.

Most excitingly – for me, at least, as a Languages Specialist – giving children mental images of places and stories they can relate to at an early age provides an excellent anchor for later language acquisition. For those unfamiliar with French culture, learning a phrase like “à table !” means little more than learning “bonjour” or “au revoir”. For those who have already explored the importance of family meals and extended mealtimes in France, however, the phrase sits effortlessly within an

existing cultural understanding. Similarly, learning about cultures that place particular emphasis on respect for elders makes the eternally confusing “tu/vous” or “tú/usted” distinction far easier to grasp.

Culture gives language meaning.

Contrary to the popular “sponge” belief, cognitive load theory tells us that young learners struggle when new sounds, unfamiliar meanings, and social demands are introduced simultaneously. Cultural Studies allows children to encounter one new idea at a time, in a familiar language, supporting engagement and confidence.

There are certain stand-out moments when teaching languages with no cultural backdrop. The confusion surrounding teaching French in France is comical – children want to know why French is on a French person’s timetable. As you explain that French in France is like an English lesson in England, their eyes widen as they try to comprehend and then... you see the penny drop. This happens every single time.

And I have to say that I would actually miss the excitement in their eyes when I teach them that French children frequently have a “bol de chocolat chaud” for breakfast – if they had already learnt that cultural titbit. But that is exactly the cultural hook provided through earlier learning that makes school subject and food-related vocabulary so much more relevant.

A longstanding bugbear of language teachers is the “false start” syndrome. When a language is introduced very early, much of it will inevitably be repeated later. While repetition is a natural part of language learning, this is not the rich



Helen Abbott

repetition that comes from immersion. Instead, it is often forced repetition caused by changing languages, restarting content and losing continuity. Cultural awareness, by contrast, is cumulative and transferable and can never be described as wasted learning.

At BPS, we aim to provide our youngest children with deep cultural exploration that helps them develop empathy and curiosity about the world around them. In Pre-Prep, we explore language, culture and context and yes, explore words they may encounter; when they are ready, in Year 3, we introduce age-appropriate French, followed by Spanish in Year 4. Both languages continue through to Year 6, ensuring continuity and progression without disruption. We also, related to our residential programme, explore German in order to give them timely phrases to navigate their trip – contextual learning in action.

As schools continue to reflect on how and when languages are introduced, one key factor must be prioritising the right skills at the right stages. Rather than teaching lists of disconnected words in the Early Years, we should wait until language becomes meaningful. By first providing the cultural backdrop, we prepare children not only for future language learning, but for life beyond the classroom.

## National Youth Monologues

Bishop's Stortford College, Hertfordshire, have been awarded a Regional Commendation Award for pupil submissions to The National Youth Monologues Competition 2025.

The National Youth Monologues is a competition for young people aged 9 to 19 across the UK. It provides the opportunity for young actors to perform live in front of an audience, with the finals taking place on a West End stage. Split into four age groups, KS2, KS3, KS4, and KS5, monologues can be submitted into one, or all four, categories including Contemporary, Classical, Screen, and Devised, with submissions requiring a self-recorded video of their chosen monologue, lasting between 60 and 90 seconds.

Pictured: Bishop Stortford's Regional Commendation



Of the eight pupils entered into the competition from the Bishop's Stortford College Prep School (Years 3 to 8), Findlay S, Huxley R, Ben H, Ankhan A, Helena F, Alice H, Iris M, and Delilah W, all eight received commendations for their submissions. Ben H, Huxley R, and Findlay S made the Regional Finals Shortlist, with Huxley and Findlay making the National Finals Shortlist; Huxley as a National Finalist Reserve for KS2, and Findlay as a National KS2 Finalist. Representing the College in the National Finals, Findlay went on to achieve overall runner-up.

## Economics prize



A Haberdashers' Monmouth School sixth former has won the Schroders Economics Prize.

Three Year 13 economists from the school attended an economics and finance networking lunch at Haberdashers' Hall, London, following the successful shortlisting of their competition essays. James, Carys, and Sophie were selected from a highly competitive cohort, representing all Year 13 economists who submitted essays for review.

Pictured: Haberdashers' Monmouth Sixth Formers at the Schroders event in London  
Photo credit: Haberdashers' Monmouth School

The event formed part of the Haberdashers' Futures Schroders Economics Prize, which brings together students from across the Haberdashers' schools alongside finance professionals and members of the Haberdashers' Company.

James was announced as the overall winner. He was praised by judges for his excellent use of diagrams and his critical assessment of extensive, well-researched analysis.

Advertorial Feature

## Education You Now

### Is it time to stop being in the middle?

The independent sector is at a crossroads. For some, it has meant school closures and for others a quick change in strategy to stay open. It's easy to put yourself at the bottom of your own priority list. But investing in yourself isn't a luxury – it's a responsibility. You never know what is going to happen, so now more than ever you need to put yourself first.

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Take time to reflect on your employee experience, what needs to change? How can you invest in your future – starting today?

#### 2. What is the real story of your school, right now?

As you walk around your school community, what is the present story?

#### 3. How prepared are you for what is next?

Take time to look at your skill set – what else do you need to remain competitive?

#### 4. If you gave yourself the same support I give others, what would I do differently?

So many of us are generous to others and harsh with ourselves. Reversing that imbalance can be a powerful act of self-investment

#### 5. What will it cost me not to invest in myself?

Growth has a cost – but so does stagnation. Don't underestimate what you're giving up by staying still.

#### 6. What is your next action to move forwards?

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# Profile

In conversation with Jill Drummond

**Born:** 1978 – Edinburgh, Scotland

**Married:** 2001 to David

Children; Nathan, 23 and Finlay, 19

**Schools and Universities attended:**

The Mary Erskine School and The University of Edinburgh

**First job:** Sales assistant in the family newsagent

**First job in Independent**

**Education:** PE teacher at Clifton Hall School following 8 years in a local authority school

**Appointed to current job:**  
August 2025

**Favourite piece of music:**  
Champagne Supernova – Oasis

**Favourite food:** I particularly love Thai cuisine and enjoy sampling a variety of dishes!

**Favourite drink:** A cappuccino first thing in the morning (and a cold glass of rosé wine in the sunshine!)

**Favourite holiday:** The hustle and bustle of the theme parks of Orlando or a quiet sun-drenched relaxation in Spain!

**Favourite leisure pastime:** As soon as I stopped playing hockey I began coaching. Since retiring from that, I enjoy watching football with my family and friends

**Favourite TV programme:** Round the World – I love watching the teams navigate cultures that they are unfamiliar with. This has opened my mind to travelling to some less travelled destinations in the future!

**Epitaph:** Laughter is timeless, imagination has no age and dreams are forever!

**Q** Clifton Hall started life as a boys-only boarding school in 1930, then became co-ed day and boarding, and then scrapped boarding in 1996. Thirty years on, can you envisage boarding ever entering the equation again?

**A** Although I have been here for the last 18 years, we are now utilising every last nook and cranny of the building so I cannot see how we could ever have a boarding facility at Clifton Hall in the future. The school has been on quite a journey already in terms of its evolution and becoming a 3-18 school took significant foresight. I am in favour of a one Campus school and to reintroduce boarding would mean developing residential options off-site.

**Q** You follow the Scottish Curricula Guidelines and prepare pupils for Scottish qualifications. If headlines in Scottish papers are to be believed there is widespread disquiet on both fronts. Why have you stuck with them?

**A** It is important to recognise that the Scottish Curriculum is currently undergoing a period of significant development and reform. This evolution is both necessary and timely, as the needs of young people, wider society, and the future workforce continue to change.

Clifton Hall is a well-established and traditional learning environment, and as a Scottish school situated in the nation's capital, it is both appropriate and purposeful that we continue to follow the National Curriculum. The Scottish Curriculum is widely respected and internationally recognised, and while it remains a strong framework, the modernisation already underway is both welcome and essential. I look forward with optimism to seeing how these developments will further enhance the educational experiences and outcomes for our young people in the years ahead.

**Q** You have said that relationships with teaching staff and friends are the single most important thing to young people. What, in your experience, have been the most effective ways to foster those meaningful relationships?

**A** It is widely understood that some of the most meaningful opportunities for building friendships take place beyond the classroom. The school's approach of providing a 30 minute morning break and a one hour lunch break allows pupils ample time to eat, relax, and socialise, which is highly beneficial to their wellbeing and relationships. An array of lunchtime clubs and activities also provide opportunity for engagement.

In addition, a wide range of sporting activities further enhances opportunities for social interaction, alongside day trips and residential experiences, including Outdoor Education. Together, these create a rich variety of contexts in which pupils can connect with one another.

Within a small school environment, these opportunities are not limited to specific year groups or existing friendship circles. This allows new relationships to develop naturally and organically. Rather than attempting to engineer social connections, it is the exposure to different people and shared experiences that most effectively supports meaningful and lasting friendships.

**Q** After graduating you went straight into teaching at a maintained school before moving into independent education. Was this always your intended career path? Who or what inspired you into the profession?

**A** Growing up, I explored a number of possible career paths – some more realistic than others! As an early teenager, I was quite taken with the idea of becoming cabin crew. The appeal of travelling the world, seeing new places, and not being tied to an office desk was hard to resist. While that career didn't quite take off (pun intended), my love of travel certainly hasn't diminished.

As I moved through my senior years at secondary school and leaned into my passion for sport, my focus shifted towards Physiotherapy or teaching Physical Education. Teaching ultimately won out – and I can safely say I've never looked back. My own PE teachers played a huge role in that decision; they were professionals I respected immensely and whose impact stayed with me long after I left school.

Jill Drummond has been head at Clifton Hall School, Edinburgh since August 2025. She started at the school in 2008 as a PE teacher, and most recently served as Pastoral Care and Guidance Coordinator.



Once I was teaching, my role models naturally became colleagues and leaders who inspired me to look beyond the classroom and consider how I could support young people more broadly. This led me into the Guidance role, where my skill set developed significantly and my understanding of leadership deepened. That experience, alongside the influence of many inspiring professionals along the way, eventually guided me towards headship.

As educators, we regularly encourage young people to take risks, trust themselves, and change direction if something isn't quite right. On this occasion, I took my own advice – and here I am. It turns out that stepping outside your comfort zone can be very good practice.

It is always a challenge to assume the role of head, but perhaps particularly so when an internal appointment and relationships with former colleagues change. What are your top tips for making this transition effectively?

Working in a school where staff remain for long periods of time allows strong, trusting relationships to develop. Those relationships continue to be a real strength of our community, even if the dynamic has naturally shifted as roles evolve. I value these connections deeply and see them as central to the positive culture of the school.

My approach to leadership is grounded in the same values we encourage in our pupils: Be Kind and Work Hard. These principles have guided my own professional journey and continue to inform how I support and work alongside colleagues.

In my early experience as Head, I have learned the importance of leading with courage, confidence, and conviction – while always remaining approachable, supportive, and mindful of the collective expertise and commitment of the staff team.

A large percentage of your working life has been spent at Clifton Hall. Do you consider it beneficial to your role as head to have stayed in one establishment? Would you advise other staff with ambitions to headship to follow your example or to widen their experience?

This is a very personal question, and the experience will naturally differ from one Head to another. For me, having such a strong belief in the school's ethos, model, and approach meant there was only one community in which I wanted to pursue this opportunity.

One of the greatest strengths I brought into the role was my deep knowledge of the school community. The positive, respectful relationships built up over many years provided a strong foundation and were invaluable in supporting my transition into headship. Having a thorough understanding of the environment, its people, and its culture has been an enormous advantage.

Stepping into leadership in a completely new setting undoubtedly brings its own rewards, but also significant challenges. My experience demonstrates that there is real value in looking within your own community, trusting the relationships you have built, and recognising the transferable skills you already possess. For those considering leadership, confidence in your knowledge, your values, and your people can be a powerful starting point.

Clifton Hall offers a range of extra-curricular activities including those around sport and residential trips. You have said that schools should provide opportunity and create avenues for further exploration with clubs and local groups. Since taking up post what steps have you taken towards this and what outcomes have you witnessed?

This reflects an approach to young people's development that I have long believed in and consistently championed throughout my career – one that has remained unchanged in taking on this role. Every school offers different pathways and opportunities, and ours is a place where enthusiasm for sport and wider activities can be nurtured, explored, and enjoyed, even if excellence is not always the ultimate goal.

For many pupils, the opportunity to build skills, develop confidence, enjoy participation, and experience competition is exactly what they

need at this stage of their journey. For those aspiring to perform or compete at the highest levels, it is equally important to recognise the value of opportunities beyond the school environment. These experiences complement one another rather than compete.

Importantly, engagement in activities beyond the classroom and the school day helps broaden social circles and supports pupils' overall wellbeing. When young people face challenges in school, having alternative spaces where they feel confident and connected can be incredibly powerful – and the same is true in reverse. This balance is particularly valuable when pupils live across a wide geographical area, where informal socialising beyond the school day is not always possible.

Ultimately, providing young people with access to varied experiences allows them to grow as individuals, build resilience, and develop a sense of belonging across different communities – an outcome that sits at the heart of meaningful education.

You have said that educational setting is crucial, especially in relation to class sizes, pastoral support and community belonging. Clifton Hall has fewer than 500 pupils. With the current financial challenges facing the sector how are you maintaining the balance between setting and staying financially viable as an all-through school?

Being an all-through school allows for educational continuity. We share specialist staff and facilities across phases, to benefit the widest possible range of pupils. This supports the development of strong relationships; a fundamental of success. Most importantly, whilst the sector faces headwinds, our focus remains on the value of the output. By maintaining small class sizes, we ensure the academic outcomes and character development that parents prioritise, making the choice of our school a sustainable and attractive long-term investment for families. Ultimately, we are optimising our unique all-through structure to protect the small-group environment that defines us, without academic selection in an environment that meets the needs of the young people in our care. **Continued >**

# Profile

In conversation with Jill Drummond (continued)

**Q** The school has recently opened a new Woodland Trail in its grounds. It is available for all pupils through from Nursery to Seniors. What impact have you seen this have since opening?

**A** Our spectacular surroundings are a defining feature of the school and a key source of inspiration for learning. With access to more than 35 acres of woodland, we are fortunate to have a natural environment that is not only visually stunning but also provides a rich and meaningful context for outdoor learning. These surroundings create a unique backdrop where curiosity, wellbeing, and engagement can flourish.

This environment was the inspiration behind the creation of the Woodland Trail. Designed to enhance creativity and deepen understanding, the trail thoughtfully blends nature with technology, making it both accessible and appealing to all learners. Alongside informative posts, QR codes

invite pupils to explore further, encouraging independent enquiry and sparking individual interests.

Although still in its infancy, crucially, the Woodland Trail is not static. It is designed to evolve over time, allowing learning opportunities to be adapted and expanded as pupils' needs and interests develop. This flexibility enables significant differentiation, ensuring that learners at all stages can benefit from the experience while making the most of our remarkable surroundings.

**Q** Clifton Hall promotes an "accessible approach" to pastoral care. Are there other approaches? What makes this one the right one for your students?

**A** In a busy school environment, especially during lessons, accessing the right support at the right time can be challenging. Our open door approach ensures that a member of staff is always available when pupils need support.

As a small community, staff know pupils well, and pupils are encouraged to seek help from the person they feel most comfortable with, not simply the person who is available. This allows for timely, effective support and early intervention, reinforcing the message that no concern is too small.

**Q** Outside of work what do you like to do to relax and wind down? You are a Hibs supporter but maybe that's not so relaxing!

**A** You are absolutely right – being a Hibs supporter is rarely a relaxing experience! Still, it's all part of the passion. When I'm looking to unwind, I'm most often found out walking the dog in the evenings or at the weekend, making the most of some fresh air and a bit of headspace. Above all, I really value spending quality time with my family and close friends, which is where I find the greatest enjoyment and balance.

## Vanbrugh 300



Kimbolton Castle, located in the grounds of Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, is one of six historic properties that will be showcased in Vanbrugh 300 in 2026 – a nationwide celebration marking the tercentenary of Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect behind some of Britain's most iconic buildings.

Vanbrugh 300 will feature activities, exhibitions, events and lectures throughout the year at six of Vanbrugh's most significant masterpieces, including: Kimbolton Castle; Castle Howard, Yorkshire; Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire; Seaton Delaval Hall, Northumberland; Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire; and Stowe House, Buckinghamshire.

As part of the anniversary, more than 100 state primary school

**Pictured:** Kimbolton Castle

classes (KS1 and KS2) from across the UK are being invited to take part in a free national school's programme learning about Vanbrugh's work. Primary school teachers can book a free school visit to their nearest Vanbrugh-designed heritage site – including Kimbolton Castle – and access teacher CPD and curriculum-linked classroom resources that give pupils the chance to explore history, heritage, and architecture.

Headteacher at Kimbolton School, Will Chuter, said: "It's an honour for Kimbolton Castle to be part of the national Vanbrugh 300 celebrations. This initiative will not only showcase the castle's significance, but will also welcome schools and communities from across the region to engage with our shared heritage."



## Commemorating a school architect

Pupils at York House, Hertfordshire, have been commemorating the 300-year anniversary of the passing of Charles Finch, the original architect of their school building. The main Grade II listed building that now houses York House School, was built in 1712 by Finch on the site of a former dwelling which is thought to have dated back to Tudor times.

Head of History at York House School, Dr Matthew Glencross, commented: "With it being 300 years since the passing of Charles Finch, I began to wonder what he would make of the school and the changes we have made to the site. I tasked our pupils to write a letter to Finch telling him about their

**Pictured:** Historic image of York House

school and to imagine the former uses of the rooms in which they now study."

The pupils came up with a raft of ideas including the fact that while the front door is rarely used today as an entrance, the entrance hall itself, as the main foyer, is still the first thing that a visitor sees when they arrive.

"Many school traditions were also mentioned in the letters as the site has had its fair share of pupil and staff rumours over the years, the most notorious being the history room ghost. The room, situated on the first floor used to be a bedroom with a walk-in closet but now only exists as a small annex in the corner," said Dr Glencross.



# Want more students to choose Classics at GCSE or A Level?

Share with them the resources from Bloomsbury Publishing's latest campaign, *Where Can Classics Take You*. It includes a huge range of resources for schools looking to promote the subject and inspire the next generation of Classicists.

Whether it's learning a classical language or studying the ancient world, Classics teaches so many transferable skills that can be applied to different areas of the curriculum and opens up numerous career opportunities. At Bloomsbury, we launched our *Where Can Classics Take You?* campaign to help highlight the long-term benefits and importance of a subject we care so deeply about.

The resources found on the campaign hub – [www.bloomsbury.com/wherecanclassicstakeyou](http://www.bloomsbury.com/wherecanclassicstakeyou) – bring together interviews and personal stories from Classicists and current students, and classroom resources that you can use to show not just what Classics is, but what it does for students throughout their lives.

**How can you use the campaign to advocate for Classics?**

**Conversations with Classicists video recordings**

At the heart of this campaign are the voices of real people who have

studied Classics and have entered different types of industries. Each interview and personal account shows how Classics can act as a springboard into diverse opportunities, whether that's in academia, heritage and museums, publishing, languages, law, or even cyber-security!

- Watch these videos as part of assemblies, careers talks or departmental open evenings for students.
- Invite students to watch the videos together and reflect on how the skills they're developing – analytical rigour, interpretation of texts, cultural literacy – are valued far beyond the syllabus.

**Articles and insights from the Classics community**

The campaign includes a digital magazine bringing together articles, insights, tips and reflections by classicists. It is continually updated with new

reads throughout the year and will give students something new to read every term to inspire their learning.

The magazine is a ready-made resource for form time or enrichment sessions to spark curiosity and discussion about the value of Classics today.

- Create a *Where Can Classics Take You* reading group or club. Challenge students to pick an article, read it, and then discuss back in class to share ideas.
- Include the magazine in your departmental meetings or with parents to use at home with students.

**Invite students to be part of the campaign (and share your own Classics story)**

Bloomsbury is encouraging anyone who is currently studying a classical language or subject at any level to share what they love about Classics. There are student competitions to get involved with

(with past examples on the hub) and ways to share your students' creativity.

Did you study Classics at school? Share your story and be part of the campaign. Fill out the online form on the campaign hub.

**Book recommendations for every learning stage**

The Bloomsbury Classical Studies books are designed for scholars, teachers and students at every stage of learning from Key Stage 3 to PhD. There are fiction books for young readers to introduce stories from the ancient world, the *de Romanis* course to start your Key Stage 3 learners on the path to learning Latin, textbooks for the core Cambridge OCR GCSE and A Level Classics subjects, and teacher CPD books including Steven Hunt's *Starting to Teach Latin* for teachers new to the subject.

Whether you're looking for textbooks for your reading list or the latest research, there is something for you.

Take a closer look at the campaign hub and start sharing with your students:  
[www.bloomsbury.com/wherecanclassicstakeyou](http://www.bloomsbury.com/wherecanclassicstakeyou)

# A shared heritage, a shared future

Kingham Hill School, Oxfordshire, recently went through the merging process to become part of the Dean Close Foundation. Head of the school, now Dean Close Kingham Hill School, Pete Last, outlines their experience and how a shared heritage has built the foundation for a successful shared future.

1886 was a very significant year. It marked the launch of Coca-Cola and, more importantly for us, the founding of both Kingham Hill School and Dean Close School. That these two schools, established in the same year and founded on strikingly similar principles, should now come together feels both fitting and deeply meaningful.

Kingham Hill School was founded by the philanthropist Charles Edward Baring Young, whilst Dean Close School was established in memory of The Very Reverend Francis Close. Both men were motivated by a profound belief in the transformative power of education, shaped by strong Christian values, and driven by a desire to provide young people with the opportunity to flourish. Those founding principles continue to underpin both schools today.

For me, as Head of Kingham Hill School, this shared heritage has taken on even greater significance

as, on 1 August 2025, Kingham Hill School formally joined the Dean Close Foundation to become Dean Close Kingham Hill School. This marks one of the most significant and exciting developments in the school's long history, arguably matched only by the decision to welcome our first girls in 1993.

The journey to this point began with a simple lunch conversation in early 2024. Over the following 18 months, that conversation developed into a thorough, rigorous and carefully considered process of exploration and due diligence. I am enormously grateful to the Trustees of both the Kingham Hill Trust and the Dean Close Foundation, as well as to staff across both organisations, for the many hours of thoughtful, professional and collaborative work invested in reaching this decision.

Over the past two years, the senior leadership team at Kingham Hill has been on a remarkable

journey. It has been a period defined by collaboration, clarity of purpose and a shared ambition for the future. From the outset, we recognised that exploring a partnership of this scale required courage, strategic wisdom and a steadfast commitment to our values. Kingham Hill has always been proud of its identity, ethos and traditions, and these were never compromised. Instead, they guided every conversation and decision made.

At the heart of our thinking was a clear desire to strengthen the long-term security of the school, widen opportunities for our pupils and deepen our capacity to deliver an exceptional education. Joining the Dean Close Foundation offers precisely this: the strength that comes from being part of a successful and values-led family of schools, whilst retaining the distinctive character that makes Kingham Hill such a special place.

The process itself was both demanding and deeply affirming. Across governance, finance, pastoral care, academics, compliance and estates, we took the opportunity to review and reflect on every aspect of school life. In doing so, we were repeatedly brought back to the fundamental question of why we exist: to provide the very best education for the pupils in our care. That clarity has been both grounding and energising.

What has characterised the journey most strongly has been the extraordinary sense of collaboration, not only within the Kingham Hill Senior Leadership Team, but also with colleagues across the Dean Close Foundation. Early conversations quickly revealed a shared educational philosophy, a compatible approach to ethos and pastoral care, and a mutual desire to create environments in which young people are known, valued, and encouraged to thrive. These



shared convictions made the hard work purposeful and sustained momentum through the more complex phases of the process.

One of the greatest privileges of headship is the opportunity to equip and empower staff to do exceptional work for pupils. Throughout this journey, it has been inspiring to see the excitement and creativity of colleagues as they begin to map out future opportunities: from curriculum collaboration and professional development, to shared expertise and resources. There is real strength in being part of a wider foundation, and a palpable sense that we are shaping something genuinely exciting for current and future generations of Kingham Hill pupils.

As we reach the point where this partnership becomes a reality, the Senior Leadership Team is immensely proud of what has been achieved. This has been a demanding process, but it has also been deeply rewarding. Above all, it has reaffirmed the strength of Kingham Hill's values, the dedication of its staff and the enduring relevance of its founding vision.

Looking ahead, we do so with optimism, confidence and enthusiasm. The partnership with the Dean Close Foundation offers an opportunity not only to safeguard the school's future, but to enrich it – enhancing what we already do so well, while opening new doors for pupils and staff alike. With shared heritage, shared values, and a shared ambition, we are confident that this next chapter will prove transformative and overwhelmingly positive for our whole school community.

## Coastguard operational support team

Gordonstoun, Moray, has launched a service to become the first school in the UK to support Coastguard Rescue Teams responding to lifesaving incidents.

A team of eight senior students will form part of the Operational Support Team (OST), a group of volunteers who can be called upon at any time to support trained Coastguards dealing with lifesaving operations.

They will assist HM Coastguard with emergency search and rescue incidents across North East Scotland.

The students' key role will be assisting with communications from a Forward Control Point, strictly supervised by two Coastguard-trained members of Gordonstoun staff.

The students will operate from a new purpose-built Coastguard Centre situated on the Gordonstoun campus, around a mile from the shoreline.

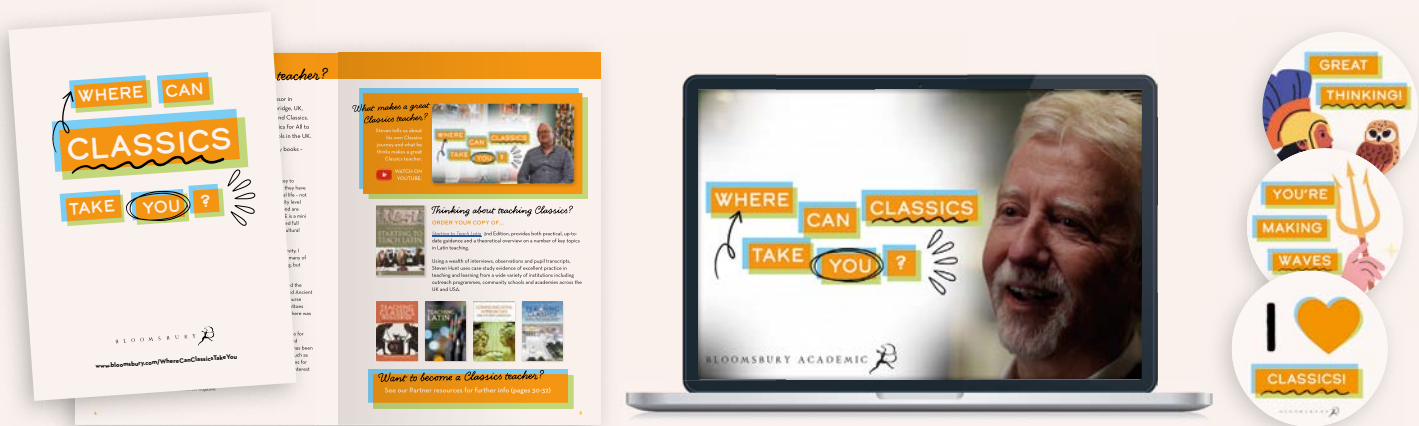
The Winthrop-Young Gordonstoun Coastguard Centre was officially opened by HRH The Princess Royal last year, ensuring the students have the latest equipment and facilities.



Pictured: The Winthrop-Young Gordonstoun Coastguard Centre



Visit [www.bloomsbury.com/WhereCanClassicsTakeYou](http://www.bloomsbury.com/WhereCanClassicsTakeYou)  
for resources and stories to inspire our future Classicists



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BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC



# The training ground for tomorrow's political leaders: why an all-girls' education politically empowers students

GDST Politics Network Chair and Head of Politics at Bromley High School, Kent, Adam Tagg, is working with the University of Roehampton to research some of the challenges girls face in the field and study of Politics to try and improve their involvement in the subject. Here he looks at how the environment of an all-girls' setting can encourage students to become confident change-makers.

For students with a keen interest in politics and leadership, an all-girls educational environment offers a uniquely beneficial platform. At the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), our schools are designed to dismantle the barriers and stereotypes that can inadvertently limit young women in mixed-sex settings, in this environment, girls are given space and time to grow into confident, ambitious leaders: free from gendered bias, social stereotyping, and unconscious barriers. In no other subject are stereotypes more obvious than in Politics, with research clearly showing girls feel their voices are not heard and that they lack the confidence to speak up and be heard. Now that the voting age is planned to be

lowered to 16, ensuring girls have the confidence to speak and a be heard is more important than ever.

In girls-only environments, they are given unparalleled opportunities to lead and take on visible roles of responsibility across the school community. In co-educational settings, research has shown that it is boys who dominate classroom discussions, particularly in subjects like Politics, and are disproportionately elected to top positions, and often girls go unheard. By contrast, an all-girls school ensures that every single leadership position is held by a girl. This constant visual affirmation of female leadership fundamentally changes the perception of what a leader looks like. Research into

the success of single-sex settings demonstrates that girls are more likely to participate actively in lessons, challenge the views of others, and engage with subjects. In a Politics classroom, this translates directly into a greater confidence to engage in rigorous debate, voice unconstrained opinions, and develop the resilience and self-confidence necessary for public life.

## Girls thrive most when in an all-girls school

In recent months, we have seen many independent schools opting to switch to co-educational to adapt to changing market dynamics, allowing more options to help full student numbers raising concerns about the disproportionate impact on girls. Girls-only schools play a pivotal role in the educational ecosystem by providing a specialised environment for young women. After decades of research in girls' education, the GDST has clear proof that girls thrive most in a girls' school.

## Cultivating political leaders

For students aged 11 to 18 navigating the critical developmental years in Senior School and Sixth Form, a specialised, all-girls educational environment provides a platform for the rigorous study of Politics and the practical application of political leadership. The GDST has long advocated that such a setting is not merely an alternative, but an essential training ground for future female leaders, deliberately engineered to counter the systemic biases that still permeate wider society.

In a single-sex classroom, the subtle but pervasive pressures to



conform to gender stereotypes simply evaporate. This constant, pervasive visibility of female leadership is transformational. It moves the abstract idea of political ambition into the tangible, making the pursuit of power, civic engagement, and influence a normalised, expected pathway for every student. For those studying A Level Politics, this environment directly fosters the crucial qualities of self-confidence and resilience needed to engage effectively in public discourse. They are not merely learning theory; they are continuously practising leadership and advocacy in a space where their voices are guaranteed to be central.

The mandate of the all-girls sector is to move its students from a state of anxious concern about the future to one of confident agency. The young women of this generation are highly engaged with the state of the world; they are acutely aware of the challenges facing society, particularly relating to environmental decline. While internal concerns such as mental health remain a primary worry, there are many issues students feel they can personally influence, environmental issues and sustainability rise to the top of their priorities. This intense desire to impact real-world policy and create change, to become, political activists and leaders, is a powerful energy that the all-girls environment channels and empowers. By ensuring their education is focused on equipping them to become change-makers.

## MUN conference

Wycombe Abbey, Buckinghamshire, has hosted its annual Model United Nations conference, welcoming 250 delegates from 15 schools to debate global issues ranging from human rights to Security Council challenges, alongside social events including a Highland Ball.

Throughout the conference, committees addressed international topics such as 'The Question of Civilian Rights in Occupied Territories' and 'The

Question of Protecting Healthcare in Areas of Conflict'.

Beyond the committee rooms, a highlight was the Highland Ball, where delegates enjoyed two hours of ceilidh dancing accompanied by a live band in a celebration of new friendships.

This year's conference also featured WYCOMAC, a simulation of the Arctic Council, which offered participants a forum to explore geopolitical and environmental challenges in the far north.

The conference forms part of Wycombe Abbey's Model United Nations society. MUN at Wycombe Abbey has run for several years and is supported by a dedicated member of staff, while being pupil-led, with senior pupils and leavers playing an active role in organisation and leadership.



Pictured: The MUN conference at Wycombe Abbey

# Smarter and sustainable laundry solutions for modern education

As schools and colleges continue to evolve, so do the expectations placed upon their facilities. Hygiene, efficiency, and sustainability are no longer optional extras – they are essential pillars of a well-run educational environment. Miele Professional's laundry solutions speak directly to these priorities, enabling institutions to modernise their operations while reducing environmental impact and long term costs.

At the heart of Miele's approach is advanced technology that delivers meaningful results. Their commercial laundry systems are engineered for energy efficiency, water conservation, and

exceptional hygiene – three areas where schools can see immediate and measurable benefits. With programmable cycles and eco friendly features, these machines streamline daily processes while

supporting the sustainability goals that are increasingly central to educational settings.

The Little Giants range exemplifies this commitment. With programme times reduced by up to 50% (from 49 minutes), specialist cycles and a textile protective cleaning process, they deliver fast, reliable results without compromising fabric care. Their compact washer dryer stacks save both space and resources, making them ideal for busy on site laundry rooms.

For larger or more complex operations, the Benchmark washers and dryers combine efficient technologies, intuitive controls, and specialist programmes to deliver a precisely matched system that ensures fast, cost effective performance over the long term.

With the added support of Miele MOVE Connect and appWash connectivity solutions, these machines become an ideal choice for on premise laundries or self serve laundrettes, offering schools greater oversight, flexibility, and operational efficiency.

Miele is dedicated to producing the best possible products with the least environmental impact, embedding sustainability at every stage of each product's life cycle. From thoughtful design to long term performance, this commitment drives ongoing progress toward fully carbon neutral solutions – providing schools seeking reliability, efficiency, and a greener future with a compelling, future ready choice.



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# A spiral notion

Religious Studies and Civics Tutor at Priory School of Our Lady of Walsingham, Isle of Wight, Jeremy Strickley, considers how the question of what to teach is inextricably joined to the question of how to teach, and offers some thoughts on the value of using a spiral timeline.

“The question of how to teach is as old as the hills. In the works of Plato, Socrates asks open questions to stimulate critical thought. A very few centuries later, Seneca the Younger allegedly observed that teaching in and of itself is a learning process, summarised in the phrase “docendo discimus” (“by teaching, I learn”). In the Gospels, Jesus uses parables to convey his lessons. Medieval scholars tended to favour rote learning, whilst the father of Victorian thinker John Stuart Mill was certain of the benefit of intense study. By the early 20th century, Maria Montessori’s child-oriented approach and AS Neill’s Summerhill School added further and innovative replies to the issue. Today, flipped classrooms, oracy strategies, and project-based learning offer yet more answers to this age-old query.

The question of what to teach (outside of exam syllabuses) can be somewhat less developed. Tutors typically refer to pre-made curricula, from which to create their programmes of study. Core subjects, such as English and Mathematics, have well-established learning pathways, supported by years of research, where scope and sequence details are largely predetermined. All told, these materials represent a sort of teaching manual, where the substance of what to teach is largely decided in advance and at distance.

As a Religious Studies tutor, I have always found this situation intriguing. This is because I have invariably been able to draw on relatively flexible curricular frameworks. Thus, I could equally well find myself tasked with delivering a predominantly Judeo-Christian curriculum in one context, and a balance of faith traditions in another. Similarly, the thematic aspects of Religious Education (RE) can

vary from school to school, with some institutions favouring more practical concerns (e.g. social justice) and others opting for more philosophical areas (e.g. arguments for the existence of God).

This diversity emerges out of RE’s rare status as a statutory subject in England and Wales (where in the latter it is now titled Religion, Values, and Ethics) but is not yet part of the National Curriculum. As such, syllabuses are determined by local education authorities, with the proviso that curricula “... must reflect that the religious traditions in Great Britain are mainly Christian, while also taking into account the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain...”<sup>1</sup>. The result of this educational freedom is that many tutors are broadly able to develop their own topics and subtopics as a matter of course. Hence, in my experience, the question of what to teach has always been tightly joined to the question of how to teach.

A simple example of this interaction in RE is pupils learning about the issue of prejudice. Here, the chosen focus, which can be addressed through spiritual and secular understandings, centres on encouraging pupils to be nonjudgemental and may include role-playing relevant attitudes, such as inclusivity. Thus, the decision of what to teach becomes integral to the process by which it is taught.

After RE, the discipline I’ve had the opportunity to teach the most is history. Responding to the question of what history to teach can prove just as considered a process. To begin to answer it, the Historical Association, the UK national charity for history, is a good starting point. Its website contains a “School History FAQs” section, focusing

on state secondary schools in England, which sets out a series of succinct replies to queries such as “Why is something not on the National Curriculum?” and “What do schools decide to teach?”. The answers it provides reveal that whilst there is guidance in the National Curriculum, it is not overly prescriptive (e.g. curricula should span British history from medieval times to the present and include some non-British history) and indicates only one mandatory topic, the Holocaust<sup>2</sup>.

Within these tramlines, historical texts are a source of direction in so far as how to teach is concerned. In his introduction to the classical work ‘The Histories’, the US scholar John Marincola points out that Herodotus employs a “... guiding thread...”, which uses “... themes and concerns...” to help manage the weight of historical record gathered in a single volume<sup>3</sup>. The way historians use thematic patterns as vectors in their studies is equally meaningful in arranging a school history curriculum. By embedding past events thematically, it is possible to shape a historical sequence that may otherwise seem unwieldy or confusing. This format also gives pupils room to engage in analytical and evaluative thinking, providing tutors with invaluable assessment opportunities.

A way in which the questions of what and how to teach are simultaneously answered in history is apparent in the use of timelines. This visual device combines curricular content with chronological learning. The traditional linear timeline is probably the most immediately comprehensible. Essentially, a horizontal or vertical line, labelled with selected events, it is widely used as a means of presenting a chronology. However, it also risks oversimplifying things. An alternative approach is the



spiral timeline. This can be used to depict layers of connections between happenings, as well as presenting a standard order of events. It can spiral in ever-increasing circles, thus indicating greater distance between certain occurrences, or in tube-like fashion, to indicate a tighter, more consistent run of events. Each circle of the spiral may also include miniature loops, signifying interlinked small-scale events. Each of these loops in turn becomes part of a larger cycle of concern – continuity and change within continuity and change, if you will.

There of course are limits to this representation. A spiral timeline may encourage pupils to see events as more closely related than is the case. The shape of an ever-expanding spiral might lead some pupils to perceive progress (e.g. a chronology of peace agreements) where in point of fact there is no such thing. At bottom, it may simply be an unnecessarily complicated arrangement. I think, however, these shortcomings can be surmounted. A spiralling structure may require more careful exposition, perhaps involving a whole-school approach. Its complexity, too, may be used to the tutor’s advantage, by deploying it as a form of differentiation, to stretch more gifted pupils.

However a timeline is presented, I think it is a useful way of highlighting the convergence of curricular content and instructional methods. I also remain convinced that our being cognizant of what to teach as much as how to teach is critical to our educational practices.

1 <https://natre.org.uk/about-re/> [Accessed 3 November 2025].

2 <https://www.history.org.uk/higher-ed/resource/10557/school-history-faqs> [Accessed 3 November 2025].

3 Herodotus, ‘The Histories’. Aubrey de Selincourt, trans. London, Penguin Books Ltd, 2003, pp.xxii–xxiii.

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Speakers and Panel

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# A smarter way to cater: how independent schools can maintain quality under cost pressures

The UK food and non-alcoholic drink inflation rate, which is the annual percentage change in prices, rose during much of 2025: from 2.0% in December 2024 to 5.1% in August 2025<sup>1</sup>. While these figures reflect broader economic pressures, their impact on schools is particularly concerning. Behind the numbers lies a growing crisis: school meal services are struggling to provide high-quality meals amid the soaring cost of food.

DEFRA-commissioned modelling identifies five core drivers of food prices: what farmers are paid, import prices, exchange rates, and labour and non labour manufacturing costs<sup>2</sup>. Whatever the cause, rising prices are being passed on to schools. This is placing even greater financial pressure on the independent school sector, which has already weathered several turbulent years. The introduction of VAT on school fees has prompted more families to move their children into the state system, as many find the increased financial burden difficult to sustain. At the same time, the removal of charitable business rates relief has placed additional pressure on schools already grappling with rising inflation and higher payroll costs.

At the same time as dealing with these cost pressures in the kitchen, parents are rightly still expecting their children to be served quality meals that cater to individual needs and preferences. Delivering this level

of service while managing the costs is a daunting task, especially as schools are continuing to navigate a serious and continuing labour crisis in kitchens.

The combination of rising costs, shrinking budgets, labour shortages, and growing dietary complexity presents an important question: How can independent schools protect meal quality, safety, and inclusivity under intense financial pressure? This is where considering different approaches to catering can make a real difference.

Catering should never be left to schools to shoulder alone. At apetito we're passionate about delivering a personalised meals service that suits every child's needs and know how vital it is that pupils are able to enjoy nutritionally balanced meals that support their wellbeing and meet their needs.

With apetito, independent schools are able to guarantee consistent quality whilst also delivering cost savings in the kitchens. Unlike

traditional kitchen setups that demand a team of skilled chefs and kitchen staff to source ingredients and prepare meals from scratch for pupils with increasingly diverse dietary requirements, our catering system eliminates much of this labour-intensive work.

In fact, our prepared meals typically require 50% less staff and completely removes the requirement for skilled cooks and chefs, which in turn protects schools from the volatile labour market and reduces the costs required to produce high-quality meals.

But the benefits don't stop at reducing the cost of school meals. Our service offers flexible menus, which allow schools to offer an expansive range of nutritious dishes including classic favourites that pupils' love. Every meal is designed to meet school nutritional standards and includes options for specialist diets, such as allergen-free meals.

## Transform your school catering today

We're proud that our unique proposition gives us the ability to help schools serve high-quality meals, whilst also tackling other significant challenges like cost and labour shortages.

Our model is built to support the needs of all pupils, without driving up staffing or waste. And we know it works, as we've seen an increase in uptake with the independent schools we partner with. One school we partner with saw their uptake rise by 85%, following their introduction of apetito.

As one of the fastest growing school meal providers, we're committed to transforming school catering for independent schools and are delivering outstanding quality, meeting pupils' needs and serving serious cost savings in every bite.



Learn more about apetito's service by visiting: <https://apetito.link/ISM26> or scanning the QR code.

<sup>1</sup> Harari, D (2026). The impact of food inflation on the cost of living. [online] House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2026-0004>  
<sup>2</sup> Davidson, J; Lin, H; Lloyd, T; McCorriston, S; Morgan, W (2021). Retail Food Price Modelling Project Report. University of Exeter. Report: <https://hdl.handle.net/10871/128070>



## Acquisition

Inspired Learning Group (ILG) has announced that it has agreed, subject to contract, to take on the running of the Nursery and Pre-Prep (Reception and Years 1–2) at Exeter Cathedral School, Devon, from September 2026.

Under the agreement, early years and Pre-Prep provision will continue to be delivered at Hall House.

The partnership has been developed in close collaboration with the Governors of Exeter Cathedral School, following careful consideration of the challenges facing small, standalone preparatory schools across the sector.

As part of the arrangement, Hall House will work in close collaboration with Shebbear College, Devon, an established ILG through school. Through this, the school and nursery will benefit from shared leadership

**Pictured:** Hall House

expertise, governance support, and educational resources, while retaining the distinctive ethos, values, and character that families associate with Exeter Cathedral School.

Head at Shebbear College, Mr Charlie Jenkins, will work alongside the leadership team at Exeter Cathedral School and offer places to pupils in other year groups, should families wish to explore this option, with suitable transport arrangements available.

Chair of the Board of Governors at Exeter Cathedral School, Charles Beer, commented: “This partnership and collaborative model offer the most sustainable way to protect and strengthen early years and Pre-Prep education within the local community. We are grateful to ILG and Shebbear College for their thoughtful and supportive approach, and for the reassurance this provides to families.”



## New education group

QED Schools Group, an international schools group created by a team of educationalists, has launched.

Led by CEO Anita Gleave, the QED Schools Group has been named in honour of Graeme Delaney (whose Education Consultancy was called QED). Graeme, who died in 2024, dedicated his almost 50-year career to the care and development of all children.

The founding school of QED Schools Group is Wycliffe College, Gloucestershire.

Anita Gleave, said: “The independent school sector in the UK has been battered – first by Covid and then by financial pressures which have led to a mighty tailspin. Sadly, not all schools have survived and there continues to be much consolidation and contraction in the sector.

“QED Schools Group is resolute in our determination to champion our sector, to promote all that is brilliant about UK education and to build a community of

**Pictured:** Wycliffe College pupils

exceptional schools who have every child at their heart. As a group, we honour the best in independent education: integrity, scholarship, community and kindness.”

Headmaster of Wycliffe College, Christian San José, said: “Today marks a significant new chapter in our College’s history and enables us to plan confidently for the future in a way that many independent schools sadly cannot at this time.

“Life at Wycliffe College will continue as normal. I will remain as Headmaster and the Senior Leadership Team will continue to run the school. QED Schools Group will support us with targeted expertise, professional development, access to new educational resources, additional learning experiences and international expansion. These additions will broaden opportunities for all our pupils while keeping classroom life and our values at the heart of everything we do.”

## Joining for the future

St George’s Ascot, Berkshire, is set to become a part of the charitable St Albans Education Group (STAEG) during the Summer Term 2026.

Founded in 1877, St George’s Ascot is a day and boarding school for girls aged 11 to 18. STAEG currently comprises St Albans High School for Girls Senior School, St Albans High School for Girls Prep, and Stormont School, in Hertfordshire.

Amber Waite, Principal of STAEG, said: “We are thrilled

to welcome St George’s Ascot into our Group. The school’s values and ambitions align perfectly with our own, and this partnership will strengthen our shared commitment to providing exceptional education within a supportive community.”

Hannah Fox, Head of St George’s Ascot, said: “Joining STAEG opens up so many opportunities for collaboration and development, while allowing St George’s Ascot to continue to thrive as a school and build upon our considerable strengths, within



a strong charitable trust. As we look to the future, I am excited about how this partnership will

**Pictured:** Amber Waite (left) and Hannah Fox

enrich the learning experiences of our pupils and create even more pathways to success.”

# Getting a return on investment with D1 Driver Training

Lightweight 17-seat minibuses that can be driven on a standard car licence (without D1 entitlement) are popular with schools who have Section 19 Permits.

However, there are distinct advantages to having drivers with full D1 entitlement. This article explains the difference between B1, D1, and D1 (101) licences and looks at the advantages of having D1 drivers, including increased safety and greater opportunity.



John Peterson

Please note, this article focuses mainly on schools operating under a Section 19 Permit. If your school operates under a PSV Operator's Licence, then all your drivers need to have full D1 entitlement and Driver CPC (Certificate of Professional Competence) which is 35 hours of periodic training every 5 years.

## What is a D1 entitlement?

D1 entitlement on a driving licence allows individuals to drive minibuses with a GVW (Gross Vehicle Weight) over 3.5 tonnes and up to 16 passengers. There are two types of D1 entitlement inherited D1 (101) and the full D1 entitlement.

Drivers who passed their test before 1 January 1997 will have D1 (101) entitlement on their licence, commonly called inherited D1 entitlement. 101 indicates not for hire or reward, so they can drive minibuses over 3.5 tonnes, with up to 16 passengers, and be paid to do so, provided the organisation is operating not-for-profit, under a Section 19 Permit.

Under a Section 19 Permit, drivers with a standard B1 car licence without inherited D1 entitlement, can drive a minibus with a GVW up to and including 3.5 tonnes, or up to 4.25 tonnes if it has specialist access equipment or is an electric minibus. There are conditions for this including being over 21 and being "volunteer" drivers who are not paid, rewarded, or compelled, to drive.

As the age of those with inherited D1 increases, the pool of D1 drivers decreases. It is worth looking at your fleet of minibuses to see how many of your minibuses have a GVW over 3.5 tonnes that younger members of staff without D1 have will not be able to drive.

It is advisable to keep a detailed list of your vehicles, the GVW weight, and who can drive them so that drivers are not accidentally taking

a minibus they do not have the licence to drive.

## The Benefits of D1 Driver Training

### 1. Everyone can drive everything

If all of your drivers have D1 entitlement on their licences (either inherited or having taken the full D1 test) then there will be no confusion as to which minibus your staff can drive. This will alleviate the logistical issue of ensuring lighter buses are available for younger staff and ensure no one is unwittingly driving illegally.

You will also negate the debate as to whether teachers driving for their schools with B1 licences are "volunteers" or not.

### 2. Save money on external transport

Gemma Monk, Portsmouth Grammar: "I've just done my first two transitions from B class to D class just in the last week, so I am quite pleased as it opens up more opportunity. Looking at cost savings for that, the sports master in particular that took the transition from B class to D class – they've already paid the investment back by the number of journeys they have been able to do in the larger vehicle. So that's fantastic. He's already done four journeys in the vehicle and it's paid for itself, the training."

### 3. Demonstrate your commitment to pupil safety and fully trained drivers

Offering D1 driver training to your staff shows a commitment to the highest levels of driver and passenger safety.

Parents will rightly assume the staff driving their children have been given not just sufficient, but the proper training. You risk reputational damage should the worst happen and parents discover school staff have been driving their child in a

vehicle 4 times the size of a car, without any additional training or health and eyesight checks.

A full D1 driver licence not only requires a theory and practical test but a medical and eyesight test, all of which significantly reduce the likelihood of accidents in the long term.

If you are not considering the full D1 licence for your drivers, it's advisable to ensure they are having annual eyesight tests and regular driver training including MiDAS every four years as well as annual risk assessments and/or practical driving assessments.

## The Process of Obtaining a D1 Driving Licence

Getting a full D1 driving licence involves several steps:

### Checking Eligibility

To apply for a provisional D1 driving licence, individuals must:

- Be at least 21 years old
- Hold a full Category B (car) driving licence
- Meet the necessary medical and eyesight requirements

### Medical Examination (D4 Form)

Applicants must undergo a medical examination conducted by a registered doctor. The doctor will complete a DVLA D4 medical form, which assesses the driver's fitness to operate larger vehicles.

### Applying for a Provisional D1 Licence

Once the medical examination is completed, the individual must submit a D2 application form to the DVLA to obtain a provisional D1 licence. This typically takes a few weeks to come through.

### Theory Test

After receiving the provisional licence, the applicant must pass a D1-specific theory test. This test includes:

- Multiple-choice questions covering road safety and regulations.
- Hazard perception, assessing the ability to identify and react to potential hazards.

### Practical Training and Driving Test

The next step is to undertake professional training with a qualified instructor. Rivervale Minibus has advance driving instructors who train individuals on a one-to-one basis to improve first time pass rates. After completing training, the applicant must pass a practical driving test, which includes:

- Vehicle handling and control
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- Vehicle safety checks
- On-road driving assessment
- Specific manoeuvres such as reversing into a bay

Rivervale Minibus do this over two days (including the test) to keep the time your staff are out of their day-to-day roles to a minimum.

Investing in D1 driver training will reap multiple benefits including:

- Improved safety and flexibility
- Savings on external transport costs
- Transport options and reliability
- Compliance with legal requirements
- Open the door to offering payment or incentives to drivers

This type of best practice driver training and transport policy will enhance an organisation's reputation and possibly give you a competitive edge where potential staff and parents are concerned.

John Peterson is Director of Minibus Services for Rivervale Minibus. If you have any questions about driver training or minibuses, you can call the Rivervale Minibus team on 01869 253744 or email: [minibus@rivervale.co.uk](mailto:minibus@rivervale.co.uk)

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## Keeping orchestras and other national ensembles alive

Director of Music at The High School of Glasgow, Sarah Stuart, takes a look at the role independent schools play in developing pupils to participate in orchestras and national ensembles, and discusses the importance of balancing excellence with providing inclusive musical experiences to allow pupils of all abilities and sectors to feel a part of something.

On attending National Youth Orchestra of Scotland concerts in recent years, it is striking that a significant proportion of the orchestra's make-up (with players in the 13–18 age bracket) consists of independent school pupils, pupils attending specialist music schools or conservatoires, or the offspring of professional musicians. The explanation for this must surely lie in the access these young musicians have to one-to-one specialist music lessons from an early age and in the motivation they develop to practise, perform, compete, and build skills for life, enabling them to access high-level music-making in their teenage years.

Working as the Head of a thriving Music Department in an independent school is a fortunate position to be in. Parental support is often in place, there is access to one-to-one lessons from highly skilled professional musicians, a positive learning environment with healthy competition from like-minded peers and access to a decent-quality musical instrument and case. The identity that comes from being a member of the school Chamber Choir, Senior Orchestra,

Jazz Band, or Pipe Band enables pupils to meet musicians from other year groups, perform in exciting concert halls, travel to New York to play in the Tartan Parade, or gain Music Colours for achieving Grade 8 with distinction.

Whilst striving for excellence in our Music Department, there is also an obligation, I feel, to provide musical experiences that are non-competitive, inclusive and allow pupils to feel part of something exciting, often greater than the sum of its parts. The weekly Rock Band (and now Rock Band Plus!) for pupils in Transitus to Senior 2 who are interested in being in a band is a popular club. It resulted in some of the more excitable Senior 2 boys performing publicly for the first time in last session's Spring Concert, with a very respectable rendition of 'Mr Brightside' by The Killers.

This session, the Senior Orchestra will perform 'Danse Macabre' by Saint-Saëns, featuring a Senior 5 soloist who gained a place in the NYOS Symphony Orchestra last year, alongside an almost full complement of players from Seniors 3–6. A small number of

gaps (tuba, second bassoon and second horn) will be filled by our one-to-one specialist tutors on these instruments. For the majority of the 40 players in the Senior Orchestra, this will be their only orchestral experience. It will give them a genuine sense of what orchestral playing feels like, and, hopefully, inspire a desire to pursue music beyond school in an amateur setting, given that most will not go on to study Music at tertiary level.

We are also currently working on a programme to attract musical pupils who are not otherwise learning an instrument by Senior School age to some of the more endangered instruments, including bassoon, double bass, trombone, and tuba. We have a stock of instruments and need to make it as easy and attractive as possible for potential new pupils to take up a perhaps less obvious choice. The carrot to dangle is inclusion in bands, orchestras, and other ensembles that are in danger of losing their bass line altogether.

There are many factors that need to be in place for young people to achieve places in national or other high-level performing ensembles. The key is surely early immersion in music, access to one-to-one (or small-group) specialist lessons from primary school age, the maintenance of a good stock of instruments and early performance opportunities.

At the Junior School at The High School of Glasgow, every pupil learning a musical instrument, either in or out of school, is invited to perform to their class and parents in the popular 'Mini Concerts' in June. Each child is supported by their class music



Sarah Stuart

teacher or instrumental tutor, either as a piano accompanist or backing-track operator. The confidence they display is incredible to witness.

At the Senior School, all pupils in Transitus (Primary 7 equivalent) to Senior 2 who learn a musical instrument are invited to prepare and perform a piece to their class. I attend all of these classes to help select the most outstanding performances for a 'Rising Stars' competition. By this stage, with pupils aged only 11–13, the standard of playing is excellent, with some remarkably mature performances on offer. Many pupils are already of a standard to apply to national music ensembles, further extending their musical development and opportunities.

Working in the independent sector as a music teacher is a privileged position and one I wish could extend to all pupils in Scotland, regardless of whether they attend state or independent schools. Every child should have access to one-to-one specialist music tuition, irrespective of background. This will take time to build, but the primary sector is the place to start, and Scotland's wealth of professional musicians are the people best placed to make it happen.





## Royal College of Organists Accreditation

Leweston School, Dorset, has been awarded the Royal College of Organists' "gold standard" accreditation, recognising the school's excellence in organ teaching, performance, and musical outreach.

This accreditation follows a detailed application process and a full-day visit from an RCO representative, during which school staff, Dr Rachel Milestone, Mr Stuart Whittle, and Mr Paul Cheater were interviewed about the school's organ programme. As part of the assessment, current organ students joined Mr Cheater and former pupil Eleanor Shortman, in giving a short recital, followed by a brief demonstration lesson with student Martha B. The assessor, Mr Simon Williams, was particularly impressed by the number of students who chose to attend the recital voluntarily to

hear the organ music during their lunch break, including many who do not play the organ themselves.

Becoming an RCO-accredited school brings with it a wide range of educational, cultural, and strategic benefits including access to the full suite of RCO resources, including a structured progression of examinations from beginner to diploma level for organ students; opportunities for the school to act as a regional hub for organ and church music, hosting workshops, concerts, and collaborative projects with local schools and churches. This will include outreach to young musicians who may not otherwise have access to an instrument; and access to national networks where Leweston will receive invitations to specialist courses, events, and conferences, and will be part of national initiatives supporting organ education.

Pictured: School organist, Mr Cheater

## BBC Young Composer Competition success

The Purcell School, Hertfordshire, is celebrating after its students have been named winners in all age categories at the BBC Young Composer Competition.

Following the announcement from the BBC, Gerard (Year 13) has been named winner of the Senior category, Nemunis (Year 12) winner of the Upper Junior category, and Luca (Year 10) winner of the Lower Junior category. In addition, Tim (Year 13) has been highly commended.

This year's competition was judged by a panel of adjudicators made up of Segun Akinola, Belle Chen, Lloyd Coleman, Tansy Davies, Hannah Donat, Shiva Feshareki, Gavin Higgins, and

George Moore – whose expertise spans a range of contemporary and classical practice.

Each category winner will now embark on a bespoke development programme, working closely with a mentor composer on a project with the BBC Concert Orchestra, culminating in

This year's success carries special significance for the school as Head of Composition Alison Cox, who is retiring at the end of this academic year after 38 years of service, helped Peter Kingston of The Guardian establish the original BBC Proms/Guardian Young Composer of the Year Competition in 1998.

## World Dance Cup Champion

A student from Westholme, Lancashire, has returned home as a World Dance Cup Champion after taking part in an international competition in Mexico.

Kent Hayward, 13, travelled with the Phoenix Company to compete in the World Dance Cup Championship, an event that brings together young dancers from across the globe.

Competing in solo, duet and group categories, Kent and his fellow dancers from Phoenix secured medals across multiple categories, including two gold medals and a silver in group performances. The pinnacle moment came when Phoenix were crowned World Champions for the X-pirit World Cup.

Kent, who has been dancing since the age of 4 performs a wide

Pictured: Kent Hayward



range of styles including modern, ballet, tap, commercial, acro, and theatre. He was one of around 30 boys and girls of all ages from the company selected to travel to Mexico, having successfully auditioned before fundraising to make the once-in-a-lifetime trip possible.

## 'The Band' musical



RGS Worcester has put on a performance of its musical 'The Band'. Inspired by the music of Take That, the production is set between 1992 and the present day. It follows five schoolfriends whose shared love of a boyband shapes their teenage years. Twenty-five years later, the group reunites for one final opportunity to see their childhood idols.

The musical featured many of Take That's most recognisable hits, performed under the musical direction of the

Director of Music, Mr Jamie Conway, and Vocal Director, Mrs Claire Tilling.

Ahead of opening night, the production received the news that it was nominated in five categories in the National School Theatre Awards: Best Musical, Best Ensemble, Best Actress in a Musical, Best Supporting Actress in a Musical and Best Actor in a Musical. Representatives from the Awards attended a performance to see the pupils in action.

Pictured: Final bow after performing 'The Band'

## Choir competition



Young vocalists from Duncombe School, Hertfordshire, have been crowned Prep School Choir of the Year at the Haileybury Choral Competition, after a group of Year 5 and 6 pupils wowed judges at a special event celebrating choir music.

The 2026 edition of the competition, which is hosted by Haileybury College in Hertford Heath, saw independent prep schools from across the region

Pictured: The Duncombe School Harmony Choir

compete for the trophy.

The 18-piece Duncombe School Harmony Choir secured gold medals for their rendition of 'Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning', the traditional spiritual arranged by Greg Gilpin.

The day of music-making also included a jazz workshop, a masterclass on Sir John Rutter's 'A Sprig of Thyme', and a performance from the Haileybury Choir.

## Music of the Holocaust

Lancing College, West Sussex, has held a pupil-led concert to commemorate the music that was composed and performed during the Holocaust.

The event, which took place on Holocaust Memorial Day, was produced and performed by Lower Sixth student, Isaac, alongside fellow musicians, as part of his Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

The concert explored the complex and often contradictory role of music in the camps and featured rarely performed works by composers including Ilse Weber, Viktor Ullmann, and Gideon Klein, alongside specially created arrangements.

The project represents the culmination of six months of research and preparation. Isaac independently organised all aspects of the concert, including sourcing rare music, producing the event, assembling

Pictured: Lancing College student organiser, Isaac



the orchestra and performers, and managing its marketing and promotion. His research has involved collaboration with Holocaust historians, musicologists, publishers, and archival institutions. The concert builds on Isaac's wider academic research into music in the Holocaust, for which he was awarded a Young Historian Award (Modern Studies GCSE) for his paper "Was the role of music in the Nazi camps of the Holocaust a force for good or bad?"



## A Midsummer Night's Dream

Pupils from Years 8-13 from Francis Holland Sloane Square, London, have put on a performance of Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at the Shaftesbury Theatre in the West End.

In line with the original play, the show style was themed around the idea of the moon, echoing the fact that in the time of Shakespeare's work, people believed in the power of moon and the stars to tell their fortunes. It felt especially fitting, therefore, that the day of the performance coincided with the February Snow Full Moon, thought to be a celestial symbol of creative transformation.

Head of Francis Holland Sloane Square, Alexandra Haydon, said: "The opportunity to perform in

Pictured: Performing 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

the West End is invaluable for our young actors and I am so grateful to everybody who made this possible. Our performers did so well with their mastery of Shakespearean language that the audience forgot it was Shakespeare, and the level of creative input from the girls themselves – including devising much of the music – was amazing, creating a hilarious, beautiful and contagiously joyful performance. This was an extraordinary feat to pull off, particularly as the girls rehearsed at the Shaftesbury for the first time on the day of the show, but teamwork made the dream work and the calibre of the performance was the true personification of the strength and spirit of our community."

## 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child'

Tudor Hall School, Oxfordshire, has become one of the first schools in the UK to secure the rights to perform the secondary schools' edition of the West End play, 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child'.

It has been selected to mark the all-girls' school's 175th anniversary in the 2025-26 academic year.

The school's 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child' production involves an 80-strong cast, including teachers, and features the portrayal of roles traditionally written as male. Many school departments are involved; from DT creating props such as wands and making jewellery as part of costume design, to science providing the on-stage experiments and Leiths Cookery

Pictured: Tudor Hall's 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child' poster



pupils making the sweets used in the play.

Local children were also invited to enjoy a Harry Potter experience day. This included making sorting hats in the Ceramics studio, playing a Quidditch match, enjoying a Hogwarts-themed lunch, and watching a final dress rehearsal of the production.

# Future First Conference

Pupils at Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG), Tyne and Wear, have stepped into discussions about the future at a Future First Conference, which explored the theme: Championing the Case for Humanity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.

Now in its second year, the annual conference brings together pupils in Years 10 and 12, alongside parents, to consider what the world of work might look like for the next generation – and how they can shape it.

Throughout the day, pupils, alumnae, and staff examined why human intelligence, creativity, and judgement remain essential in a world increasingly defined by rapid technological advancement.

Assistant Head and conference organiser, David Hyde, presented the event theme with his address 'AI and 2026 – Two Competing Visions of Our Futures', urging attendees to reflect on the opportunities, risks, and ethical

Pictured: Emilia Hardie, Associate Producer – Journalism

questions surrounding artificial intelligence – including the possibility that human-designed systems could one day surpass human capability.

The programme also featured talks from three NHSG alumnae, each offering a frontline perspective on how AI is reshaping their industries:

Lucy Baxter, Commercial Solicitor at Ward Hadaway – 'Being a Newly Qualified Solicitor in the Age of AI'.

Jennifer Vineberg, Practice Educator Radiographer at the NHS – 'Healthcare Must Remain Human in the Age of AI'.

Emilia Hardie, Associate Producer at CNBC International – 'The Importance of Human Intelligence in Journalism'.

While each speaker highlighted the efficiencies and innovations AI brings to their workplace, all three concluded that qualities such as accuracy, empathy, communication, and relationship building –



hallmarks of human intelligence – remain irreplaceable.

Complementing the alumnae contributions, pupils from Years 10–12 delivered a series of talks on the human achievements that inspire them. Their presentations ranged from the invention of the telegraph to the role of imagination and play in early childhood.

Later in the conference, pupils took part in series of seminars exploring the broader debate around AI and human values covering the future of knowledge, language learning, politics, and digital ethics.

Talking about the impact of the Future First Conference, David Hyde, Assistant Head and Conference Organiser, said: "The pace of technological change – especially in AI – is challenging every generation in both exciting and unsettling ways. AI is here to stay, but it is the choices we make, and particularly the choices this next generation will make, that will determine how AI develops and what role it plays in shaping our shared future. In my view, humanity must remain at the centre of that conversation."

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# CHANGING FACES... CHANGING PLACES...



Hall School Wimbledon (HSW), London, has appointed Mr Jack Tyson as its permanent headteacher. Mr Tyson's appointment follows his successful tenure as Interim Headteacher of the school.

He originally joined the school

from Chertsey High School in Surrey, with a background in education leadership, and 16 years' experience of teaching specialist subjects including Business Studies, Maths and Sports.

HSW is part of Blenheim Schools, a family of all-ability independent schools.



Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, has announced the appointment of Mr Doug Harper as its new Chief Operating Officer (COO).

Doug began his career as a commissioned officer in the British Army's Royal Engineers, serving for nine years in the UK and overseas. Over the past 12 years, he has held a number of senior executive roles in international development organisations. These include Chief Executive of Engineers Without Borders UK, a charity that engages engineering students and professionals in sustainability and global development projects. He currently holds the role of Chief Operating Officer at DMI,

an organisation that delivers evidence-based media campaigns to improve health outcomes in low-income countries.

Academically, he holds a first-class degree in Civil and Structural Engineering from Newcastle University and a Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Leicester, alongside professional qualifications in construction, project and financial management.

He will take up his newly defined role as COO at the school on 26 March 2026, succeeding the current Bursar, Mrs Jenny Agnew, who is leaving to take up the role of COO at Taunton School, Somerset.



Dame Allan's Schools, Tyne and Wear, will welcome a new Principal this September. Neil Seaton, who has experience in both the state and independent school sectors will join Dame Allan's from Queen Elizabeth High School, Northumberland, where he has been Head of School for five years.

Neil was born and grew up in Dumfriesshire, Scotland and, after qualifying as a History and Modern Studies teacher, joined Dollar Academy, Clackmannanshire. There, he took on the roles of Boarding House Tutor, Deputy Head of Year, and Head of Year.

Following Dollar Academy, Neil

moved to George Heriot's School, in Edinburgh, as a Head of Year and teacher of history and modern studies. He was at Heriot's for 15 years, the final six spent as Deputy Head in charge of pastoral care. Then in 2019, Neil completed his Standard for Headship with the University of Edinburgh and took up his position at Queen Elizabeth High School, having relocated to the North East to live with husband, Rob, and wire-haired Dachshund, Otto.

He is joining Dame Allan's as it makes the transition to become fully co-educational in September.

Neil succeeds Will Scott who will take up a position as Headteacher of Churcher's College, in Hampshire, in September.



Tring Park School for the Performing Arts, Hertfordshire, has announced the appointment of its new Principal, Andrew McGarva.

Andrew is currently at Morrison's Academy, Perthshire and Kinross, where he has been Rector since August 2021. His previous experience spans boarding, day, single sex, and international schools in the UK, Jersey, and

Japan. On the vocational side, as well as previous roles as Director of Music at two schools, Andrew has been a professional violinist, conductor, and performer.

He succeeds Simon Larter-Evans, who stepped down as Principal last term, and is provisionally set to start January 2027. In the meantime, Tring Park School will continue in the hands of its senior leadership team and Governors.

The Governing Body of Ghyll Royd School and Pre-School, West Yorkshire, has announced the permanent appointments



of Mr Hadley Nicholson as the new Headteacher, with Mrs Rebecca Picken appointed as Deputy Headteacher, effective from 1 February 2026.



Hadley Nicholson is a long-standing member of the Ghyll Royd community, having served as Deputy Headteacher, Form 6 Teacher and, since June 2025, Acting Headteacher.

Rebecca Picken has been a member of the school community since joining in 2019 as a Year One teacher. She is also the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). She was appointed Acting Deputy Headteacher in June 2025.



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Monkton Combe School, Somerset, has welcomed Bradley Salisbury as its new Principal.

Educated at Monkton before studying at the universities of Leeds and Bristol, Bradley previously led Dean Close School in Cheltenham for more than a decade. Prior to that he was the Senior Deputy Head at Dean Close School; Housemaster and Head

of RS at Wells Cathedral School; Head of RS and Head of Middle School at Bristol Cathedral School, and started his career as a teacher of RS and PSHE at Gordano School, North Somerset.

Bradley's appointment comes at a time when the school is celebrating being named Independent Boarding School of the Year in the in the 2025 Independent School of the Year Awards.



Durlston School, Hampshire, has announced the appointment of its new Headmaster,

Mr Bennjamyn Smith, who will take up the post in September 2026.

Most recently Headmaster of Kitebrook School, Gloucestershire, Bennjamyn's previous roles include

senior leadership positions both internationally and in the UK. As well as having a Masters in Education Leadership, he is also undertaking a PhD in Education, focusing on leadership and school development.

The appointment follows the announcement that current Headmaster, Richard May, will retire after a decade of service.



Portsmouth High School, Hampshire, has announced the appointment of Mrs Ruth Irvine Capel

as their new Head of Prep School, effective from September 2026. She will take over from existing head, Mr Paul Marshall say who is retiring.

Already a familiar presence within the school, Mrs Irvine Capel is currently serving as Assistant Head

(Pastoral) at the Prep School, and has been part of Portsmouth High Prep's leadership team for five years.

An alumna of Oxford High School GDST, Oxfordshire, Mrs Irvine Capel studied History at the University of Cambridge before completing her PGCE. Her career includes teaching and leadership roles across both state and independent schools, as well as work as an advisory teacher.



George Watson's College, Edinburgh, have announced the appointment

of Emma Lacroix as their new Director of Development. In this role, Emma will lead all fundraising activity for the school and oversee engagement and relationships across the Watsonian community.

Emma brings more than 15 years' senior-level fundraising and development experience across the higher education, culture and heritage sectors, and has been working at George

Watson's College as Fundraising Lead since the summer of 2025.

Her previous roles include Director of Development and Communications at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, and Head of Philanthropy at the University of Edinburgh for the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. She has also worked internationally as a Director of the American Friends of the Botanical Foundation and has advised organisations as a freelance fundraising consultant with the Philanthropy Company.



Morrison's Academy, Perthshire and Kinross, has welcomed Mr

Brian Miles to the school as Assistant Rector, Academic.

Brian was previously at Strathallan School, Perthshire and Kinross, where he was Head of Modern Languages and Director of Activities.

Commenting on his appointment, Brian said: "Joining Morrison's Academy is a fantastic opportunity and I look forward to working with colleagues to build on its strong academic culture. Supporting pupils in achieving their best, while ensuring learning remains ambitious, engaging and future-focused, will be central to my work."



The Repton Family of Schools has appointed Ian McIntyre as its new

managing director. He, will lead the expansion of Repton's international schools' business and further mergers across the UK.

Following an early career spent teaching in UK independent schools including two Headships, Ian led the international development

of Brighton College, East Sussex, opening their schools in the Middle East and South East Asia. Since 2019 he has been International Development Director at Rugby, Warwickshire, responsible for developing Rugby's schools in Japan, Nigeria, and Dubai.

The Repton School Group educates over 10,000 children and spans three continents, including five schools in the UK and six across the Middle East and China.



Mr Chris Staley has been appointed as Loughborough Schools

Foundation's first Chief Executive Officer. He will take up the role from the start of January 2026, joining from Coventry School Foundation where he has been Principal and Chief Executive since 2022.

Prior to his time at Coventry, Mr Staley's previous experience

in the education sector includes eight years as Headmaster at Wisbech Grammar School, Cambridgeshire, as well as senior roles at schools in Dorset and Surrey.

The Chief Executive Officer role has been created to set the longer-term strategic direction of the Foundation, and ensure it is best placed to achieve the ambition it holds for its schools, pupils, staff, and wider community.

## Heads Hunted

Among the upcoming head and principal appointments:

Alleyn's Oakfield	London
Bassett House School	London
Edenhurst Prep School	Staffordshire
Morrison's Academy	Perthshire
Rishworth School	West Yorkshire
Rose Hill School	Kent
Somerhill Pre-Prep	Kent
St Martin's School, Northwood	Middlesex

News items, contributions, comments and suggestions are always welcomed by the editor.

Please email:  
mail@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

## Girls' rugby



Highfield and Brookham School, Hampshire, have launched their girls' rugby provision. Driven by the passion and determination of the girls themselves, the initiative was inspired by the success of the England women's national rugby union team, the Red Roses, whose achievements have ignited a new generation of players.

In October 2025, the Rugby Football Union launched an ambitious action plan to drive the growth of women's and girls' rugby through to 2030, building on the success of the Red Roses. Now one of the fastest-growing sports in the country, women's rugby has seen participation soar, with more than 500 clubs offering opportunities for women and girls to start, stay and thrive in the game.

**Pictured:** Practicing rugby at Highfield and Brookham School

Rugby is now being taught to all girls in Years 7 and 8, delivered in a rugby league-style format with opportunities to experience both contact and non-contact versions of the game. The girls are currently developing the core skills and fundamentals as they prepare for their first-ever fixture in March.

Head of Highfield and Brookham, Suzannah Cryer, said: "We are incredibly proud to be the first prep school in our immediate area to launch girls' rugby, and we hope this inspires more schools to follow suit. With the girls' first fixture in March on the horizon, it's exciting to think that this could be the start of a journey that leads one of our pupils all the way to the 2033 Women's Rugby World Cup."

## National Bowl Quarter-Final Place



The U15s rugby team from Embley School, Hampshire, have made school history after defeating Mount Kelly School, Devon, in the South West regional final of the RFU Continental Tyres Schools U15s National Bowl. The victory has secured Embley a place among the final eight schools in the country and progression to

**Pictured:** Embley's U15 team

the national quarter-finals of the competition.

The RFU Continental Tyres Cup is foundational to age-grade rugby in England, enabling students from across the country to compete against one another and against the best the game has to offer at school-age level.

## ISFA U14s captaincy

A Year 9 pupil at Loughborough Grammar School, Leicestershire, William Lewis, has been selected to captain the ISFA England Under 14 football team.

William, who is a member of the Leicester City Football Club Youth Academy, was initially nominated by Loughborough Grammar School to attend the ISFA Midlands trials, part of the national selection pathway run by the Independent Schools Football Association (ISFA). Following a successful trial, he went on to represent the ISFA Midlands team at the ISFA National Tournament.

It was during this national competition that William caught the attention of England selectors and was selected for the ISFA England Under 14 squad. He went

**Pictured:** William Lewis



on to captain the team during the Christmas break in a fixture against Southampton Academy.

The Independent Schools Football Association (ISFA) is the national governing body for football in independent schools in England. It provides a structured pathway for talented players to progress from regional trials through to national representation, with ISFA England teams regularly competing against professional academy sides and international opposition.

## Red Plus clay court facility



Queenswood School, Hertfordshire, in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), has announced a project to develop the first large-scale Red Plus Clay court facility in Great Britain.

The development is supported by a £600,000 investment from the LTA, alongside substantial funding from the school. The project includes the construction of eight new courts and a refurbishment of the school's pavilion.

The new Red Plus courts are designed to meet the highest standards for training and competition, replicating the playing conditions of major European clay tournaments.

Senior Property Investment Manager at the LTA, Sophie Curthoys, commented: "We

**Pictured:** Queenswood tennis player

are thrilled to be working with Queenswood School to deliver this eight-court Red Plus clay venue. This is more than an investment in infrastructure – it's an investment in the future of British tennis.

"This project demonstrates what can be achieved when the LTA and our partners collaborate with a shared vision. The courts will provide unrivalled training and competition opportunities, host national and international events, and help nurture the next generation of British talent. We couldn't be more excited to see players of all levels enjoy these fantastic new facilities."

The new facility will be officially opened in June, marking the start of the LTA 11U International Team Trophy.

# Learning without limits: why anxious children shouldn't miss out residential trips

With childhood anxiety on the rise, day-to-day school life and learning experiences such as the ability to attend life-changing overseas and residential trips are in turn being impacted. But how can schools adapt to empower the anxious learners out there? What strategies can be adopted? Academic, Dr Martina Geromin, explores the ways in which schools can flex to ensure residential experiences are completely inclusive.



Dr Martina Geromin

Residential trips provide important, immersive, hands-on experiences for all children, regardless of their age or school setting. Creating opportunities for physical adventures that help to nurture social skills, encourage teamwork, and support personal growth, become ever more valuable as children move through their school years. For most children, residential trips that take them away from their usual day-to-day life, and can feel exciting and wonderful. Likewise, the opportunity to learn with peers outside of the traditional classroom setting is often a welcome distraction to the daily school timetable. That said, for those children who struggle with anxiety and thrive on routine, the scenario can be very different.

Children with anxiety often face significant challenges when it comes to participating in school residential trips, as these experiences usually involve leaving the familiar comforts of home and daily routines. The prospect of being in an alien environment can trigger feelings of fear and uncertainty, leading to heightened anxiety around separation, social interactions outside of school and the unpredictability of new situations. Residential trips typically require children to be adaptable and resilient, which can be particularly daunting for anxious students, who may worry excessively about the potential negative outcomes of

being away from the safety net of their parents.

## Identifying triggers

Sometimes a students' reluctance to engage in these kinds of experiences can limit their opportunities for personal growth, including bonding with their classmates and the development of coping strategies. As a result, schools have a duty of care to support these students with tailored interventions in a way that both empathises and understands their concerns without belittling the magnitude of how such a scenario might make them feel.

Being away from our usual surroundings often heightens our emotional intelligence, which can be a positive – providing more spiritual learning opportunities in a way that allow us to work on the softer skills like problem-solving, dealing with conflict, and socialising with others in respectful and mindful ways. However, the heightening of our emotions can also impact anxious children in a very different way, making them feel panicked, afraid, or tearful. In this case, the child might also become withdrawn, feel isolated or detached from their peers and teachers, and may struggle to engage with activities and challenges.

Residentials, although fun for most children, are not simply an entertainment exercise. They

are designed to help students to connect with each other without a set of fixed rules. In the same way, it is important that schools are flexible and adaptable rather than confined by tradition, to ensure that all students can benefit from these trips even if they are anxious or require different interventions.

## Gradual exposure

Implementing a supportive and inclusive approach that addresses specific needs is a good place to start. This might include hosting one-to-one pre-trip meetings with the student and their parents to identify the key concerns. These meetings can also help to familiarise students with the itinerary, setting expectations and allowing them to highlight anything they are feeling worried about. Pairing anxious students with a trusted adult or a peer buddy that they feel comfortable with can also provide additional emotional support and reassurance. It may be the case that a child is simply too anxious to spend a week away from home, so offering more gradual exposure through day trips or shorter overnight stays can help to build confidence in a less overwhelming scenario.

Communicating the positive aspects of a school trip is equally important in encouraging anxious children to consider attending. Elements such as enjoying fun adventures with their friends, relaxation, and creating a warm and open

atmosphere where everyone's feelings matter and reassurance that they can make contact with home if needed, can help students to feel included and understood.

That said, it is vital to keep the channels of communication open with parents without being limited by preconceived set views on trip protocols. For example, if a child struggles with separation anxiety, schools can arrange for parents to attend these trips – even if they stay at nearby accommodation and are only there as a security blanket for the child if needed – if it means the child doesn't miss out on the experiences with their peers, there are always ways to make the scenario more accessible and achievable. There is certainly no one rule that fits all, as every child's needs are different.

## No limits

These kinds of travel experiences provide a variety of real-world learning experiences that all children should be able to enjoy, regardless of any learning difficulties or mental health issues that might deter them. No child should be limited by their anxiety and schools need to adapt to empower the increasing numbers of anxious learners out there rather than conforming to traditional approaches that could result in growing numbers of children missing out.

Dr Martina Geromin is Co-Founder at School Beyond Limitations. Visit [www.school-beyond-limitations.com](http://www.school-beyond-limitations.com)

## Sports centre expansion

Planning permission has been granted for sports centre expansion works at Oakham School, Rutland.

The project aims to elevate the athletic facilities by introducing weightlifting and gym amenities. Additionally, the project will provide improved storage solutions for the existing sports hall, allowing more flexibility in its use.

Pictured: External Imagery of the new Sports Centre

Director of Sport at Oakham School, Steve May, said: "Sport is an integral part of life at Oakham School, where we champion participation, performance, and personal development across a wide range of disciplines. This expansion of our sports centre reflects our commitment to nurturing every pupil's potential – whether they're representing the school at national level or discovering a

lifelong love of fitness. The new facilities will support our holistic approach to sport, providing inclusive, high-quality spaces that inspire confidence, resilience, and teamwork."

National practice, GSSArchitecture, have been appointed by the school to provide architectural and quantity surveying services for the project.





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## The Independent Schools Magazine

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#### Advertising Sales & Accounts:

Sean McKeon, Fellows Media Ltd, The Gallery,  
Manor Farm, Southam, Cheltenham GL52 3PB  
T: 01242 259249  
E: [ads@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk](mailto:ads@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk)

#### Editor & Publisher, Distribution:

Angharad Jones T: 01635 201125  
E: [editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk](mailto:editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk)

#### Design Studio/Pre-press Production, Website:

Andrew Wicks T: 01635 201125  
E: [studio@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk](mailto:studio@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk)

#### Consultant:

Kimble Earl  
E: [consultant@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk](mailto:consultant@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk)

The Independent Schools Magazine  
Serif House  
Blake Road, Hermitage  
Berkshire, RG18 9WN

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