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In this issue...



New boarding house opening

Brentwood School, Essex, has officially opened its new, purpose-built boarding house, named The Sir Michael Snyder Building.

The facility was named in recognition of the service to the school by Sir Michael Snyder (OB), who has served the school in various capacities, including as Governor from 1992 to 2007, Vice Chairman from 2007 to 2018, and most recently as Chairman of Governors from 2018 until 2024.

The new boarding house, which has been years in planning, offers 122 single, en suite bedrooms located on the upper floors in university-style accommodation.

The fully-accessible building is designed to function as a true home away from home. It is subdivided into three main sections: separate houses for girls and boys, and a central shared hub. This shared hub includes new dining, communal, and recreation areas, along with an outdoor courtyard and a dedicated landscaped social space.

A Sixth Form Café, operated by UK café chain Benugo, also sits at the heart of the new development, strengthening the school community.

Guests at the official opening and lunch included the current Chairman of Governors, Lord Guy Black of Brentwood; Headmaster Michael Bond; Head of Prep Alice Goodfellow, Bursar, Jeremy Blunden, and members of the school's Senior Leadership Team. They were joined by representatives from Cottrell & Vermeulen Architecture, Oxbury Chartered Surveyors, and Rooff construction company, together with the school's Estates Team and Houseparents.

Pictured (l-r): Headmaster Michael Bond, Chairman of Governors Lord Guy Black of Brentwood, Sir Michael, and Lady Snyder

Cover background

Growing skills, Growing futures

It's the beginning of a new year. In a focus on continuing professional development find out more about teacher-led learning and the advantages of using internal expertise for supporting staff career, skills, and learning development. See pages 4-7.

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Is your school mentioned?

Schools featured in this issue include:

Ardingley College; Ashville College; Ballard School; Bede's School; Beeston Hall; Brentwood School; Bolton School; Croydon High School; Ellesmere College; Gayhurst School; Haberdashers' Elstree Schools; Highfield and Brookham School; Ipswich High School; Kimbolton School; King's School Canterbury; Kitebrook Prep School; Loughborough High School; Loughborough Schools Foundation; LVS Ascot; Milton Abbey School; Morrison's Academy; New Hall School; Reigate Grammar School; Sevenoaks School; Solihull Prep School; St Albans School; St Bede's College, Manchester; Tudor Hall School; The Unicorn School; Westholme School; Wrekin College; Wycliffe College

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

Please email:

editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

Cutting costs, not corners: harnessing teaching staff expertise to develop in-house CPD

With current budgetary constraints placing pressure on staff training and development opportunities across the sector, Wrekin College, Shropshire, have introduced a new in-house CPD solution. Acting Head and Deputy Head (Academic) at Wrekin College, Shropshire, Ben Smith, explains what it is all about.

The Bursar's fingers twitched in nervous anticipation. In his hand was a copy of my proposed budget for staff CPD and training for the forthcoming academic year. We've rehearsed the same conversation for the last five years at our annual budget-setting meeting. It normally begins with me extolling the importance of the school's investing in our teaching staff's professional development and keeping their understanding of best practice at the cutting edge. I usually then appeal to my colleague's predilection for numbers by citing the school's improving value-added figures which I attribute, with some justification, to our willingness to pay for staff to attend external training courses. My passionate advocacy for funding such training is invariably met with a facial expression that is at once both sympathetic yet circumspect and a sharp intake of breath worthy of the most unscrupulous car mechanic. I am then politely but firmly told that, owing to prevailing financial circumstances, a 10% reduction in next year's staff CPD budget will be unavoidable. This year's meeting featured one important difference, however, in that the 10% reduction had unfortunately quadrupled. This was, of course, in no way our Bursar's fault but rather a necessary response to what is popularly known among the Labour government's critics as its "tax raid" on the independent sector. The resulting financial pressures on schools have meant that significant cuts to training budgets, universally deemed by Bursars to be discretionary expenditure, have sadly become commonplace.

Research published by the Teacher Development Trust indicates that nationally schools' spending on CPD training is significantly lower than it was in 2016 in real terms, with a 50% drop in spending in primary education and a 30% drop in secondary schools. Their survey of the national CPD landscape last year highlighted that 20% of teachers spent less than a single day

on formal CPD offered by external providers last year mainly owing to the prohibitive cost of such training. These statistics are particularly sobering when one acknowledges that quality of teaching is almost always the decisive factor in the progress our pupils make and the clear correlation between investment in colleagues' professional development and teacher retention levels. A Department for Education review of CPD in schools in May 2024 found that the current retention crisis is partly the result of a lack of access in many schools to "high-quality training" and that teachers able to benefit from regular CPD were "more likely to stay in their jobs."

The fundamental challenge then, which is currently felt no more acutely than in the independent sector, is how to facilitate meaningful and impactful opportunities for professional development and training for staff with ever-dwindling resources. Necessity, we are told, is the mother of invention and at Wrekin we have joined the growing number of independent schools to move away from a reliance on external training providers in order to develop a more creative and cost-effective in-house CPD solution.

This new approach was based on the introduction of an online Teaching and Learning Hub. This is effectively a website hosted on the school's intranet that provides a forum for staff to access a wide range of homegrown training sessions and opportunities for professional growth. The cornerstone of the Hub is a growing collection of pre-recorded online training sessions created by colleagues in order to share the latest best practice in a wide variety of different areas, ranging from retrieval practice, the teenage brain, strategies for supporting EAL students, and the advantages and pitfalls of artificial intelligence. Staff have been asked to record training sessions based on their

own professional interests and experience, thereby ensuring authentic engagement with the focus of the training by colleagues who are genuinely interested in sharing the most recent research or pedagogy in that particular area. These sessions often take the form of a video recording of a colleague in their classroom delivering a presentation, although staff less confident in front of the lens can simply record themselves speaking over the top of a series of slides or other illustrative material.

Many schools have traditionally been slow to capitalise on the expertise among their own teaching staff in preference for external training and, as a result, have frequently overlooked an invaluable CPD resource. If there is any positive to be derived from the current budgetary constraints on professional development, it is that schools have been prompted to look much more closely at the expertise within their own staff rather than routinely outsourcing training. The advantage of our Teaching and Learning Hub is that it captures this expertise in a way that can be accessed by colleagues remotely and at their own convenience. Gone are the days of our twilight INSET sessions where staff were corralled into the school lecture theatre at the end of a long working day to listen to a presentation on another new teaching initiative which had little if any impact on their classroom practice. Now our teachers, in consultation with their Head of Department, largely have complete ownership over the training they undertake. This approach has served to transform how our staff engage with their professional development, generating a much more vibrant dialogue between colleagues who are now more inclined to exchange ideas about pedagogy or whole school issues.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the Hub enjoys considerable traction within the staff body. A member of our Maths Department

recently contributed a short training session on a plenary activity he finds very helpful in consolidating pupils' understanding of material covered during a lesson. Learning walks subsequently carried out by several members of our Senior Leadership Team revealed that this activity was being used to good effect in several different subjects by colleagues keen to try out this strategy. In another instance, a parent contacted school to commend several strategies one of our English teachers had used to support the learning of her autistic son. This was shortly after our SENDCO had contributed an informative training session entitled 'Autism and the Teenage Brain.'

It is gratifying to see that our Hub is making a tangible difference in promoting best practice and enhancing the quality of pupils' learning experiences. However, its other key advantage is in supporting the Senior Leadership Team in achieving an overview of the professional learning taking place within the staff body. All teaching staff at Wrekin are expected to complete a minimum of one online training session via the Hub every term. After finishing a session there is an expectation that staff complete an online "Training Record" form which prompts them to reflect on how the training will enhance their performance in school. Colleagues are required to respond to a series of questions about their training, one of which asks them to describe at least two things they have learnt that they will incorporate into their work. On submission, Training Record forms are checked by a Deputy Head before being collated in a professional development portfolio for every member of the teaching staff. Colleagues are able to access this helpful record of the sessions they have completed when preparing applications for new roles or simply updating their CV.

The development of new resources for our Teaching and Learning Hub has also been used as the basis of INSET days for our teaching staff. I



Ben Smith

have never understood why the vast majority of INSET sessions delivered in schools (or externally run CPD training courses for that matter) take the form of didactic lecturing from a text-heavy presentation when we, as experts who impart information in an engaging and memorable way, know that this is one of the least effective strategies. At Wrekin we have eschewed this in favour of a more active approach by challenging academic departments to spend part of an INSET day working collaboratively to record their own subject-specific training films based on a specific theme. Arguably our most successful was our independent learning "showcase", a collection of short films available on our Hub about how each subject promotes greater autonomy in pupils' learning. Many of the strategies presented by departments have been successfully applied across the curriculum, enriching the learning experience. Not only did this style of INSET prove far more productive than a more traditional approach, it created an opportunity for colleagues to reflect collaboratively on their practice and the importance they attach to independent learning skills in their teaching.

When it comes to budgetary cutbacks' impacting staff training and CPD, the biggest disservice a school can do to itself is to overlook the wealth of expertise and knowledge present in its staff. Strategies which provide a forum for the sharing of such expertise, such as our Teaching and Learning Hub, are undoubtedly the way forward in providing a more cost-effective solution in supporting staff development. A reduction in the amount available to invest in training doesn't need to result in a decline in the quality of the training available. Empowering colleagues to deliver training themselves can ultimately result in a more pedagogically informed and reflective teaching staff.

Teachers as learners: a teacher-led approach to professional development

Morrison's Academy, Perthshire and Kinross, has been building and refining a teacher-led approach to professional development over the last few years. Depute Rector at the school, Emma McCormick, shares how the approach is shaping the school culture, strengthening community engagement as well as inspiring the next generation.

At Morrison's Academy, we believe that great teaching begins with great learning. This philosophy underpins everything that we do and is captured in our principle of "Teachers as Learners." For us, it's not just a phrase; it's a mindset that shapes our professional development, inspires our staff, and enriches the experiences of our pupils.

For several years now, we have been building a teacher-led approach to professional development, one that places staff at the centre of their own learning. The impact has been transformative. It has fostered collaboration across nursery, primary, and secondary colleagues and strengthened our ability to recruit and retain excellent teachers. When teachers are encouraged to keep learning, they model curiosity, confidence, and resilience for their pupils. After all, how can we expect our pupils to love learning if we aren't doing the same ourselves?

Our Teaching and Learning Toolkit lies at the heart of our CPD. Created by our teachers following school wide discussions about what makes an exceptional lesson, and inspired by Bruce Robertson's book 'The Teaching Delusion', it reflects our shared vision of high quality teaching. The Toolkit is a guide, not a rule book. It is organised around three key areas – Key Principles, Culture of Learning, and the Structural Features of an Exceptional Lesson, and is designed to support reflection and consistency, rather than dictate exactly how a lesson should be taught.

Conference Days give teachers time to explore the Toolkit in depth,

reflect on their own practice and share ideas with colleagues. These days offer a rare chance in the busy school week to pause and be inspired. Each year we welcome guest speakers – Bruce Robertson last year, Kate Jones this year – and invite teachers from local schools, fostering wider professional dialogue and strengthening connections beyond our classrooms.

Every term teachers take part in Learning Walks, visiting colleagues' classrooms and writing postcards to share what inspired them. This simple process cultivates transparency, reflection, and celebration. In the summer term, colleagues are grouped in trios to enable deeper reflection and discussion of the good practice observed. Learning Walks are not inspections – they're about appreciating and sharing excellence.

Our newest initiative, the Morrison's Academy Learning Hub, is an online platform where teachers can access blogs, videos, articles, and shared practice and contribute their own digital content. It is a living library of resources that strengthens connections and keeps professional dialogue flowing all year.

For those teachers who wish to explore pedagogy further, our Pioneer Teacher Group offers rich discussion of the latest educational research, books, and teaching techniques.

Established nearly ten years ago by my colleague, Alex Wylie, Head of Geography and Teaching & Learning Coordinator, the group meets to share ideas and inspire



Emma McCormick

fresh approaches in classrooms. Curiosity drives discussion and teachers leave motivated to innovate in their own practice.

Beyond these formal pillars, our staff demonstrate lifelong learning in every sense. They attend external conferences, are invited to lead workshops, pursue personal passions, and bring all these experiences back into the classroom.

The impact of our approach to CPD is clear. Staff feel supported, engaged, and confident in their teaching. Our collaborative culture strengthens relationships across the school and creates an environment where teachers want to stay and grow professionally. Most importantly it ensures every pupil experiences excellent teaching in every lesson.

Teachers as Learners is more than a philosophy; it is a lived practice that informs how we teach, lead, and grow together. When teachers are given the autonomy to explore, innovate and reflect, the entire school thrives. We are always learning alongside our pupils and it is this curiosity, and sense of possibility, that makes Morrison's Academy a special place where both staff and pupils flourish.

Appraising the appraisal

Head of Academic Enrichment and Teacher of Geography at Sevenoaks School, Kent, Paul Thompson, takes a look at the teacher appraisal process, with a focus on getting the balance between accountability and professional development.



Paul Thompson

Enhancing student achievement and delivering high-quality education hinge on developing teaching staff. Teacher appraisal, a widely used tool for evaluating teacher quality, faces persistent challenges regarding its methods, impact on morale, and workload.

Worldwide, appraisal has a dual function:

1. **Professional development:** helping teachers refine their practice through constructive feedback and tailored CPD.
2. **Accountability:** monitoring teaching quality to meet policy standards and drive school improvement.

Balancing these two objectives is challenging. Appraisal processes overly focused on high stakes accountability can erode trust, reduce motivation, and increase stress (Figazzolo, 2013). Conversely, developmentally-focused systems, which prioritise coaching, collaboration, and feedback, can significantly enhance teacher effectiveness.

Beyond evaluation: broader benefits

There are three other key benefits:

1. Accountability and School Improvement

Appraisal remains a necessary tool for Senior Leaders and Middle Management to hold staff accountable for their work and therefore drive school improvement.

2. Recruitment and Retention

Embedding a culture of professional growth helps individuals feel valued, boosting job satisfaction and stabilising the workforce. Promoting this culture from recruitment will also attract staff who share the same vision.

3. Workload reduction

Aligning the school improvement plan, CPD, and appraisal places equal importance on each element, helping staff to

understand their contribution to the process and reduces workload.

Research study

I recently reviewed appraisal processes at Sevenoaks School, focusing on strengths, weaknesses, and improvement strategies. It connects our teaching and learning work with The Harvard Human Flourishing Program, particularly around meaning, purpose, and teacher wellbeing. My research suggests the key elements of an effective teacher appraisal system are:

• Clear objectives

Communicating objectives such as improving instruction, fostering development, and recognising outstanding performance, ensures all teachers understand the purpose of the process.

• Clear criteria

Evaluation criteria must reflect key teaching competencies, including subject knowledge, instructional delivery, classroom management, and student outcomes.

• Incorporate a variety of evidence

A comprehensive view of performance requires multiple measures, e.g., classroom observations, student progress data, self-assessments, and peer or parent feedback.

• Regular, constructive feedback

This helps teachers identify growth areas and celebrate strengths. Critically, the system must offer actionable development pathways, such as targeted workshops, coaching, or mentoring.

Reviewing our appraisal system

Our current model follows a two-year cycle.

Year One:

- Evidence gathered via lesson observation, colleague consultation, and teacher reflection.

- Appraiser completes appraisal form and statement.
- Appraisee adds comments.
- Documentation sent to Deputy Head Staff.

Year Two:

- Formal appraisal meeting takes place.

To review the system, I ran a staff survey covering Culture, Process, Roles & Responsibilities, Lesson Observations, Objective Setting, and Feedback. I also studied appraisal models in three other HMC schools and met their Academic Deputy Heads.

Findings

My findings suggest that appraisal is most effective when the following are consistently applied:

– Teacher-led research

Research rich school environments are the hallmark of high performing education systems. Encourage a research-based appraisal process to shift focus on the development of new ideas and pursue areas of interest in a practitioner's own teaching.

– Frequent, low-stakes feedback

Teachers who receive regular feedback are more in control of their performance. Unclear performance expectations increase dissatisfaction and disengagement with appraisals. Regular, informal "check-in" conversations are essential to review objectives, clarify performance standards, and provide timely development support.

– Line manager training

Appraisal processes are only as strong as those implementing them. Invest in training for line managers, enabling them to manage difficult conversations, to give high quality feedback, and to effectively set objectives.

– Use of multiple evaluation methods

Effective appraisal systems combine qualitative and quantitative measures, including peer feedback, self-assessment, and professional reflection. Suggestions for improvement:

- Peer comments should provide clear examples to reinforce their contributions.
- Student feedback could be useful to complement other measures but would have to

be very carefully done – their responses must focus on learning, not teacher preference! – to encourage a wider view of performance and opportunity to praise.

- While classroom observations are useful, they are the least predictive assessment of overall effectiveness. Separate lesson observation from the appraisal meeting so they are completed at different times in the appraisal cycle, allowing the teacher time to implement feedback.

– The role of technology

AI and online solutions can streamline appraisal processes and reduce workload. An integrated system helps school leaders identify CPD needs across the workforce and provide targeted training, while staff benefit from a portable CPD portfolio to support their career-long learning.

Responsible adoption of GenAI-powered Performance Management can improve fairness, reduce bias, and help employees receive consistent, actionable feedback. By automating routine tasks, AI frees managers to focus on meaningful conversations and coaching that strengthen engagement.

Conclusion

Teacher appraisal should centre on meaning, purpose, and wellbeing, with a developmental, growth focused approach. Research highlights the value of frequent feedback, line manager training, multiple evaluation methods, and a research driven element. A GenAI powered review system may further enhance effectiveness.

For further detail please visit the Institute of Teaching and Learning at Sevenoaks School academic journal, Innovate, here: www.sevenoaksschool.org/academic/institute-of-teaching-and-learning/publications

References:

Department for Education (DfE) (2024) Teacher appraisal – guidance for schools. Available at: https://tdtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Transforming-Teacher-Appraisal_final.pdf 79
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Developing future leaders through coaching: strengthening a Middle Leaders' Programme

Solihull School, West Midlands, has recently relaunched its Middle Leaders' Programme. Senior Deputy Head (Academic) Solihull Preparatory School, West Midlands, Michael Jones, outlines what it now looks like, the importance of integrating coaching and offers some top tips for schools looking to set up their own programme.

Leadership development remains a strategic priority at Solihull, ensuring we continue to nurture colleagues who can guide teams, drive innovation, and uphold the high standards that define the school. As part of this commitment, we have expanded our investment in professional coaching and relaunched our Middle Leaders' Programme with a renewed emphasis on developing confident, reflective, and resilient leaders.

Investing in professional coaching

Solihull has built a strong internal coaching capacity in recent years. A core team of colleagues has undertaken accredited coaching qualifications from Level 3 to Executive Level 7. This breadth of expertise has enriched our ability to facilitate meaningful professional conversations across teams and departments. With this foundation in place, we began exploring how we could harness it more fully to support aspiring and emerging leaders.

Relaunching the Middle Leaders' Programme

The Middle Leaders' Programme provides new or aspiring middle managers with a structured opportunity to develop essential leadership competencies. Delegates participate in sessions led by senior leaders and complete a change-management project within their department or area of the school. Towards the end of the academic year, they graduate by giving a formal presentation to governors and senior leaders that outlines their initiative, its impact, and how they evaluated its success.

Applicants complete a short form to explain their suitability and confirm their understanding of what the programme entails. This has helped ensure strong engagement with no dropouts to date.

Integrating coaching

One of the most significant enhancements to this year's Middle Leader Programme is the introduction of personalised coaching. Each delegate receives a series of coaching sessions with a qualified professional coach, offering a confidential space to:

- explore the direction and scope of their project;
- identify potential barriers and strategies;
- receive constructive challenge and support; and
- discuss wider professional issues if they choose.

Coaching begins with a chemistry session in which the coach and coachee agree practical arrangements, talk about the level of challenge the coachee welcomes, and discuss the coaching code of ethics. This helps create a safe and trusted environment, underpinned by clear safeguarding expectations. While the model is mainly coaching-led, mentoring can be incorporated where helpful.

Senior Leader Sessions

Alongside coaching, delegates attend sessions led by senior leaders that explore key aspects of effective leadership, including:

- understanding the wider leadership landscape;
- quality assurance in subjects and departments;

- managing difficult conversations with staff, parents, and pupils;
- preparing for inspection.

These sessions combine practical advice with reflective discussion, helping delegates apply what they learn to real-world leadership situations.

Experiential learning

Delegates were given a lively introduction to the programme when the Headmaster opened with a roleplay task. They were asked to debate the school's key aims while adopting a predetermined communication style such as being argumentative, drawing others into discussion, or observing quietly. With an adjudicator selecting a winner, the activity had a competitive edge. Delegates' engagement was remarkable and demonstrated both their willingness to embrace challenge and their emerging leadership strengths.

Early impact

Although the programme is still in its early stages, feedback from coachees has been extremely positive. Many say the coaching has helped them refine their ideas, think more deeply about implementation, and consider what makes a project both impactful and sustainable. Senior leaders have also noted increased confidence and clarity of thinking among delegates.

Looking ahead

Integrating coaching into the Middle Leaders' Programme represents an exciting development in our wider commitment to professional growth. As we continue to evaluate its effectiveness, we hope to extend coaching opportunities



Michael Jones

to other leadership levels and further embed a culture of reflective practice and constructive challenge across the school.

Top tips for schools looking to set up a programme

1. Define the programme's purpose clearly so everyone understands its aims.
2. Select and prepare your coaching team carefully to ensure a consistent approach.
3. Build coaching into the structure from the outset rather than treating it as an add-on.
4. Begin with a meeting to agree expectations, boundaries, and practical arrangements.
5. Keep coaching flexible to allow for both project-based and broader issues.
6. Offer leadership learning that is practical, relevant, and grounded in real challenges.
7. Use experiential tasks to stretch participants and build confidence.
8. Ask participants to commit formally so they understand expectations.
9. Include a meaningful, evidence-informed project that requires applied learning.
10. Review the programme regularly and refine it using participant feedback.

Digital Leaders Programme: Empowering students for a safer online world

Milton Abbey School, Dorset, was recently announced as a finalist in the 2025 SACPA (Safeguarding and Child Protection Association Safeguarding) Safeguarding Awards, in the category of 'Safeguarding Inclusion Award'. Part of the school's work to empower students to ensure they can take an active role in their own wellbeing and that of others has been the introduction of a Digital Leaders Programme. Head of Design and Creative Media, and Director of Digital Learning, James Ratcliffe, shares more about it.

For over five years, Milton Abbey School has proudly run a thriving Digital Leaders programme, offering students unique opportunities to develop leadership skills while promoting online safety within the school community. This initiative, based on a framework developed by the charity ChildNet, empowers young people to educate their peers about the digital world, a space that is as exciting as it is challenging. We highly recommend schools to use pupils' voice to shape the future of digital use at schools, because they are the biggest critics and, in many ways, most aware of the impact on their lives.

Why peer-led online safety matters

The programme's foundation lies in the belief that peer-led initiatives are highly effective. Students say they often relate better to advice from their peers, who share similar experiences and understand the realities of growing up in a digital age. By equipping students with knowledge and confidence, Milton Abbey ensures that online safety

becomes a shared responsibility across the school.

Digital Leaders complete detailed modules on critical topics such as:

- Online fraud
- Cyberbullying
- Cybercrime
- Managing screen time

Once certified, these students become ambassadors for safe and responsible technology use, actively supporting the school community with online safety issues and leading on the topics of focus.

Making an impact across the school

The Digital Leaders' work goes far beyond the classroom. They hold regular termly meetings to discuss emerging concerns and brainstorm creative ways to address them. Their initiatives include:

- Designing social media content and posters with a distinctive Milton Abbey style, often featuring the students themselves.

- Contributing to school policy, offering feedback on online safety issues.
- Creating a student-friendly version of the Acceptable Use Policy, displayed prominently in classrooms and boarding houses.
- Leading assemblies to share ideas and raise awareness about online safety.
- One of their most impactful contributions has been the production of annual educational films aligned with Safer Internet Day themes, which have become a highlight of the school calendar.

National recognition

Milton Abbey's Digital Leaders have not only made a difference locally – they've shone on the national stage. The team has participated in Childnet's National Film Competition, achieving remarkable success:

- Winner in 2023
- Third place in 2025

At this year's awards ceremony, Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England, praised Milton Abbey's entries for their quality and relevance, reinforcing the programme's reputation for excellence.

Current projects: Tackling AI challenges

The digital landscape is constantly evolving, and Milton Abbey's Digital Leaders are staying ahead of the curve. They have chosen to focus their latest project on the challenges posed by AI. Through a new series of posters and information sessions, they are addressing thought-provoking questions such as:



James Ratcliffe

- Will AI take our future jobs?
- The rise of AI-generated fake news – can you tell?
- Could AI reduce our critical thinking?

These resources and debates aim to spark discussion among students and encourage responsible engagement with emerging technologies.

Student voice

Digital Leader, Henry B, Fourth Form reflects on the programme's impact:

"The Digital Leaders is a group of students who have regular meetings to discuss all things technological. We talk about our concerns and how we can prevent them. In my opinion, the Digital leaders highlights the importance of digital issues in school and amongst young people. The Digital Leaders bring the school together and gives us a space to share positive and negative experiences, and offer advice."

Henry's words capture the essence of the programme: student-led, proactive, and creative.

Looking ahead

As technology continues to shape our lives, Milton Abbey School remains committed to preparing its students for the digital future. The Digital Leaders programme is more than an extracurricular activity, it's a movement that fosters leadership, responsibility, and innovation. By empowering students to take charge of online safety, Milton Abbey is ensuring that its community thrives in a connected world.



Pictured: Milton Abbey Digital Leaders



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Rethinking pupil imagery: how schools can celebrate safely in the age of AI risks

With reports of AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) going up, what can school marketing teams do to address the risks posed by rapidly evolving technologies? Following new guidelines published by the Independent Schools Bursars' Association (ISBA), Loughborough Schools Foundation (LSF), Leicestershire, changed their approach. External Engagement Director at LSF, Russell Langley, outlines what they have implemented and considers how schools can still celebrate pupils but without compromising their safety.

Schools have always relied on powerful visual storytelling. A smiling pupil absorbed in learning, a group celebrating a sporting victory, or a candid moment in a music rehearsal: these images have long been the backbone of how we communicate who we are. They reassure prospective families, foster community, and reflect daily life with authenticity and warmth.

But as technology evolves faster than many of us can regulate or fully understand, a pressing question has emerged: are the images we share inadvertently putting our pupils at risk?

A shifting digital landscape

In February 2025, the Home Office announced that the UK had become the first country to introduce new offences criminalising the creation of AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM). This followed urgent warnings from the Internet Watch Foundation, which reported a 380% annual rise in identified AI-generated sexual abuse content.

These figures underline a worrying trend – harmful actors no longer need access to children to exploit them. A single publicly available image can be manipulated,

altered, or fed into generative models to create illegal material. Many school marketing images, particularly close-up, identifiable portraits, are unfortunately well-suited to this kind of misuse.

The new ISBA guidance on 'Taking, Storing and Using Images of Children Policy' was released soon after. Although it centres largely on parental consent and governance, it has acted as a catalyst for wider sector discussion, with schools reconsidering how they obtain consent, how images are stored and, crucially, how they are published online.

The dilemma facing school leaders

For those of us responsible for communications and marketing, these developments present a genuine tension. On one hand, high-quality imagery showcasing real pupils is a vital tool for telling the story of a school. On the other hand, we have a clear safeguarding responsibility to prevent foreseeable risks – including those we might not have imagined even five years ago.

It would have been easy to continue as before with a more

robust consent process. But with the scale of AI-enabled manipulation now clear, the more important question quickly became: just because we can continue using close-up pupil images, should we?

As a father of a teenage boy and a governor at a primary school with many vulnerable children, the answer to that question felt straightforward. The Loughborough Schools Foundation decided that safeguarding must outweigh convenience, marketing tradition and even established parental expectations.

Developing a safer visual strategy

Over the past year, our Marketing, Data Protection and Executive teams have collaborated to reshape the way we use and share pupil imagery across the Foundation. The changes, launching across the 2025–26 academic year, are designed to reduce risk, support transparency, and retain the authenticity our parents value.

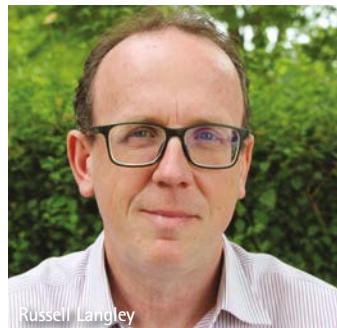
Our approach includes:

• Minimising close-up, full-face imagery

We now only use identifiable, high-resolution pupil photos where there is a compelling need and explicit, informed consent. This is not about removing pupils entirely from our websites or publications; it is about choosing angles, distance and context with greater safeguarding awareness.

• Removing metadata before publication

Image metadata can include location details, device information, and timestamps. These details may seem insignificant, but in the wrong hands they can help build detailed intelligence about a



Russell Langley

child's habits and whereabouts. We have implemented mandatory metadata cleansing for all images before they are published.

• Streamlining our social media footprint

Each additional social platform increases our digital exposure and our safeguarding responsibility. We have rationalised our accounts to ensure content is consistent, monitored, and adheres to our updated standards.

• Reimagining our visual identity

One of the most productive outcomes of this shift has been the creative challenge it set for our teams. Instead of relying heavily on portrait-style pupil photography, we have developed a broader palette of visual tools: illustration, iconography, environmental photography, and more dynamic, contextual images of school life.

The launch of our new website reflects this wider visual identity. It has shown that pupil safeguarding and strong school storytelling are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the constraints have sparked more inventive, contemporary, and differentiated design thinking.

Supporting parents through the transition

Any change to how schools present pupils will naturally lead to questions from parents. Many families enjoy seeing their children celebrated publicly, and rightly so. We have been open, direct, and collaborative in explaining why we are adapting our practices, and feedback has been largely positive.

In a recent letter to parents, I wrote: "The safeguarding of our pupils, your children, is something we will not compromise.





Celebrating pupils' achievements is incredibly important to us. We share your pride in their brilliance. We will continue to do this, but in a safe and responsible way."

By framing decisions around safeguarding first, not marketing limitations, we have found that parents understand and support a more cautious approach.

What other schools can do now

While every school's context is different, the risks posed by AI image manipulation affect the entire sector. ISBA's guidance is

helpful, but it is not exhaustive – and it is not legislation. Schools will need to take a proactive stance.

Below are practical steps any school can begin to implement:

- **Conduct a full audit of online imagery**
Review websites, social channels, and third-party platforms. Identify pupil images that may now pose a risk.
- **Revisit your consent process**
Ensure consent is genuinely informed, specific, and age-appropriate. Explain the risks associated with AI manipulation

and online distribution so parents and pupils can make empowered choices.

- **Update image-selection workflows**

Train staff on safer photography techniques (angles, distance, context) and encourage a culture of "safeguarding-first image selection".

- **Remove all metadata as standard**

Build metadata cleansing into your file-handling processes before anything is uploaded.

- **Limit your social media outputs**

Fewer accounts mean better oversight, reduced risk and more control. Broaden your visual toolkit

Illustration, graphics, abstract visuals, and environmental imagery can all communicate the character of your school without compromising pupil privacy.

- **Communicate openly with parents**

Transparency builds trust. Explain the reasoning behind change and emphasise your school's commitment to both celebration and protection.

A chance for sector leadership

The conversation around AI-generated CSAM is not going away. Technology will continue to evolve faster than regulation. Schools cannot rely on legislation to catch up before taking action; by then, harm may already have occurred.

Independent schools, in particular, have an opportunity to lead – not simply in compliance, but in best practice. By embracing safer visual strategies early, we can demonstrate a firm, future-facing commitment to digital safeguarding. Most importantly, we can ensure that our desire to celebrate pupils never compromises their safety.

As a Foundation that educates children from six weeks to 18 years, Loughborough Schools Foundation carries a safeguarding responsibility that begins long before pupils reach their teenage years. This is why our shift in approach has challenged us creatively, aligned our values with our practices, and reinforced our message to families that our children's wellbeing will always come first.

”

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From at-risk to assurance: a school's guide to managing risk and safeguarding pupils' information

In the second of a series on strengthening governance, risk, and compliance culture in data protection, privacy specialist Simon Hall explains why understanding the risks to pupils' personal – and often highly sensitive – information is not just important, but a critical part of every school's safeguarding duty.

1. The threat

Every school leader understands the importance of risk assessment for physical safety – playground supervision, school trips, fire evacuation, and so on – yet few apply the same rigour to the protection of children's information, even though a personal data breach or cyber-attack can result in lasting damage and even physical harm to children.

We know school leaders already carry huge burden of responsibility – safeguarding, finance, health and safety, estates, HR, IT, compliance – the list feels endless. You manage more risks, and of a wider variety, than almost any other type of organisation.

But please, take a fresh look at information risk. It is now one of the biggest threats your school faces, and getting it wrong can lead to the greatest harm – to your pupils, your staff, and your school.

Ransomware remains the most serious threat – those reported in the press being just the tip of the iceberg for obvious reasons: criminals encrypt school information and demand a ransom, often stealing a copy to sell on the dark web. Attacks are now so frequent that, in July, the DfE issued mandatory guidance prohibiting schools from paying ransom demands.

But the far greater number of breaches are accidental – mis-sent emails, spreadsheets uploaded in error, staff sharing login details, or teachers using new technologies without understanding or assessing the risks. These are not "security issues"; they are safeguarding failures. Even the accidental disclosure of a parent's address or email can cause real harm – for example, where domestic violence is involved – and when information about a child's wellbeing or family circumstances is mishandled, the consequences can be devastating.

Your systems and information need active defence, and your people – staff and pupils alike – are your first line of defence.

Simon was the UK's first Data Privacy Officer at IBM and co-founded KPMG's Privacy Advisory practice. He is a Fellow of Information Privacy, a non-practising barrister and Data Protection Thought Leader for School Business Manager (UK).

2. The current approach: reactive and incomplete

In most schools, information-risk management is patchy or ad hoc. This is largely a result of how the GDPR itself is written: it specifies that a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) must be completed if certain types of processing are involved. In practice, this has led to a compliance-driven, "tick-box" mentality. Many schools simply copy a DPIA performed elsewhere, file it away and consider the requirement met.

It is clear from recent governor discussion groups, that this approach leaves significant gaps. Three weaknesses appear consistently:

- **No formal assignment of risk ownership:** Ownership of risks – like Privacy/GDPR responsibilities generally – are rarely assigned and documented. Instead, they are usually handed, inappropriately, to the bursar. This likely explains why so few DPIAs are done: the people who should be doing them have not been assigned the necessary responsibilities or risk ownership.
- **Limited expertise:** Staff asked to complete DPIAs are rarely trained in risk assessment or in deciding what "high-risk" means in a school context.
- **No feedback loop:** Lessons from incidents seldom feed back into training or improvement, so the same vulnerabilities persist.

3. Why risk management matters

This absence of structure is starkly illustrated by experience from CPOMS, whose safeguarding platform is used by over 20,000 UK schools. During my six years as its Data Protection Officer, we received fewer than 200 requests for basic information about where pupil information is stored, how it is protected, and who can access it – information without which it is impossible to perform even a rudimentary risk assessment.

Put bluntly, that means only around 1% of schools have complied with

their legal obligation to carry out a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) of their most high-risk processing activity.

Effective risk management is not red tape, nor a compliance box to be ticked – it is about preventing harm. It allows schools to:

- anticipate what could go wrong before it happens;
- put in place proportionate safeguards that are monitored and reviewed; and
- demonstrate to governors, parents and regulators that those safeguards are effective.

And there are other benefits.

When organisations document and actively manage their information risks, they also find efficiency savings: duplicate systems, unused licences, and opportunities to automate routine but time-consuming tasks.

Managing information risk isn't "just more GDPR paperwork" – it's safeguarding; it's how schools protect children from harm.

4. What effective information-risk management looks like

Practical risk management need not be complex. It starts with three straightforward steps:

1. **Identify your information assets:** Know what personal information you hold, where it lives and who can access it.
2. **Assess and prioritise:** Consider what could happen if that information were lost, stolen or misused. Which information would cause real harm to a pupil or family? Focus effort there.
3. **Apply and record controls:** Implement proportionate safeguards – access restrictions, encryption, staff awareness – and record them. This evidence gives governors the assurance they need.

Most importantly, responsibility for risk management should follow operational responsibility. The person who leads a department or function – the head of HR, the DSL, the finance lead – is best



Simon Hall

placed to identify, own, document, assess, and address the risks arising from the processing activities in their departments and to maintain the evidence that they are being managed.

5. The way forward

For independent schools, understanding information risk is as vital as understanding safeguarding risk. Both exist to protect children – and staff – from harm. Yet many schools still rely on outdated compliance routines that generate paperwork but provide little real protection.

Embedding risk management into daily practice – owned by the people who run the processes and supported by a capable, experienced Data Protection Officer who understands the school environment – allows schools to prevent incidents rather than simply react to them. It shifts the focus from paperwork to protection, and from fear of non-compliance to confidence in doing the right thing.

It should, however, be acknowledged that effective risk management – and the accountability approach discussed in the first article in this series – depend on thorough record-keeping and regular reporting. Both are time-consuming and require specialist skills that many schools do not have in-house.

For that reason, many organisations are now looking to purpose-built software tools to support information-risk management by maintaining risk registers and automating risk identification, record-keeping, and reporting. Used well, such tools can help close skills gaps, reduce administrative burden, and lower exposure – without replacing professional judgement or leadership accountability.

The journey from unrecognised dangers to informed defence gives schools a framework that not only meets legal requirements, but strengthens safeguarding, improves confidence, and reassures parents that their children's information is in safe hands.

iPQ Research Library



Highfield and Brookham School, Hampshire, has launched a purpose-built Independent Project Qualification (iPQ) Research Section within the school library, designed to elevate Year 8 pupils' research skills and nurture genuine intellectual curiosity.

Recognised as an ISEB iPQ Gold School for 2025–26, the school advocates the power of traditional book-based research in an age dominated by digital information.

The project was championed by Deputy Head (Academic),

Pictured: The dedicated iPQ Research section in the library

Ian Nichols, and supported by iPQ Scholar in Residence, Lawrence Deju-Wiseman, an industry expert in research and project delivery. Their combined expertise has created a space for Year 8 pupils as they embark on their independent learning journeys. Pupils benefit from carefully curated books and resources, along with designed guides from Mr Deju-Wiseman and Dr Fiona Whitfield, the school librarian, helping the children navigate and use the research tools effectively.



Celebrating a milestone

St Bede's College, Manchester, is celebrating 150 years at the heart of the city by giving back to the city that shaped it.

Founded in 1876 on the site of the former Manchester Aquarium, St Bede's has marked its anniversary with a full day of celebrations that brought the entire school community together. The programme included a whole-school Mass, birthday cake for every pupil, and activities that reflected on the College's past, present, and future.

As part of the 150th celebrations, St Bede's has also committed to a year-long programme of charitable fundraising and community

Pictured: Celebrating 150 years

support, with pupils, staff, and families supporting charities across Greater Manchester.

Throughout the year, the College will raise funds and awareness for organisations supporting some of the city's most vulnerable people, including food banks, homelessness services, mental health support, and hospices.

As part of the anniversary year, St Bede's is also inviting former pupils from across Greater Manchester and beyond to reconnect, share memories and take part in events throughout the year, celebrating what it means to be a Bedian across generations.

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Raising kind, resilient teenagers in an uncertain world

How we can help parents to raise kind, resilient teenagers when the world is full of uncertainty? Head of Reigate Grammar School, Surrey, Shaun Fenton, offers some thoughts.

In the faces of our students, I see excitement, pride, nerves, and sometimes a touch of worry. Parents feel it too. The pressures on teenagers are intense and constant – tests, deadlines, social media comparisons, and the bigger worries they hear about in the news.

Parents naturally ask: Will my child succeed? Are they ready for the future? And, we must stop any thoughts that success can be measured by exam results alone. Of course, qualifications matter as they open doors of opportunity, but the qualities that carry them through life are character, resilience, and kindness.

Parents are saying the same thing: they are anxious about their child's future. They talk about mental health, safety, and happiness in school, much more than exam results. Parents are telling us clearly that they want schools to help raise young people who are kind, grounded, and confident.

Universities and employers say the same. Adaptability, creativity, and empathy make the difference in adult life. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) has argued that values and agency should be taught alongside knowledge if children are to thrive in tomorrow's world.

Even within schools, the research is compelling. The Education Endowment Foundation has shown that programmes teaching resilience and teamwork boost learning by the equivalent of four months' progress in a year. Far from being a distraction, developing character supports academic success.

The strength of kindness and resilience

When school leaders put kindness at the heart of their culture, the impact goes well beyond test scores. A recent Barnardo's study of Mental Health Support Teams found that:

"The difference in the children, and in their parents has been amazing. They work with the parents too, reduce the anxiety in the parents and it changes everything for the child."

We know from experience that resilience is not about pretending life is easy; it is about managing setbacks and having the confidence to keep going – in school I talk about "embracing the climb".

Helping parents to help their teens

Parents often ask what makes the biggest difference at home. From what I've seen, it is often the small, consistent things:

- **Model balance.** Teenagers learn by watching us. Do they see road rage or restraint? If we cope with setbacks in measured ways, they are more likely to do the same.
- **Value the process not just the product.** The destination matters, but so does the journey so celebrate determination and progress, not just grades. Evidence shows that when parents



Shaun Fenton

encourage effort, children thrive.

- **Protect downtime.** Sleep, family meals, and hobbies are essentials, not luxuries. They give young people space to recharge.

- **Talk about values.** Conversations about kindness, fairness, and integrity anchor teenagers when the world around them feels noisy.

Schools and families together

I find that the strongest outcomes happen when parents and schools pull in the same direction. Parental support for the school, on the big things and the little things, that consistency reassures children that the adults around them are united, are on the same side – the side of the child. That sense of belonging is a powerful protection against anxiety and disconnection. At Reigate Grammar School, we see daily how our values of kindness, compassion, and global awareness give young people both roots and wings.

The future?

The world can feel uncertain, but we do know this: when children grow up in communities that value resilience and kindness, they do not just survive pressure – they flourish. The most important shared purpose, between school and home, is to raise young people of character who will meet the future with confidence and compassion.

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Let's get energy in perspective

In the September 2025 editorial I talked about energy optimisation and how to prioritise specific potential energy-saving interventions on the school estate. Now I'd like to take a step back and offer an approach to thinking about energy that should help to get it all in perspective.

It seems to me that current thinking about energy on the school estate is often rather fragmented. Staff are busy, crocodiles near the raft demand immediate attention, and there is almost inevitably little spare time to step back and get it all in perspective. Furthermore, perhaps those of us on the supply side have not been diligent enough in pointing out the advantages that could accrue from taking a more integrated approach. Most schools have an asset management plan, detailing – for example – when heating plant is due replacement. But how many of those plans set out to integrate the management of all the heat, power, and transport assets across the entire estate? How many take a truly holistic approach across all the energy-related functions? Can that even be done, and if so is it worth the effort?

I'd like to offer two examples of why it is worth the effort: one is an opportunity already missed; the other illustrates the significant savings that could be achieved by adopting such an integrated and holistic approach. These are both authentic examples based on current school case studies. In each case, these are large schools with a wide range of different types of buildings and multiple heating and cooling systems in place: both need concerted efforts by the estate staff to keep the show on the road. And nobody, least of all

me, is suggesting that anyone is being idle: this is about changing our collective approach, not about levels of effort.

First, an opportunity missed. In this case, a heating system in one building in one of the two schools failed, unexpectedly. The school quickly replaced it with like-for-like technology. The requirement was urgent and there was little to no time to think outside the box. In the event, school operations were hardly affected and neither staff nor students would have been aware of the urgent endeavours of the estate staff: life continued as normal. So, what's the issue?

Elsewhere on the estate there is a large district heating system serving several buildings via a heat network. That network, originally installed with stretch potential for future school expansion, currently has spare heating capacity which is somewhat greater than the capacity needed to replace the failed plant. The network also happens to pass close by the location of the failed plant. My suggestion is that had there been an estate-wide energy infrastructure plan in place then the remedy to the urgent plant replacement could have been different, and cost less money. Instead of tackling the failed plant in isolation, this would have been an opportunity to bring the stand-alone building into the heat network. That would have

cost significantly less than the stand-alone replacement cost. Furthermore, the diversity within the heat network overall would have been increased, enabling further savings. Of course, this solution could only have been implemented quickly if it had already been foreseen as part of the estate-wide plan and been included as a contingency. Hold that thought.

Next, an opportunity to be seized. The second of the two schools is currently reviewing alternative energy solutions. Ultimately the school wants to achieve net-zero by 2050, but it needs a roadmap that allows for a phased conversion, to avoid disrupting operations. Cost is an important factor, of course. The roadmap entails further iterations of fossil fuel plant before converting to heat pumps, and one interim solution is to introduce combined heat and power systems (CHP) for various buildings. Seen in isolation, the business case for each CHP installation is not that compelling. However, by introducing the concept of a CHP network – whereby the target buildings are all connected to one heat network served by one larger CHP – the business case suddenly becomes very compelling, with an ROI at over 150% over the 12–15 year life of the system. (Yes – that's not a misprint – over 150%). This advantage arises from procurement-related

economies of scale, plus the net system efficiency is greater due to the increased diversity in demand arising from a networked approach. In short, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, the introduction of the heat network infrastructure at this stage means that it will not need to be installed later as part of the eventual decarbonisation design concept. That nuance has the advantage that it smooths out the installation cost profile.

So what's the overall message here? In one instance, a cost-saving opportunity was missed due to the absence of a comprehensive plan. In the other, a major cost-saving opportunity has been flushed out in advance by dint of developing a comprehensive plan. But it's also clear that the plan needs to be inventive in approach: for sure it needs to take a holistic view of the estate, but it also needs to be alive to the different technological options available. It's not enough merely to think of replacing like with like. We could call it an asset management plan, but I don't think that captures what we are really trying to achieve by it. This is about more than mere management. I'd call it an energy systems masterplan.

Hopefully we'll get a chance to look at what one of those looks like in more detail in a future edition of the ISM.

If you want to learn more about any aspects of this article, contact Nigel Aylwin-Foster by email: nigel@reenergisegroup.com or call on 07496 950531.



Nigel Aylwin-Foster

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What it means to be a school librarian today

In a world where information is now readily available at our fingertips, people may question the role of a school library and its librarians. But research shows that an effective school library can have a positive long-term impact for children and not just with literacy¹. Head Librarian at Wycliffe College, Gloucestershire, Sharon Hodgkins, explains.

Recently, I've been asked more than once why a modern school needs a library. What does the school and, by extension, the pupil, get out of it? I often start my answer with a simple observation: when a librarian makes good choices about what a school invests in, it can make all the difference to a pupil's education.

In an age where almost everything is online, it's easy to assume that pupils no longer need a library, let alone a librarian. After all, if you want to know something, you can "just Google it." But as we all know, the answers young people find aren't always accurate, balanced, or at the right level for their needs. That has become even more evident since the rise of AI tools; while often helpful, the information provided is sometimes laughably inaccurate. That is where our role becomes essential. Librarians curate, filter, and guide, thereby ensuring that both staff and pupils have access to resources that are not just abundant, but reliable and relevant.

I am often asked, in something of a standing joke, if I've read every book in the library. The short answer is, of course, no. But what

librarians do read are the patterns of usage – which books are borrowed most, which collections are thriving, and which materials sit untouched. By tracking this, I can make evidence-based decisions about what books to get in, ensuring the library grows as a genuine support to both the curriculum and the wider life of the school. It also means I can offer practical help to teachers by suggesting texts that might enrich or complement a departmental initiative, or spark a discussion in the classroom.

This role extends beyond curriculum support. At Wycliffe, literacy development is a central strand of our library strategy. We are intentional in offering a broad, diverse range of reading materials, including books in translation. Research shows that the more widely pupils read, the more empathetic they become, and exposure to different cultures, voices, and perspectives accelerates this. In a world that prizes intercultural understanding, offering global literature isn't a luxury, it's a necessity.

Of course, reading for pleasure remains one of our biggest challenges. Even before mobile phones took centre stage in

young people's lives, we were seeing a drop-off in recreational reading. Pupils often start as enthusiastic readers in their younger years, only to lose momentum in adolescence. To counter this, we work closely with the prep school library to create continuity. One practical approach is through topical displays that link books to what pupils are already talking about. When the television series 'Adolescence' was trending, for example, we built a themed display around it, bridging the gap between popular culture and reading material. These moments capture attention and can reignite an interest in books.

It is important to stress, too, that pupils still want physical books. For all the availability of e-readers and tablets, I would estimate that, when it comes to reading for pleasure, 95% of our students choose a paperback when left to their own devices. Their academic and social lives are already so dominated by screens that reading a book becomes a refreshing act of going offline. And the evidence is there that this is a good thing. Studies show that information read on paper is more effectively processed and retained by the brain.

But a modern library is not just about literacy, it is also about wellbeing. Increasingly, I see pupils using the library as a safe and inclusive space. For some, it is a quiet refuge from the pressures of school life; for others, it is a place where they know they can find support for their mental health. Our 'Reading Well' section, stocked with carefully chosen titles on wellbeing and resilience, is regularly used by pupils navigating anxiety or social challenges. We also offer



Sharon Hodgkins

a dedicated reading room where they can step away from the noise and immerse themselves in something restorative.

When I reflect on what it means to be a school librarian today, I keep coming back to one phrase: facilitating solutions. Whether it is helping a pupil track down a reliable source for their work, guiding a teacher toward supplementary material, or simply creating a safe space where reading and reflection are possible, the librarian's role is one of quiet, adaptable problem-solving.

In an era where schools are under constant pressure to do more with less, it can be tempting to see the library as an optional extra. I would argue the opposite. A well-staffed, well-curated library is not a luxury, it is an engine for academic rigour, a catalyst for empathy, and a sanctuary for wellbeing.

As independent schools, we have the privilege of being able to invest in this, and I believe we have a responsibility to model what a truly modern library can look like. If we want our pupils to become critical thinkers, lifelong readers, and empathetic citizens, the school library must remain central to that mission.



¹ School Libraries Association, Why do school libraries matter? <https://www.sla.org.uk/Services/Public/Why-do-school-libraries-matter.aspx>



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Born: Germany (in a British Military Hospital)

Married: In 1987

Children: Two

Schools and universities attended: Junior King's School, Canterbury

Hordle House

Bembridge School

Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

First Job:
Bottling up in a pub

First job in independent education: Deputy Bursar and CCF

Commander – Cranbrook School, Kent (State Day & Boarding School)
– Loved it and such a wonderful School!!

Appointed to the current job:
April 2010

Favourite piece of music:
Supertramp

Favourite food:
Love Greek food

Favourite drink:
Good red wine!

Favourite holiday destination:
Cyprus – I was lucky enough to live there for three years

Favourite leisure pastime:
Sailing or anything to do with boats

Favourite TV or radio programme/series:
Car SOS

Suggested epitaph:
Had the best office view – now aiming for an even better one!

Profile

In conversation with Mark Taylor

Q You served for nine years in the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards before moving into the education sector. What skillsets developed in the Army have been of particular use in the role of school Bursar?

A The Army taught me three things in particular. First, trust. And trust works two ways. You trust colleagues and staff to use their initiative and skills to do the job; that is, you delegate, having ensured that the task is clear and that everyone has the right skills to tackle it. And if you are in a position to delegate, you also have a responsibility to provide training and professional development as necessary. Then you have to earn the trust of the people you line-manage. They have to know that they can rely on you as much as you rely on them. Secondly, it's trite, but no less true for that: teamwork. Teamwork is also built on trust, but it goes further. It involves sharing, consulting, building consensus – always bearing in mind that the purpose of it is to reach decisions and carry out actions. And thirdly – you might think this an unexpected answer – an appreciation of history. I don't mean being shackled to the past, far from it – change is inevitable and vital – but regiments draw a strong sense of shared endeavour from their long histories. You want to do well in order to honour the achievements of all those who have gone before: it's a tremendous inspiration, and especially relevant in a centuries-old school like King's.

Q With the financial challenges the sector is facing currently, how critical is the role of bursar at the moment? And in light of that how do you see the job evolving in the coming years?

A Well, bursars are indispensable! I know: I would say that. But what a bursar in the conventional sense of the word can bring to the table is breadth of vision and experience; and this is valuable at both the strategic and tactical level. What do I mean by "conventional sense?" Someone who can look beyond bean-counting: a) to understand the impact of financial changes on parents, pupils, and staff when the impact may be psychological as much as practical; b) to open up innovative ways of securing the financial future and stability of the school. Don't get me wrong: beans have to be counted, particularly in these times when beans are in short supply. But beans are meaningful only if they enable you to provide an excellent education and upbringing for your pupils, and to

run a school where people positively want to live, teach, and learn. As for the future, innovation is the key. Schools are much more than commercial businesses – but they are businesses nonetheless. Bursars will have to develop new sources of income, some of which will seem rebarbative to anyone who wishes times were not a'changing. The alternative, though, would be worse.

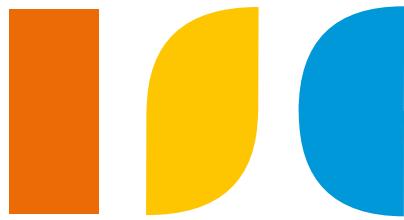
Q You were interim chair of the ISC for several months before your role became permanent. You follow a high profile ex-headmaster. As a working Bursar, are you planning any changes in priorities or direction for the organisation?

A We have a very strong team at ISC led by our incredible CEO Julie Robinson, and through the Board and member associations we can call upon immensely rich experience and guidance from across the sector. This support has been invaluable in facing up to the policy onslaught from government and representing the views of independent schools. Could we have exerted more influence on public policy? I don't think so. Should we try to make even more friends in high places, and engender even more vocal opinion from parents and alumni? Yes, I think we must. It is not facts that are at issue, but opinions; and opinions are there to be changed.

Q One of the shifts you have made recently at King's School, Canterbury, is to address non-fee income streams so you are better placed to reduce the VAT impact. Can you explain what this has entailed? Have you set up trading businesses outside the strictly educational sphere?

A For me, reducing dependency on fee income isn't just a financial necessity – it's a strategic priority for the long-term health of our schools. At King's, we've worked hard to broaden our horizons. We have an Enterprise Company to manage UK-based commercial ventures and an International Company to oversee overseas operations. That's allowed us to grow non-fee income through carefully chosen international franchise partnerships, alongside expanding commercial activities like facility lettings, events, and specialist courses. We're also putting real energy into fundraising. These steps aren't just about VAT – they're about resilience, innovation, and ensuring that our schools can thrive for generations to come.

Mark Taylor is chair of the Independent Schools Council (ISC). He is also the bursar at King's School, Canterbury, Kent.



Q Your family received a military bursary which opened the door to an independent education. Today's serving personnel can apply for a Continuity of Education Allowance to help with fees. Has the introduction of VAT prompted an increase in applications? How can independent school heads help promote the scheme?

A So far, VAT hasn't triggered a big rise in applications, but I expect interest will grow. Heads can help by making the scheme visible – through admissions conversations, websites, and outreach. This is personal for me: I'm a sixth-generation soldier, and my family benefited from a military bursary. I was proud to support ISC's campaign highlighting VAT's impact on military parents. Supporting those who serve isn't just policy – it's a responsibility I feel strongly about.

Q Last November, the ISC once again released its annual 'Celebrating Partnerships' report. This highlights some of the great partnerships work that goes on in the sector. But how, in your experience, can partnerships between schools, local businesses, and community organisations strengthen a school's mission as well as that of wider society?

A A good school opens the eyes of its pupils to the wealth of opportunities that the world could hold for them; it prepares pupils to articulate their aspirations as the first crucial step in turning those aspirations into reality. On the one hand, schools cannot do this without cooperation and practical help from that outside world: work experience, either in businesses or as community service, is the classic example. On the other, schools can give as well as take: the classic example here is sharing lessons in specialist subjects with state schools. Both instances provide a public benefit through education, which is the simplest definition of a school's charitable purpose. Can schools do more? Generally, yes; although the obligation will fall harder upon small schools that have less extensive resources, and this would only hasten the trend of mergers and acquisitions among schools. Should schools do more? Again, yes. Contact with the wider world can demonstrate just how good a good education can be – and independent schools need

that understanding, locally and nationally. Businesses, in particular, may also gain from increased contact with articulate pupils: these are the next generation of employees, and becoming acquainted with them may help firms to plan for how attract them and get the best out of them in the future. Accountancy firm PwC is now training its Generation Z recruits in resilience and how to deal with customers (i.e., other people). Good schools do this as a matter of course. Surely there is an opportunity for partnership here?

Q The recent ISC campaign against VAT on fees, and the previous one about charitable status might give the impression that the independent school sector is somehow invariably opposed to government policy. What examples can you provide of how the sector supports government objectives for education?

A Well, we will certainly oppose harmful policies – but as a considered response to events, not from inbuilt prejudice. When the ISC has spoken out, it has been to protect children and families, not to oppose reform for its own sake. Independent schools see themselves as part of a shared education ecosystem, rooted in their local communities and committed to the public good. The sector's strong preference is constructive collaboration with the state. Every day, schools work alongside state partners through more than 9,000 partnerships, sharing facilities, specialist teaching, and ideas that improve outcomes well beyond their own pupils. Many of our schools exist precisely to widen opportunity: over £1 billion a year is invested in fee assistance, much of it means-tested, and a third of pupils receive support. Schools also play a crucial role in areas of clear government concern, including SEND, specialist provision, and teacher development. In these areas and more generally, the government is also now discovering just how much money the independent sector saves the public purse – a positive message that I hope might resonate more loudly among the public at large. The curriculum and assessment freedoms our schools enjoy make them centres of educational innovation – a contribution we've consistently made to the wider system over the years. Looking ahead, we're

positioned to help shape policy decisions in constructive ways, as we see ourselves as partners in UK education.

Q Your jobs as a Bursar have all been in schools in the south of England. How do the challenges differ in other, less affluent, parts of the country?

A In a broad sense, the challenges are much the same across the country (e.g., affordability; retaining good staff, students and governors). This degree of commonality is one reason ISC can speak for, and support, the diverse range of independent schools. It's the circumstances in which these challenges play out that are different. In some rural areas, schools (and therefore their catchments) are more thinly spread, and the options for remaining viable may be more restricted than in the south-east, e.g., fewer other schools to merge or collaborate with. If average household incomes are lower, affordability becomes even more acute, which would require more robust bursary programmes and perhaps different fee structures. There might also be different community expectations about the school's relationship with the local area – which could be a benefit. ISC needs to listen carefully to understand these specific contexts, engaging with local stakeholders. Every school will have strategies that have worked: ISC can help schools to learn from one another and adapt as necessary for their own situation.

Q As someone who leads a very busy working life, what do you like to do in your spare time to wind down and relax?

A I'm fortunate to have a wonderful family who keep me well grounded, busy, and on my toes – whether that's through lively conversation or tackling DIY projects at home. Outside of work, I love sailing and anything to do with boats, and I enjoy the challenge of making things better with my own hands. Professionally, I count myself lucky to work in one of the most inspirational places in the world: the Canterbury Cathedral Precincts. From my office window, I have a direct view of the Cathedral – a daily reminder of history, continuity, and purpose.

St John Ambulance launches HEART defibrillator to help schools save lives

St John Ambulance has launched a defibrillator range to help save lives in schools and their communities.

Cardiac arrest affects more than 40,000 people outside hospital in the UK each year. While four in 10 cardiac arrests happen to people aged 16 to 64, the unthinkable can happen to people of all ages – with 1.7% occurring in children under 15.

Every minute without CPR and defibrillation reduces a person's chance of survival by around 10%. If defibrillation is delivered within three to five minutes of collapse, survival rates can reach 50 to 70%.

The charity has built on its 150-year history of providing first aid care and training to develop two light and easy-to-use HEART defibrillators which give clear step-by-step instructions in a choice of languages.

Find out more at: www.sja.org.uk/heart-pr

Schools are being encouraged to install the defibrillators in publicly accessible places and register them with The Circuit, the UK defibrillator registry, which will extend the benefits of defibrillators to the surrounding community.

In addition, all profits from the sale of St John first aid equipment are used to fund the charity's life-saving activities, including training and equipping volunteers to give vital first aid at public and sporting events.

Dr Lynn Thomas, medical director at St John Ambulance, says: "We hope to see many more schools equipping themselves for medical emergencies such as cardiac arrest, which can sadly happen to anyone at any time."



"While they're not a legal requirement, schools do have a duty of care to their pupils, staff and visitors, so we advise them to include defibrillators in their safety provision. I also strongly hope they'll consider locating the HEART defibrillators where members of the public can access them out of school opening hours."

Although defibrillators are designed for use without training, recent research by St John Ambulance found almost two-thirds of people lack the confidence to use one, so it offers defibrillator training, either as a stand-alone course or integrated into essential first aid training.

Sustainable style

Pupils from Ipswich High School, Suffolk, have welcomed young fashion lovers from across the region for this year's teen-led Fashion Reboot.

The event at Woolverstone Hall brought together young fashion enthusiasts to promote sustainable shopping through pre-loved clothing. With its first-ever Teen Room, the event encouraged pupils to rethink fast fashion, and

showed how young people can lead the way in making ethical, environmentally friendly fashion choices.

Over the course of the event, hundreds of items found new homes, proving that second-hand shopping can be both stylish and sustainable.

It is hoped that the Fashion reboot will become an annual event.



The Fashion Reboot event at Ipswich High School

Tree planting to mark birthday



Pupils from Tudor Hall School, Oxfordshire, have helped to plant more than 300 trees in their grounds to mark the school's 175th birthday.

A mix of native tree saplings have been planted and it is hoped that the newly created woodland, thanks to the school's partnership with the Woodland Trust, will be a lasting legacy at the Wykham Park campus, to be enjoyed by

the school community for years to come.

The girls were keen to plant the trees themselves, guided by Tudor's Groundsmen Charlie and Graham. The trees not only mark the school's 175th birthday but also supports the school's sustainability efforts, demonstrating how every person can make a positive difference to their environment.

Tudor Hall pupils planting tree saplings at Wykham Park

Integrated care solutions

Exeter Paediatric Integrated Care Solutions (EPIC Solutions) are a consultant led multidisciplinary team of healthcare professionals including paediatrician, psychiatrist, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, mental health practitioners, creative therapist, dietitian, pharmacist, and an emotional support dog! Together we offer holistic, integrated assessment, and

support for a wide range of needs in children and young people (0–25 years) including physical, psychological, educational, emotional, behavioural, and mental health difficulties. Young people, families, and the systems around them do not have to know what they want or need, just that something does not feel right and they need help.

Our services include assessment for neurodevelopmental difference (autism, ADHD, FASD, language disorders, dyspraxia, sensory processing), educational difficulties (cognitive, executive functioning, dyslexia), trauma and attachment disruption, anxiety and mood disorders, behaviours associated with nutritional risk (ARFID, disordered eating, binge eating), and much more.

EPIC work closely with many different nurseries, schools, and colleges. We have our own SEN adviser to provide bridging support and advice if needed.



EPIC use our multiprofessional expertise to provide consultation, presentation, education, and training into education settings if requested.

We have our own bespoke, child and young person friendly premises which includes a waiting area, sensory rooms, clinical rooms, fully equipped spaces for sensory integration therapy, creative arts therapies, and a nursery area for 2–5 years developmental assessment.

EPIC are based on the outskirts of Exeter, easily accessible from all major roads, rail, and flights into the southwest. We partner with a local hotel offering reduced price family accommodation to enable intensive assessment and intervention packages for those travelling significant distances from around the UK.



For further information about EPIC and the services we offer please visit: www.epicsolutions.org.uk or contact us via: practice.manager@epicsolutions.org.uk. Follow us on social media.



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Co-ed transition

St Albans School, Hertfordshire, has been gearing up for its co-educational transition in 2026 with focus groups, a discovery event, and the unveiling of its new girls' uniform.

Designed to encourage incoming girls to help shape the school environment they want to see in September, the school has been actively welcoming girls onto its campus for a range of interactive events which saw prospective families of both boys and girls engage in a range of activities across various departments, guided by current pupils, including St Albans Schools' Sixth Form girls and boys.

Pictured: Unveiling the new girls' uniform

Highlights also included a "first look" display of the new girls' uniform being launched in September 2026, alongside detailed plans for the Lower School Hub – a dedicated area that will house the incoming Year 7 cohort.

Head at St Albans School, Joe Silvester, said: "These events have provided an ideal platform for prospective students and their families to experience first-hand what life is like at our school. There has been a real buzz around the move to co-education and our recent focus groups with the girls and their families have proven to be very insightful, while giving them a unique opportunity to shape their future learning environment."

New Lower School

Bede's School, East Sussex, has announced that from September 2027, the school will introduce a brand-new, purpose-built Lower School at its Senior School campus, running alongside the established provision at Bede's Prep School in Eastbourne.

It has been planned in order to enhance the educational options for pupils transitioning into Years 7 and 8.

CEO and Headmaster of Bede's Senior School, Peter Goodyer, commented saying: "We are delighted to announce this strategic development. Crucially, the new Lower School will run alongside our existing provision at Bede's Prep School in Eastbourne, which will continue to operate unchanged. This means we are offering families complementary options at the critical Year 7 entry point, ensuring parents can choose the environment that is perfectly matched to their child's unique needs and personality.

Pictured: Artist impression of the new Lower School building



Whether pupils thrive on the continuity of the Prep community or benefit from earlier integration into a Senior School environment, we are offering the best of both worlds."

The cornerstone of this new development will be the construction of a brand-new purpose-built facility which will has been designed to be a "school within a school": Architects and a construction company have been appointed, and the planning process for the new facility is currently underway.

Advertisorial Feature

Driving change: electric transport that puts pupils first

Leading minibus and fleet supplier PHVC has partnered with The Unicorn School in Abingdon to provide a 100% electric Ford eTransit Minibus, supporting the school's commitment to safe, sustainable, and future-ready transport.

The Unicorn School is a specialist independent day school for children aged 6 to 17 with dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and speech and language needs. Known for its warm, nurturing environment and highly personalised approach to learning, the school empowers pupils to build confidence, independence, and a lifelong love of learning. Comfortable, reliable transport plays an essential role in extending this support beyond the classroom.

Innovative transport supporting student wellbeing – the electric

Ford eTransit Minibus reflects a shared commitment between The Unicorn School and PHVC to sustainability and innovation. Zero emissions help reduce the school's carbon footprint and contribute to cleaner air for the local community, while providing a modern, comfortable travel experience for pupils.

Alison Woodworth-Sturla, Headteacher at The Unicorn School, said: "This electric minibus is a fantastic addition to our school. It supports our commitment to sustainability while providing safe and



comfortable journeys. We are extremely grateful to PHVC for their support."

PHVC has extensive experience

in supplying specialist and electric vehicles, helping schools make confident, future-focused transport choices.

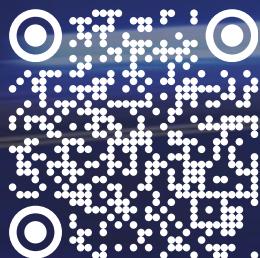
If you are considering electric minibus solutions, contact PHVC on 01489 580333, email: sales@phvc.co.uk or visit: www.phvc.co.uk to discover how sustainable transport can deliver real impact.



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Ask the expert:

How can sustainability secure the future of independent schools?



Helen Burge

In the face of increasing financial pressures, independent schools are facing a critical crossroads. With student numbers declining, attracting new pupils has never been more important. In this environment, sustainability is a strategic tool that can help schools safeguard a legacy, protect their heritage, and build an ever more appealing, future-ready school.

Helen Burge, a Consultant School Business Leader, discusses how schools can embed sustainability into purchasing decisions – from the products they buy to the suppliers they partner with – to reduce environmental impact, improve financial efficiency, and demonstrate the values that matter to prospective pupils.

Q. Why does sustainable procurement matter?

Independent schools have always been about more than academic outcomes. They shape values, behaviours, and leadership. As such, they are uniquely placed to model responsible decision-making.

Sustainable procurement goes beyond buying “green” products. It is about creating a culture of responsibility and influence across supply chains. By prioritising sustainability, schools can reduce carbon emissions, minimise waste, and encourage higher environmental standards among suppliers.

Q. What are the benefits of sustainable procurement?

Reducing carbon emissions: Sourcing locally and choosing environmentally responsible alternatives cuts transport emissions and lowers overall carbon footprints.

Minimising waste: Selecting products with minimal packaging, recycled content, or longer lifespans supports a circular economy.

Supporting sustainable supply chains: Setting sustainability expectations for suppliers drives positive change beyond the school gates.

Building educational value: Embedding sustainability into

operations sends a clear message to pupils about environmental stewardship and ethical leadership.

Q. How can buying sustainably attract new pupils?

Sustainability is increasingly important to families. Schools that clearly demonstrate environmental responsibility gain a competitive advantage in a crowded market. A strong sustainability ethos can be a deciding factor for parents seeking schools that align with their values and ethics.

Parents want reassurance that fees are being used wisely. Sustainable procurement can lead to lower long-term operating costs, reduced waste, better lifecycle value, and predictable budgeting through long-term contracts.

Sustainability is a global priority and issue. Demonstrating sustainable procurement helps schools position themselves as being globally aware and environmentally responsible, increasing appeal to international families.

It can also strengthen applications for sustainability awards and partnerships with local and national organisations.

Q. How can buying sustainably enhance financial resilience?

In times of financial uncertainty, efficiency and innovation are

essential. Sustainable procurement can deliver both. Smarter purchasing decisions often reduce waste, streamline operations, and optimise resource use. This helps schools manage rising costs more effectively.

Q. How can schools protect heritage through sustainability?

History, tradition, and excellence are cornerstones of independent schools. Embracing sustainability does not undermine this heritage, it reinforces it. Sustainable procurement ensures that school operations reflect the realities of today's world while preparing students for tomorrow's challenges. Parents increasingly expect schools to teach about climate and sustainability, and they also expect schools to model it. When procurement choices reflect the curriculum, it creates an authentic educational experience. A clear commitment to sustainability positions schools as institutions that think long term and act in the best interests of their communities and the planet.

Practical steps to get started

Integrating sustainable procurement does not need to be overwhelming. Schools can begin with manageable actions:

1. Define sustainable procurement: Ensure all staff involved in purchasing understand what it

means and how it aligns with the school's values.

2. Review procurement policies: Embed sustainability across the entire procurement lifecycle, from sourcing to disposal.
3. Engage suppliers: Work with selected hand-picked suppliers to understand their environmental practices and identify opportunities for improvement.
4. Measure and report progress: Track outcomes such as reductions in waste, energy use, or emissions to ensure accountability and demonstrate impact.
5. Embed sustainability in school culture: Involve pupils, staff, and the wider community, turning procurement decisions into learning opportunities.

Sustainability offers independent schools a clear path forward in a challenging landscape. Through sustainable procurement, schools can reduce costs, attract values-driven families, safeguard their legacy and build long-term resilience.

Zenergi's Greener Schools Index asks 13 questions in relation to procurement, offering several ideas to help you review your procurement practices, along with several other opportunities to make your school more sustainable. Get started with the free tool today.

About the expert

Helen Burge is a Consultant School Business Leader with more than 25 years of experience working in operations and strategic management within the education sector. She co-chairs the UK Schools Sustainability Network (UKSSN) Operations Group and holds a masters in Strategic Educational Leadership.

Zenergi supports more than 300 independent schools to unlock energy efficiency and future-proof their estate with a personal service that combines deep procurement sector expertise with complete transparency and measurable value. Learn more at: zenergi.info/independent-schools.



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Discover how
we can help you.



Rethinking role models: empowering teachers to nurture the next generation of female leaders

GDST Chief Executive, Cheryl Giovannoni, explores how celebrating and developing teachers as role models for female students can create an inclusive school culture, as well as equip them with the skills to be the leaders of the future and the shapers of a more equitable world.

The GDST Insights Report and Framework, 'Designing the Future of Girls' Education', is one of the most ambitious research projects we have undertaken to date, with partners from universities, businesses, campaigning organisations, and schools. The report is designed to support educators in improving learning experiences and outcomes for all girls in all educational settings, including co-ed environments.

Drawing on evidence-based insights from our expert contributors, we focus on three core principles to empower teachers and school leaders at all levels to design an outstanding education for the girls in their schools: classroom practice, curriculum and co-curriculum, and culture.

While all three principles are equally important, for me, creating a school culture that makes girls

feel they belong, where stereotypes are challenged and debated, and where they are equipped with the skills they need for the future is by far the most powerful. In fact, our Insights Report highlights that giving girls access to female role models – both internal and external – is the cornerstone to building an inclusive culture that inspires them to believe they can achieve their dreams and realise their future potential.

GDST schools work tirelessly to ensure that students are provided with access to diverse role models, particularly women working in traditionally underrepresented subjects and professional fields. However, I cannot overstate the critical role that our teachers play in shaping an inclusive whole-school culture. They are uniquely placed to contribute to a learning environment that empowers, supports and prepares girls for the futures they deserve. Every

day, teachers across the country inspire their students by role modelling the very behaviours and attributes they would like their students to develop: confidence, empathy, intellectual curiosity, and fearlessness.

Arabi Karteepan, Head of Physics at Croydon High School, Surrey, is one of many GDST teachers who is leading by example and breaking down barriers for the girls in her school. When her students asked if they could find a way to go to space, her response was "yes, why not?" Motivated by Arabi's positive affirmation and with her support, the students spent a year designing and building a CubeSat, a miniature satellite which records how sunlight passes through Earth's atmosphere. I am delighted that the students completed a flight test this summer and are on track to achieve their mission of becoming the first all-girls school to send a satellite into space.

The GDST takes enormous pride in championing our teachers as some of the most important role models for students outside of their families. As an organisation, we place the same emphasis on creating working environments where staff can thrive and enjoy fulfilling careers as we do on prioritising the wellbeing and development of our students. We offer around 2,000 courses annually through our progressive CPD programme, GDST Learn, to empower teachers to demonstrate expertise and a passion for their subjects, and to help them challenge their students to grow into confident, fearless young women.

Our investment in elevating our teachers to become internal role models and powerful forces for



Cheryl Giovannoni

change does not go unnoticed by the girls they teach. Our recent student satisfaction survey showed that nine in ten students at GDST schools feel they have positive role models who help them aspire to greatness.

If we are to accelerate the pace of change in our sector, we must be more intentional in how we approach every area of school life – classroom practice, curriculum, and culture. In an AI-enabled future rooted in STEM knowledge it is vital that girls thrive, rather than believing this domain is something reserved predominantly for boys.

We must ensure that girls and young women are at the heart of developing inclusive learning environments that give them real agency. They should never be treated as an afterthought, especially in co-ed learning environments. This is a rallying cry for every educational setting to meet the needs of every pupil, and tailor their provision accordingly.

I encourage all educators to embrace the GDST Insights Report as a valuable source of expertise on how girls learn best. Its principles and framework can be applied in every educational context, supporting girls to fulfil their potential and helping them define leadership and success on their own terms.

Join us in our mission to help girls learn without limits and to equip them with the skills and confidence to become the changemakers of the future.

Because when girls learn without limits, they go on to lead lives without limits, making the world a better place for us all.

Fine Art and Design Award

Ballard School, Hampshire, has won the 2025 Independent Schools Association (ISA) award for Excellence in Fine Art and Design.

Judges were impressed with the school's "innovative approach", commenting that giving "all

pupils access to the fine arts by opening multiple pathways to study has resulted in outstanding and prize-winning artistic endeavour." They also highlighted the school's "inclusive and flexible" provision, "allowing all pupils to thrive and find their artistic identity."

Recent innovation led by new Head of Art, Davina Hitchens, includes investment in a 3D printer, laser cutter, and digital photography equipment, and a redesigned Year 7 and 8 curriculum, rotating pupils through Fine Art, mixed media, ceramics, and textiles, all taught by subject specialists.

Davina Hitchens, Head of Art at Ballard School with the ISA award



Staff training that works with school budgets, not against them

See how training can strengthen your school, support your staff, enhance student and parent confidence, AND save money!

Do more with less, is the reality for schools in the independent sector. The impact of VAT on fees and rising operational costs, student recruitment pressures and tighter scrutiny, present a seismic challenge for schools to balance alongside the enduring expectation we will continue to invest in our people. Training course fees, costs for cover, travel, and accommodation, plus time out of school all add up, making it harder to sustain meaningful professional development without stretching already pressured budgets. At QE Training Academy, we understand this reality because we live it ourselves.

A lived understanding of the training pressures

QE Training Academy is the staff training arm of Queen Ethelburga's College, an independent school in York. Like many schools, we have had to ask



searching questions about how we can continue to fund high quality training under increasing financial and operational demands. QE Training Academy was established post-COVID, in response to those questions, not as an external provider looking in, but as an independent school looking for sustainable solutions to these challenges.

Why training must go on!

Deemed a luxury in some industries, staff training cannot be so easily compromised in the independent school's sector; in addition to upholding the quality of independent education, staff training serves to:

- ✓ Equip staff to sustain a safe and enriching learning and living environment for pupils.
- ✓ Reassure parents that their children are cared for by up-to-date expert professionals.
- ✓ Enable inspection readiness and regulatory requirements to be met.
- ✓ Enhance staff morale and loyalty and reduce absenteeism and turnover.
- ✓ Retain talented staff and boost workplace innovation, efficiency and performance.

A sector-led approach to collaborative, cost-effective and sustainable independent school CPD

QE Training Academy recognises the constraints schools face and has developed this training approach aimed to reduce cost, and boost collaboration across

the independent sector, without compromising quality:

- **Tailored training for the independent sector** is delivered by experienced professionals from the sector who understand the context and realities of independent school life.

• Hub school delivery

encourages schools to pool resources by hosting our accredited training locally for neighbouring schools to access. Trainers come to the hub school to deliver, reducing travel, multiple carbon footprints, accommodation and booking costs, while strengthening professional networks.

- **Online and blended training options** enable staff to access accredited training with minimal time out of school and fewer travel costs. Such flexible options enable wider attendance whilst incurring less cost, helping schools maximise impact while managing budget, cover, and workload pressures.

Expertise, investment, and growth within the sector

Training with QE Training Academy enables schools to reinvest in the independent sector while supporting staff to learn, grow, and thrive. As an independent school-led, Ofqual-regulated provider of adult training and development, we believe in sharing expertise, facilities and high-quality training experiences for the collective benefit of the independent school community.



In an environment where every decision must be justified, our aim is to be an affordable and accredited sector-specific training provider that recognises both the financial pressures schools face and the non-negotiable importance of high-quality training.

What QE Training Academy can offer:

	Off-Site Safety Management for School Trips
	First Aid at Work, Paediatric First Aid & CitizenAID
	Leadership – Early, Middle, Senior Pathways & Coaching
	Health & Safety & Fire Safety
	Mental Health First Aid, Safeguarding, Trauma & Attachment Informed Practice
	Team Building
	Train to Teach – Secondary & Adult Education

We welcome conversations with schools wanting to explore practical, flexible, and financially sustainable training solutions tailored to your context.



Music, Drama, & Dance

'Come From Away'



Senior School students from Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, have become some of the first students in the country to stage the new Schools Edition of 'Come From Away' – the award-winning musical based on real life events from 9/11.

'Come From Away' tells how the small community of Gander, Newfoundland opened its doors to nearly 7,000 passengers diverted during the terror attacks that rocked the world.

The production was led by Head of Drama, Mrs Naomi Akielan

Pictured: Students performing 'Come From Away'

(Director), with choreography by Tizzy Pape, stage management by Mrs Parle, and musical direction by Mr David Gibbs, supported by an extensive pupil tech and backstage team.

Students put together a live band to perform Newfoundland-inspired folk instrumentation, and worked on a set, which evoked Gander Airport through the use of wooden pallet walls, Mondrian-inspired flooring, and period-style signage. They also helped manage more than 300 lighting and sound cues.

'Miss Saigon: School Edition'



Westholme School, Lancashire, has presented its latest school production – 'Miss Saigon: School Edition'.

Featuring a cast of students and a full live orchestra, the show ran over several performances.

Inspired by a true story, 'Miss Saigon' follows the journey of Kim, a young Vietnamese woman, whose world is transformed by love, loss, resilience, and the impact of war.

Pictured: Performing 'Miss Saigon'

Students have spent months mastering the demanding musical and dramatic material. It showcases one of the largest student orchestras Westholme has assembled in recent years.

Directors Mrs Catherine Roberts-Lyle and Miss Rebecca Loudonsack, said: "Every student involved has dedicated countless hours to understand their characters, embody their journeys, and bring authenticity to this challenging material."

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New Hall School, Essex, has launched a new community choir, the Beaulieu Park Singers, welcoming local residents, parents, students, staff, and members of the boarding community, to come together through a shared love of music.

Now with more than 30 members, the choir meets every Tuesday in the school's chapel, and rehearsals are well underway as the choir prepares for a performance at New Hall's annual Gala Concert, to be held at Chelmsford Cathedral in March. The Beaulieu Park Singers

will join forces with the School's Senior Choir to perform Handel's 'Messiah'.

Director of Music at New Hall, Jonathan Turner, commented: "Music has an incredible ability to bring people of all ages together. Watching students, parents, staff, and members of the wider community unite in song is inspiring. Our historic chapel provides a beautiful and atmospheric setting for rehearsals, enriching both the sound and the sense of togetherness that the choir embodies."

Pictured: Beaulieu Park Singers



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The Governors of Ardingly College, West Sussex, have announced the appointment of Alastair Tighe as the new Head, effective from September 2026. This follows the news that Ben Figgis, the current Head, will be joining Munich International School as Principal this September.

Alastair has been Headmaster at Wells Cathedral School since 2018, having previously worked at Bedford School as Deputy Head



Radley Schools Group has announced the appointment of Dougal Lyon as the new Head of Beeston Hall, Norfolk, from September 2026.

Dougal is currently Headmaster of Craigelowan School and Nursery, Perthshire and Kinross.

Formerly a Housemaster for 6 years at Haileybury, Hertfordshire, his other previous appointments

(Academic) and at Eltham College, London, as Director of Music. He started his teaching career at Oundle School, Northamptonshire, where he was Deputy Director of Music and an Assistant Housemaster. Alastair read English and then Theology at Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he was also the College's Organ Scholar.

Alastair and his husband, Gavin, will move to Ardingly in the summer of 2026, ready for the new academic year in September.

include roles at Framlingham College, Suffolk, and Christ College Brecon, Powys.

Dougal holds a degree in Geography from the University of Southampton, as well as an MSc and PGCert from Brasenose College, University of Oxford.

He will be joined at Beeston by his wife, Charlotte, and their son, Humphrey, who will be starting Year 5 at the school.



Ballard School, Hampshire, has announced the appointment of a new Headmaster, following the tenure of Andrew



The governors of Gayhurst School, Buckinghamshire, have appointed Amanda McKnight as the school's new Head.

Amanda, who will join Gayhurst in September 2026, will become the first female Head in its 117-year history.

Amanda is currently Head of



Radley Schools Group has announced the appointment of Tim Knapp as the new Head of Kitebrook Prep School, Gloucestershire, from September 2026.

Tim will join Kitebrook from Pinewood School, Wiltshire,

McCleave, who joined the school in 2018.

Stuart Turner, currently Deputy Head at Emanuel School, London, will take the helm in April.

Pre-Prep at Somerhill, Kent. She holds a degree in Dramatic Arts from Glasgow University and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and a Postgraduate Certificate of Education from Durham University. Her career has spanned prep schools, state schools, and two schools in Illinois, USA, with teaching experience across Early Years, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 2.

where he has served as Deputy Headmaster since 2022.

After completing his degree, and PGCE at Exeter University, Tim has held roles at several prep schools. His experience includes two years at Chandlings, Oxford, and 15 years in senior roles at The Dragon, Oxford, before joining Pinewood.

Heads Hunted

Among the upcoming head and principal appointments:

Bruern Abbey School

Oxfordshire

Cranleigh Pre-Prep

Surrey

Dean Close Prep

Gloucestershire

Devonshire House Prep

London

Feltonfleet School

Surrey

The Ryleys School

Cheshire

St Margaret's School

Hertfordshire

Tower House Junior School

London

Warminster School

Wiltshire

If you would like mention made of your upcoming head or principal appointment for which applications are sought please let us know – there is no charge for a listing.

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

Please email:
mail@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

New appointments



Ashville College Prep, North Yorkshire, has appointed its first female Head of Prep School.

After a year as Deputy Head, Abigail Hiley has been promoted to Head. She brings to it teaching and leadership experience that spans the UK, Dubai, and Harrow International School, Hong Kong.

Other key new appointments see Jenny Tropia take up the position of Deputy Head of Prep School, and Eileen McTigue becoming Deputy Head of Pre-Prep.

Jenny was Ashville's first US parent liaison officer in Pre-Prep and Prep School, drawing upon more than 20 years working in education and a decade living and teaching in Connecticut in the States.

Eileen was previously the Head of Year at the British International School, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and has 20 years' experience in primary teaching.

Pictured: Ashville Prep's new leadership team – Abigail Hiley (centre) with Eileen McTigue and Jenny Tropia

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Building impactful educational partnerships

Towards the end of 2025, Haberdashers' Elstree Schools (Habs), Hertfordshire, was named as Independent School of the Year for Outstanding Educational Partnerships at the Independent School of the Year Awards. Habs Executive Principal, Gus Lock, discusses some of the work they have done with partner state schools in the community, especially in respect to helping improve school attendance.

Habs traces its heritage back many centuries, within the context of the Haberdashers' Livery Company, to a philanthropic vision intended to provide education and opportunity to the least privileged in society. At the heart of Habs Elstree Schools' success is a clearly defined purpose: to empower young people to have a profound impact in the world. As a result of our long-term commitment to social impact through deep, sustained collaborations with state sector partners in our local community, our school was recognised nationally in the Autumn of 2025 for its outstanding educational partnerships.

Yet, for Habs, winning awards is not just a celebration of academic excellence, they recognise how

both of our schools are actively using their resources, people, and purpose to drive social mobility and create a positive legacy beyond their own campus. Our students and staff work together for mutual enrichment, making a tangible impact and helping to improve student attendance across our partner schools.

Raising attendance is one of the key challenges for state schools today. As part of a programme that trains, guides, and supports them, we have put our students into the wider world and have enabled them to have a profound impact on their community. Our work in partnership has raised average school attendance amongst disadvantaged pupils, and not just attendance at partnerships

sessions, but at school overall by 10.1%, which is equivalent to an extra full day of school every two weeks.

A great example of this is our work with London Academy in Edgware who we have been working closely with to help improve Year 6 pupil attendance and attainment through a carousel of focused partnership sessions in swimming, sports and outdoor education. As one of our five local partner schools, we have been delivering the sessions weekly to Year 6 pupils at London Academy, 50% of whom are eligible for free school meals. The sessions, which aim to support and enhance curriculum learning, are run by a Habs teacher, in partnership with London Academy staff, with activities supported by 16 trained Sixth Form students from Habs.

As part of the initiative, London Academy pupils have to achieve a "golden ticket" in order to qualify for the sessions. This means they need to have had 100% attendance the previous week, have completed their homework and have no negative behaviour points.

London Academy has studied its pupil attendance on a Thursday, comparing its Year 6 data both pre and post running the sessions, and also comparing attendance for Year 6 versus other year groups. This revealed that London Academy's partnership work



Gus Lock

with Habs has raised the average school attendance – not just at partnership sessions, but at school generally.

All of our partner schools serve communities with average or above-average levels of disadvantage, and who face persistent challenges in educational attainment, access to specialist subjects, and extracurricular enrichment opportunities. Through its partnerships programme, Habs now delivers over 52 hours of curriculum support and enrichment every week with almost 2,000 students benefitting from an average of 12 hours of sessions each. This involves over 500 Habs students in Years 10 to 13 who are specially trained to lead and support the sessions, fostering leadership, communication, and adaptability. A further 56 Habs staff members also contribute weekly, supporting curriculum alignment and ensuring quality provision.

What is so moving about this kind of partnership work is the unwavering commitment our students have for one another, to our schools and to the idea that their work can genuinely change lives, while helping them to make a meaningful difference to the world. It really is inspiring and something we are hugely proud of.



MOTIVATIONAL, ASPIRATIONAL, ENCOURAGING

An advertisement for Goldtree Bespoke featuring several examples of custom-made wooden honour boards. One board for Wells Cathedral School lists 'EDINBURGH'S GOLD AWARD HOLDERS'. Another for King's Magna Middle School shows 'THE HOUSE CHAMPIONSHIP' for Lovekyn. A third for Steyning Grammar School Boarding lists 'Head Boy' and 'Head Girl' names from 2003 to 2016. A fourth board for Sherborne QA Preparatory School is 'Opened by Her Majesty The Queen'. The bottom of the ad includes contact information for Goldtree Bespoke, including a phone number, email, and website: www.goldtreebespoke.co.uk.



Protecting lives with St John HEART: Why every school needs a defibrillator

When it comes to safeguarding pupils, staff, and visitors, independent schools pride themselves on the highest standards. Yet, where a critical medical emergency is concerned – cardiac arrest – we find some institutions are less prepared than they need to be.

In the UK, more than 40,000 people suffer an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest each year, and survival depends on immediate action. Every minute without CPR and defibrillation reduces a person's chance of survival by around 10%. That's why having a defibrillator on-site isn't just best practice – it's lifesaving.

Cardiac arrest can affect anyone – including children

While four in ten cardiac arrests happen to people aged 16–64,

the unthinkable can happen to people of all ages – with 1.7% occurring in children under 15. For schools, this means pupils, staff, parents, and visitors could all be at risk. The British Heart Foundation estimates that early CPR and access to a defibrillator can more than double survival rates. In fact, if defibrillation is delivered within three to five minutes of collapse, survival rates can reach 50–70%. Without rapid intervention, those chances fall dramatically.

Why schools are taking action

Independent schools are increasingly recognising that defibrillators are as essential as fire extinguishers. They provide peace of mind for staff and parents, and they demonstrate a commitment to pupil and staff welfare. The Department for Education strongly recommends that schools install defibrillators and has funded state schools to do this; many insurers now view them as part of a robust risk management strategy. The advice is for organisations to have enough defibrillators on site to mean one is accessible within 200 metres or two minutes' brisk walk between patient and device.



Visit: www.sja.org.uk/heart-ism

By Lisa Sharman, Head of Education and Product Development, St John Ambulance

ads@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

Introducing St John Ambulance HEART defibrillators

St John Ambulance has been the nation's trusted first aid charity for over 150 years, and our new HEART One and HEART Two defibrillators are designed with schools in mind. These devices are:

- **Simple and intuitive:** offering clear, step-by-step voice and visual prompts so anyone can use them confidently in an emergency.
- **Lightweight and robust:** easy to store and transport, yet durable enough for busy school environments.
- **Affordable and reliable:** backed by St John Ambulance's reputation for quality and service.

Although HEART defibrillators are designed for use without prior training, we know that confidence matters. That's why St John also offers defibrillator training options, either as a stand-alone course or integrated into essential first aid training for staff.

Supporting your wider community

Many schools are choosing to make their defibrillators publicly accessible, extending

protection beyond the school gates. This simple step can help safeguard local sports teams, community groups, and visitors – strengthening your school's role as a hub of care and responsibility.

Why choose St John Ambulance?

When you purchase a HEART defibrillator from St John Ambulance, you'll not only benefit from a legacy of life-saving experience – but you'll extend benefit to your wider community. This is because all profits from sales are ploughed back into the charity's life-saving activities, including equipping volunteers to give vital first aid at the public and sporting events attended by many people in your own community.

Act today

Cardiac arrest can happen anytime, anywhere. By equipping your school with a St John Ambulance HEART defibrillator, you're giving every pupil, staff member, and visitor the best possible chance of survival. Don't wait until it's too late – contact St John Ambulance for advice on defibrillator provision and training to ensure a robust safety strategy is in place at your school.



New partnership

LVS Ascot, Berkshire, has announced a new three-year partnership with Southampton FC. It aims to provide insights, experiences and development to players and staff of LVS Ascot, through the Southampton Way, whilst unlocking a wider impact on the school's football.

Southampton FC will, alongside LVS Ascot, deliver a football development programme for players and staff in the school, whilst utilising the Southampton FC platform to showcase and inspire the next generation.

This will involve:

- Embedding Southampton FC coaching methods directly into LVS Ascot's football programme.

Pictured: LVS Ascot Students Visiting St Mary's Stadium, Southampton FC

England Hockey selection

Loughborough High School, Leicestershire, is celebrating the success of two Sixth Form students who have been identified for England Hockey's 2025–26 England Age Group (EAG) Programme.

Year 13 pupil Elena Fraser and Year 12 pupil Sophie Perez, both members of the England Hockey Talent Academy at Beeston Hockey Club, were shortlisted to trial for the England U18 Girls Squad. Elena's place has now been confirmed, while Sophie remains under final assessment following a strong performance throughout the earlier stages of the trials.

Across the 2025–26 cycle, selected players will gain valuable international exposure through high-level fixtures and tournaments, alongside specialist education in sports performance,

- Weekly delivery from SFC coaches and monthly staff visits from SFC staff.
- Coach education programmes for both school coaches and staff.
- Visits to Staplewood Campus to watch professional footballers in action, as well as trips to St Mary's Stadium for tours and exposure to the matchday experience.
- Career insights & pathways for pupils both on & off the pitch.

The school is also launching new football scholarships and has longer-term plans to introduce a full-time Football Education Programme. It is hoped that the partnership will play a key role in shaping and delivering that vision.



strength and conditioning, and elite athlete development.

Both pupils also train within Loughborough Schools Foundation's Hockey Player Pathway, a donor-funded programme designed to support talented young athletes through tailored strength and conditioning, technical coaching, workshops, and performance support sessions, preparing them for the demands of elite-level sport.



Tennis success

Ellesmere College, Shropshire, has been ranked second in the UK for tennis after success at a National School Finals event in Nottingham.

The senior team from Ellesmere College narrowly missed out on being named the best in the UK over the two-day tournament.

Gwen, Tabitha, VV, Amani and Katrina, who are aged between 13 and 16 years old, beat the top team from the North and the top team from the South west regional areas as part of the finals.

Pictured: Some of the successful Ellesmere College tennis players

The senior girls' team of Gwen, Tabitha, Amani, and Katrina, have also, throughout the year won the Shropshire LTA Schools event to qualify for the regional event, and won the Regional Schools Tennis Finals to be the top team in the Midlands and qualify for the National Finals.

In addition, the younger squad, in school years 7 to 9, finished third in their regional finals and were placed in the top 12 nationally.

Water Polo

A number of water polo players from Bolton School, Lancashire, have been honoured recently with selection for North West and Great Britain squads, and with selection into the North West Regional Talent Centre.

Zara in Year 12 has been selected for the Great Britain Under 18 Water Polo Squad.

She was nominated for the programme on the basis of her performances at the Regional Talent Centre, and successfully progressed through two rounds of national trials to earn her place in the squad.

Year 11 pupil Lucas has also been invited to join the Great Britain Under 18s.

Eight Girls' Division pupils were also selected to represent the North West at the girls' Under 14 Inter-Regional Championships in Walsall at the end of November: Year 9 pupils Taliah, Naoise, and Siyona and Year 8 pupils Charlotte, Izzy, Aoife, Sienna, and Darcey.

They won every match, finishing with a 12-4 victory over London in the final to become national champions.

Year 8 pupil Izzy was also awarded the prize for top goal scorer across the entire competition.



A pair of Boys' Division pupils were also selected for the boys' Under 14 Inter-Regional Championships, which took place during the first weekend of December. George and Ted, both in Year 9, helped the North West team to victory overall in the competition.

A grand total of 29 pupils were also selected for the Regional Talent Centre. From the Boys' Division: Oliver and Oscar (Year 8), David, Ethan, George, Noah, and Ted (Year 9), Matteo and Reuben (Year 10) and Jimmy (Year 11). And from the Girls' Division: Amelia, Aoife, Charlotte, Darcey, Frankie, Isabelle, Izzy, Jessica, and Sienna (Year 8), Beau, Siyona, and Taliah (Year 9), Grace and Olivia (Year 10), and Clara, Harriet, Holly, Liv, and Sianna (Year 11).

In addition, Year 13 student Amelia and Year 11 student Lucas have been appointed Regional Talent Centre coaches.

Pictured: ZU18 GB team selections Zara and Lucas Photo credit: Bolton School



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Creating inclusive SEN environments

How can landscape design be used to create inclusive, high-quality education spaces? Landscape Architect Associate, Jenny Hyden, examines how landscape architecture can unlock potential outdoors.

As the number of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) continues to grow, many schools are faced with a dual challenge: how to provide inclusive, high-quality education, and how to make the best use of their available space. The answer may lie not in building more classrooms, but in rethinking the landscape itself as a space for learning, therapy, and development.

It is important to approach any project with the fundamental principle: listen first. Begin by engaging with staff, students, parents, and the wider community. Nobody understands a school's daily rhythms and real-life challenges better than the people who live them. This valuable insight can become the foundation of a concept design, refined through collaborative workshops and cross-disciplinary consultation.

Good design for SEN is good

design for everyone. Truly inclusive environments don't just support learning, they foster belonging, confidence, and wellbeing for every pupil.

Designing for SEN means listening more deeply

SEN spaces and schools, arguably, require a greater level of design scrutiny due to the varied complexity of needs. This complexity can only be expressed by those working with the students to give the level of detail needed. High standards in layout, spatial planning, and materials are non-negotiable. At the same time, accessibility and security are essential, but they should never feel clinical or institutional. For instance, a secure boundary need not be a tall fence, it can be defined with layered planting, subtle landform changes, and thoughtful visual cues. This maintains safety while fostering

an atmosphere of openness and calm.

A landscape that learns with its users

Designing for SEN means designing with flexibility and empathy. Every student's needs are unique and often evolving therefore we create dynamic spaces that can adapt over time. From calming sensory gardens to active play zones and independent travel routes, create a "menu" of environments that cater to diverse learning and behavioural needs.

These may include:

- Quiet gardens for sensory regulation with soft planting, gentle sounds and natural materials.
- Inclusive activity areas designed for physical engagement, regardless of mobility.
- Clear, safe circulation to promote independence, confidence, and autonomy.

This isn't about creating "special" zones, but about creating inclusive environments where every student finds the support and stimulation they need to thrive.

Outdoor learning as a spatial solution

With pressure on indoor teaching space, with challenging historical buildings or tight footprints, outdoor learning environments offer a practical and powerful solution to increasing teaching space. From forest schools to farm schools, designing landscapes that serve as outdoor classrooms are on the rise, supporting everything from social development to life skills, and even curriculum-based learning.

Take the example of a recent farm school project: students tend to animals, learn horticulture, and engage in forest school education – all within a designed



Jenny Hyden

landscape that blends therapy, education, and responsibility. These environments not only improve resilience and emotional regulation but also help pupils forge a deeper connection to the natural world and their wider community.

Realising aspirations in phases

Budget constraints are a reality, therefore allow for phased implementation and design spaces that can evolve over time. It is possible to obtain planning consent for future elements at the outset, which can allow schools and their communities to fundraise or expand incrementally. This strategic foresight ensures that the school's long-term vision for outdoor SEN provision remains achievable.

With growing demand for SEN places, independent schools have a real opportunity to lead by example by integrating high-quality landscape design into their SEN strategies. The outdoor environment is no longer a nice-to-have; it is a crucial part of the educational offering. It builds confidence, promotes inclusion, and can reduce pressure on internal facilities.

We have seen firsthand how transformative the landscape can be for students. As funding pressures persist and needs become more complex, we believe the schools that embrace holistic, landscape-led design will be those best equipped to support their students' development and well-being.

Jenny Hyden is a Landscape Associate at NVB Architects, who specialise in education spaces: <https://nvbstudio.co.uk>

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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

Editor & Publisher, Distribution:

Angharad Jones T: 01635 201125
E: editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

Design Studio/Pre-press Production, Website:

Andrew Wicks T: 01635 201125
E: studio@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

Consultant:

Kimble Earl
E: consultant@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

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