

# *The Independent Schools Magazine*



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# In this issue...



## Opening of new professional kitchen

Dame Prue Leith has officially opened the brand new professional kitchen at The Royal Masonic School for Girls (RMS) Hertfordshire.

The kitchen forms part of the school's partnership with the Leiths Academy, providing an environment for students undertaking the Level 3 Extended Certificate in Professional Cookery, and has been designed to bridge the gap between classroom learning and the professional culinary world.

The day began with a "quick-fire" Q&A session, led by RMS students, and an interview with Dame Prue conducted by Sixth Form student Amber, filmed by fellow Sixth Former, Sophie.

Dame Prue also joined a Year 7 Food and Nutrition lesson, where she observed younger pupils being mentored by senior Leiths students.

The official opening saw Dame Prue and Head of Food and Nutrition, Mrs Yvonne Mackey, cut both a traditional ceremonial ribbon and a specially crafted edible one.

The visit concluded with the presentation of gifts including: school-produced honey, wildflower seeds, and biscuits baked by the students. The event also celebrated the school's long history of food education, looking back at archives dating from 1918 through to the present day.

Pictured: Dame Prue Leith with RMS Students

### Cover background

## Celebrating a love of reading

It's March and with it comes World Book Day. But how can a love of reading be embedded all year round? To find out more and to discover some of the ways reading for pleasure is being encouraged in schools see pages 6 to 7.

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

Please email:

[editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk](mailto:editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk)

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## Is your school mentioned?

### Schools featured in this issue include:

Abbot's Hill School; Ashville College; Ballard School; Banstead Prep; Bede's School; Bickley Park School; Bishop's Stortford College; Bradfield College; Bryanston School; Burgess Hill Girls; Claires Court School; Dame Allan's Schools; Demetae Academy; Dollar Academy; The Downs Malvern; Ellesmere College; Haberdashers' Monmouth School; Ipswich High School; The King Alfred School, London; Kingston Grammar School; Lomond School; Loretto School; Loughborough High School; Loughborough Schools Foundation; Luckley House School; Malvern College; New Hall School; Radnor House Sevenoaks; Repton School; RGS Worcester; Royal Masonic School for Girls; Sevenoaks School; Shiplake College; Solihull School; St Albans School; St Helen's College, Middlesex; St John's Priory School; St Margaret's School, Hertfordshire; St Mary's Colchester; Stephen Perse Cambridge; Surbiton High School; Ursuline Prep School, Warley; Warminster School; Westbrook Hay School; Westholme School; Wrekin College

# Financial sustainability and community integration: Leadership imperative for independent schools

When financial pressure intensifies, should smaller schools retreat – or should they look to redefine access?

At St John's Priory School, Oxfordshire, a new community partnership revenue model has been launched, seeing 25 new part-scholarship places for local state school pupils to attend the school full-time created. Designed as a proactive response to the current climate, Proprietor of the school, Kane Andrews, shares how this new approach is not only delivering financial sustainability but widening access to independent education and building community relationships too.



Kane Andrews

Independent schools are operating in one of the most strategically significant periods in recent decades. The latest Independent Schools Council Census reports that ISC schools educate more than 550,000 pupils across approximately 1,400 schools in the UK. Sector impact research has also estimated that these schools contribute over £16 billion annually to the UK economy and support more than 320,000 jobs. These figures underline the scale and importance of the sector. Yet rising employment costs, inflationary pressures, and increasing regulatory expectations mean sustainability can no longer be assumed.

In this environment, financial sustainability is not simply a governance discussion. It is a leadership discipline.

For proprietors and governing bodies alike, the question is clear: how do we protect educational quality while strengthening financial resilience, without defaulting to continual fee increases or reactive cost-cutting that risks long-term damage?

When I acquired St John's Priory School, Banbury in 2024, one of my first priorities was to develop a structured partnership model that could strengthen revenue without increasing operational spend.

This year, we are introducing 25 new part-scholarship places for local state school pupils to attend the school full-time. These places are funded in collaboration with local businesses through a tiered

structure, allowing companies to fund 25%, 50%, 75%, or 100% of a scholarship place.

This flexibility enables organisations of different sizes to participate in a commercially viable way while collectively widening access to independent education.

From the school's perspective, the model is deliberately sustainable. It introduces externally funded pupil places while protecting margins, avoiding additional marketing spend, and ensuring no added strain on existing fee-paying families. We are on track to raise approximately £375,000 per annum through this initiative, with commitments designed to extend across multiple years.

Companies that fund or part-fund scholarships receive tangible benefits. Each participating business becomes an official sponsor of the school, with brand association, recognition at selected events, and opportunities for meaningful engagement with families and the wider community.

In addition, employees of participating companies are offered a 30% fee discount for each of their children who enrol at the school, creating a meaningful and tangible staff benefit.

The arrangement is mutually reinforcing. Businesses demonstrate civic leadership and invest directly in local educational opportunity. In return, they receive structured recognition, community alignment, and a practical workforce incentive.

Continuity for pupils remains central. In the event that funding levels fluctuate in future years, the school has committed to accepting the reduced fee necessary to ensure that a funded child's place is not disrupted. Stability for families and pupils is non-negotiable. Financial architecture must serve educational continuity, not jeopardise it.

Three realities shaped our approach.

First, pupil recruitment is increasingly competitive. Demographic shifts and fee sensitivity require schools to diversify revenue rather than rely solely on traditional enrolment pipelines.

Second, families are more values-driven than ever. Academic standards remain essential, but culture, inclusivity, and authentic community engagement materially influence perception.

Third, cost pressures remain persistent. Staffing, compliance, and estate maintenance continue to rise. Sustainable growth must therefore come through intelligent financial design rather than defensive retrenchment.

Our partnership scholarship model addresses all three.

It widens access for capable pupils. It embeds the school more deeply within the local business ecosystem. And it strengthens income through externally funded places that enhance capacity utilisation.

Independent schools have long offered bursaries funded internally or through endowment. What is evolving is the funding mechanism. By structuring externally supported scholarships with clear agreements and transparent criteria, schools can increase funded places while protecting financial stability.

Governance remains critical. Scholarship commitments must be modelled carefully and supported by robust agreements. Governors should understand cash flow implications and ensure that accessibility initiatives are accretive rather than erosive to performance.

When designed with discipline, the outcome is powerful. Community integration strengthens enrolment resilience. Corporate engagement builds advocacy. Revenue diversification improves strategic flexibility.

St John's Priory School, Banbury has endured for nearly two centuries because it has adapted thoughtfully to changing contexts. Our scholarship partnership initiative is not a departure from tradition, but a modern expression of it.

Independent schools will secure their future not simply by managing cost, but by designing revenue models that align purpose with prudence. When financial sustainability and community partnership are deliberately aligned, resilience strengthens and opportunity expands for the next generation.

Kane Andrews is Proprietor of St John's Priory School, Banbury. He acquired the school in 2024 and focuses on financial sustainability, governance, and community-integrated growth within the independent sector.

# Inclusion or illusion? Children must be at the heart of this SEND reform

With the recent release of the SEND White Paper, Octavia Lemon, SENCo, at Demetae Academy, Staffordshire, offers her thoughts on the planned reforms and why it's important to not lose sight of the children who it will impact most.

The government's White Paper has triggered immediate reaction across UK news and is dominating discussion across social media. But beneath the political argument of SEND reform lies a simpler truth. This reform will be felt most acutely, not in Whitehall but in classrooms, by children.

At the epicentre of this is a major shift in how SEND provision will operate. It is proposed that EHCPs, by 2035, be reserved for children with only the most complex needs. If a child does not fall into the more complex needs bracket, then they will receive an Individual Support Plan (ISP). More than a million pupils are due to receive the new ISP which schools will be legally required to deliver.

At a political level, the Education Secretary (TES) Bridget Philipson said that children with SEND would change "from sidelined and excluded to be[ing] seen, heard and included." She went on to add that "support must start early." It is proposed that these reforms will also be linked to the expanded Best Start Hubs.

The TES quoted headteachers who welcomed earlier interventions but warned that "legal entitlement without capacity is a recipe for failure." If ISPs are to work then schools will need time, they will need training and they will need funding. It cannot just be about a change in paper work, it must also be about the support schools are entitled to have.

Education editor Richard Adams, for the Guardian, reported that the reforms are expected to significantly reduce EHCP numbers over the next decade citing that the current system has become "unsustainable and

adversarial." However, this has sparked fear amongst parents that there will now be a dilution in the enforceable rights that parents have fought hard to obtain. This change underscores anxiety and the proposal to remove tribunal backed guarantees may weaken families' abilities to challenge what they perceive to be inadequate provision.

As we know all too well, the independent school sector and independent specialist schools are a significant area of spending for local authorities. It may lead us to question if financial pressures are driving reform.

Is the White Paper an attempt to restore fiscal stability? Is this just a shift of responsibility yet again due to burden, the already overburdened mainstream settings?

For senior leaders the White Paper signals a significant shift.

First, let us start with compliance. If ISPs do become a statutory right for children with SEND, independent schools must ensure our systems meet legal expectations. Senior leaders must ask themselves:

- Who will be monitoring this statutory compliance?
- How will the ISPs be drafted?
- How will the ISP be reviewed and evidenced?

EHCPs are enforced and overseen through clear legal channels but the ISPs, as currently described, will act differently. This ambiguity in enforcement and accountability will naturally cause anxiety amongst leaders and parents. Awareness is high. Independent schools attract families due to the small class sizes and personalised care but

we must now evidence these claims with statutory duties. We must also face the reality that many independent schools rely on local authority placements. If EHCP numbers are going to be significantly reduced and mainstream inclusions expand then this will obviously change the status quo. Leaders will have to be proactive with local authorities. We will have to demonstrate impact, value and outcomes.

The risk with this reform is that documentation takes over dialogue. The most immediate impact will be seen and felt by SENCos. SENCos remain advocates for children and now they must ensure that they continue to lead with children at the centre of their decisions. Plans must translate into lived support. This will be critical.

The SENCo, after all, will now become the architect of these ISPs. They will be training staff, liaising with families, co-ordinating assessments, and ensuring measurable outcomes. Will this lead to increased workload? Will the burden land disproportionately on SENCos? The cynic in me gives an unequivocal, yes.

When any educational White Paper is announced, it is easy to be absorbed in budgets and timelines but children do not live in percentages.

Their experiences are whether their teacher understands their sensory overwhelm. Their experience is whether someone notices their anxiety before it becomes school avoidance and refusal. For many, an EHCP is not simply a bureaucratic artifact, it is a hard-won lifeline that protects the child from harm.



Octavia Lemon

Despite my cynicism there could be a hint of possibility in the air...

What happens if we throw integrity into the mix?

If ISPs are implemented with honesty, children who just fall short of EHCP thresholds could receive structured support earlier. If Best Hubs are genuinely able to see children's needs before they start Reception, the trajectories of children's lives could change profoundly.

The measure of this White Paper will not be in tribunal cases or council budgets, it will be in where it really matters. It will be in classrooms where children feel regulated. It will be in improved attendance for pupils who previously could not cope. It is in children and young people who feel that they belong.

It is all too easy for us to see this reform solely as a compliance risk. It is really an opportunity to recommit ourselves to an inclusive ethos and culture. SEND reform is not about structure, it is about a child who once felt invisible who now feels visible. It is about whether independent schools place children, not league tables, not finances, and not prestige, at the centre of every decision they make.

Children are not policy problems. They are individuals, human beings who deserve to be respected and have the right to be treated with compassion. This is where the future of our society really sits. Compassion. A fundamental component for inclusion, without it, change will always be an illusion.

# From statistics to stories: amplifying what works

March signals World Book Day and around it, the topic of reading for pleasure. Class Teacher and English Subject Lead at St Mary's, Colchester, Essex, Brogan Tuxford, reflects on how, whilst the statistics around that matter, the work being done in schools to inspire and embed reading to become part the culture, should be given more space to be celebrated and shared to foster collaboration and best practice.

World Book Day has rolled around again, and as ever, it has prompted reflection. I have discovered the joy that is graphic novels. Something I confess I have previously been quite dismissive of. I was wrong – and I am seeking to rectify this oversight in our curriculum.

Last year, I was disappointed to see so much airtime being allocated to the negativity surrounding World Book Day. It struck me as odd there were comments concerning the irrelevancy of dressing up as a book character to inspire our young people to read. Of course that isn't the singular magic ticket. If all a school is doing throughout the year is asking the children to dress up as a character, without spending that year introducing them to the never-ending, ever-expanding catalogue of characters at their disposal, of course they will be confused. Of course, you won't find them suddenly interested in 'War and Peace.' That's not what World Book Day was created for.

The statistics remain sobering. In 2025, just 32.7% of young people report reading for pleasure – the lowest figure in two decades. Those numbers matter. But numbers alone will not solve the problem. Practice will. As educational practitioners, we must ensure we are drip feeding a love of reading into our curriculum. And this is hard – where do we find the time? Where do we locate resources? Age-appropriate ideas?

This is where this space comes into its own. I would love this page to be dedicated airtime not to dwelling on dwindling statistics, but to celebrating the excellent and efficient practices we are executing in our school settings, so others can read and magpie these ideas. Because it is happening, and it is working – but we need to collaborate and lift the words off the page and infuse our classrooms with them. The solution lies less in lamenting decline and more in amplifying success.

I say this because it was here, in this magazine, that I read a fantastic article by Jenny Griffiths, an outstanding librarian at a primary school in London. She wrote about her modest-sized library and the different things she was doing to promote a love of reading in her school. None of it required an inflated budget. None of it was complicated. But it was thoughtful. It was consistent. And it was working. I rang her school office and asked if she would meet me. Very kindly, she agreed, and I travelled to her storybook school and spent the day learning from her. I caught the train home positively fizzing. I'd seen what she had done with her space, and I wanted to achieve that with mine.

Since then, I have implemented my own versions at my school. We have library prefects who help with the running of book events and library sessions, supporting our librarian. We run a book club

for KS2 in which we simply read. And chat. And gasp at plot twists (you must have space for gasping at a book club!) I try to choose books that are newly released, old and slightly obscure, or written by authors with a rich back catalogue – so if they love it, they have somewhere to go next. I recently read 'The Bogwoppit' by Ursula Moray-Williams with a group of Year 3 and 4 pupils which was an absolute joy.

We have book clinics where the girls can come if they have a reading issue; maybe they have finished the best series of their lives and don't know where to go next. Maybe they have had a "bad run" of books that weren't a good fit and don't know what might suit them better. We "diagnose" book issues and find them alternatives to help them get stuck in. I have found that simply creating space in the classroom for children to discuss books is one of the greatest (and easiest!) tools. It takes no planning, no resources. Just an interest and a willingness to listen to them.

My class know I read, and so they know I am interested in their books. It even extends to children I have not yet taught. One of my favourite glimmers in a day is when a child I don't know very well stops me in the corridor to



Brogan Tuxford

tell me what they are reading. Why it is good. What time they secretly stayed up to finish it. Another perfect teaching moment is arriving to find a book on your desk with a note: "Please read this too, so I can talk to someone about it." I too was once a little girl who desperately wanted to discuss books with the world.

As CS Lewis once wrote: "We read to know we are not alone." Perhaps that is the point. World Book Day was never about costumes alone. It was about connection – between child and story, and between reader and reader. If we can create classrooms where children feel there is someone ready to talk about the book they have just finished at 9:47pm under the duvet, then we are doing the work.

So, this year, let us use this space to share what works. Not because the statistics are frightening – but because the stories are worth fighting for. Share your practice – however modest it may seem – so that together we can build classrooms where reading is not an initiative, but a culture.



Share your stories and ideas with us.

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## Trio of authors

As part of World Book Day celebrations, Ballard School, Hampshire, has welcomed children's novelist Maz Evans, explorer Benedict Allan, and illustrator and author Simon Chadwick.

Across World Book Day week, Maz Evans, who penned 'Who Let the Gods Out?' as well as the 'Vi Spy' and 'Scarlett Fife' series, dropped in to meet children in Years 3 to 6, giving a presentation and taking the hot seat for a question-and-answer session.

Simon Chadwick, children's author, illustrator and creator of over 30 books, also returned for his third visit to the school, spending time reading to children from Nursery to Year 2, and leading creative workshops.

Then on World Book Day itself, explorer, writer, and broadcaster Benedict Allen was at the school all day meeting children and serving as guest judge for Ballard's annual book character costume parade, before giving a talk to all scholars and members of Ballard's Laureate Programme in Years 7 to 9.

Ballard School Headmaster Andrew McCleave said: "World Book Day is about far more than costumes – it is about nurturing a genuine, lifelong love of reading which is so important for our children and young people.

"We are delighted to welcome three such inspirational individuals. Whether it is creating unforgettable fictional worlds, bringing ideas to life through illustrations, or chronicling travels to the most remote corners of the globe, each one demonstrates the power of the imagination, and the written word."

The author visits formed part of a wider World Book Day programme, with the school's two librarians putting together a full week of activities each year, including "Booky Breakfasts", creative workshops as well as the annual costume parade. This event sees pupils from Kindergarten to Year 7 dress up and "walk" in character, before answering questions from judges about their chosen story and why they love it – putting reading at the heart of the fun.



## Reading for pleasure

Head of Pre-Prep at The Downs Malvern, Worcestershire, Emily Willetts has suggested that schools need to use the annual World Book Day event to shift the focus back to reading.

In a release she said: "Confidence is one of the most powerful outcomes of reading for pleasure. At The Downs Malvern, we see how children who read widely develop the confidence to be curious, the confidence to collaborate with others, and the confidence to be ambitious in their learning. Books also play a vital role in helping children understand the world beyond their own experiences. Reading introduces new perspectives, which helps to nurture empathy and emotional awareness.

"Reading for pleasure strengthens learning in every subject, it expands vocabulary, fuels imagination, sparks creativity, and opens doors to new ideas, people, and places.

"Whether through fiction, fantasy, biography, or non-fiction, books

help children explore, question, and discover.

"World Book Day has enormous value but we have to be honest, in many places it risks becoming more about fancy dress than fostering a genuine love of reading.

"Dressing up is fun, but it cannot be the main event when national literacy data is flashing red.

"If we reduce books to a once-a-year celebration, we risk trivialising something that is fundamental to children's futures."

At The Downs Malvern, World Book Day activities this year were designed to reinforce reading engagement, with Pre-Prep pupils "disguised" as favourite book characters using small imaginative elements rather than full costumes. Prep pupils also took part in a door-decorating initiative and the school's first House Reading Competition. Pupils were also invited to participate in the Malvern College family of schools' literary competition for Years 3 to 13.

Pictured: Reception pupil reading



Pictured: Simon Chadwick on a visit to Ballard School

## New Reading Room

Author, Caryl Lewis, has officially opened a reading room at Ellesmere College, Shropshire.

Caryl Lewis, who also writes under the name CM Lewis, spoke to Key Stage Two pupils at Ellesmere College and cut the ribbon on the newly created Lower School Reading Room.

She also took time to speak to pupils with a talk about her writing life and her latest fantasy novel, 'Quill and the Last Generation', during her visit.

Key Stage Two Teacher, Simon Fisher said: "We were delighted

to welcome Caryl to our school. She taught our students all about Welsh mythology and the creatures that inspired her latest novel.

"This visit gave pupils the opportunity to meet a writer whose work celebrates bravery, imagination and finding your own voice, themes that resonate strongly with the ethos of our new reading space.

"The room is designed to be a calm, welcoming, and child-centred space, created to encourage pupils to read for enjoyment, curiosity, and escape. We wanted to create a space that

makes children want to read, somewhere that feels inviting, comfortable, and quietly exciting.

"Reading for pleasure is absolutely vital; it builds imagination, empathy, and confidence. This room isn't about reading because you have to, it's about reading because you want to."

The Reading Room has had new furnishings, décor, and books added to create the desired space. It forms part of a wider commitment to nurturing a strong reading culture across Key Stage Two.



Pictured: Author CM Lewis with pupils

# Futureproofing schools: A head-to-head view

With more independent schools merging to secure their long-term futures, in an interview, Head at Abbot's Hill School, Hertfordshire, Sharon Schanschieff, Head at Westbrook Hay School in Hertfordshire, Mark Brain alongside Antony Spencer, CEO of the Mill Hill Education Group, discuss the collaboration between their schools and why more establishments are opting for this route.

**Q:** Why do you think so many independent schools are merging at the moment and what do you believe are the contributing factors?

**Antony:** There are a combination of factors. Certainly, the financial imperatives such as the imposition of VAT on independent schools, and the need to secure longer term stability, form part of the wider narrative – although this is the more negative side of the lean toward mergers. On the flipside, there are many other reasons schools are considering this route alongside the multiple benefits of collaboration – something the state sector, in particular, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), have been very good at for many years.

**Sharon:** I wholeheartedly agree with Antony. Independent schools have perhaps not been as forthcoming in terms of building collaborative relationships with their competitors in previous years. For us, joining the Mill Hill Education Group strengthens our ability to thrive in what is a changing and challenging educational landscape. It ensures we can continue to deliver a high-quality education while benefiting from the support, resources, and expertise of a larger network, whether that is support around regulatory pressures or shared best practice, being part of a wider family of schools offers tangible benefits.

**Mark:** For me, stability and opportunity seem to be the most obvious triggers for the trend around group mergers. Schools are aware that they need to work smarter and futureproof their survival during what have been turbulent times for the sector. From falling birth rates to rising pressure around justification of fees, schools need to protect the quality of the education they deliver to their pupils.

**Antony:** I also think it is important to distinguish the difference between a charity merger which

seeks to collaborate in a bid to meet certain charitable objectives, versus a profit-led merger which is more financially driven.

**Q:** Sharon and Mark – what do you see at the main benefits for your schools of becoming part of a bigger group?

**Sharon:** Being part of a wider family of schools offers substantial benefits such as shared best practice and being able to reach out via cross-school collaboration, as well as the obvious economies of scale. It's a step forward that allows us to grow while staying true to who we are. We can still stand as an individual school, but if we are looking for specific expertise or additional resource for instance, we have access to a wider pool of experience within a supportive and nurturing environment.

**Mark:** For me, a key benefit is the camaraderie and support from fellow heads within the group. Being a school head can be a lonely place at times and being able to pick up the phone and speak with another likeminded head is invaluable. Likewise, having access to meaningful collaborations across departments from safeguarding and medical support to pastoral care and communications, can have a real impact day to day.

**Antony:** From a group perspective, the benefits of a shared culture are really valuable. This allows effective collaboration across all our schools, across a diverse pupil roll; the impact can be difficult to quantify, but we are already seeing improvements in the quality of education we are able to provide to our pupils.

**Q:** There has been speculation from the sector that schools risk losing their own identity and personalities if they merge with other schools – what is your view on this?

**Mark:** Finding the right match is important in terms of retaining your identity as a school. The question

of ethos, purpose, and core values are high on the agenda when considering any kind of collaborative partnership. Day to day from the child's perspective, school doesn't look any different. The uniform is the same etc., but every now and then there will be something like a large-scale group sports event or creative arts experience that would have only been possible because of the merger.

**Sharon:** I absolutely agree. It has to be the right fit for your school. Mill Hill places its students at the heart of everything it does and that resonates very much with our own school ethos. Importantly for us, our identity and values remain unchanged, we are still very much "Abbot's Hill School", but it is great to be able to share ideas and aspirations and to be able to visit each other's schools too.

**Q:** How do these kinds of mergers benefit the pupils and their families?

**Sharon:** Having access to wider academic partnerships for teaching is a key benefit for our pupils as is having an enhanced range of co-curricular activities providing our children with even more opportunities for new experiences than ever before.

**Mark:** Peace of mind for parents is probably one of the main benefits too. Having the support of a bigger organisation behind you provides the stability needed to thrive and grow. For prospective parents who are looking to move their child from nursery into a school of choice, they want reassurance that the school will still exist long term. For example, a lot of smaller schools are not able to justify something like a ski trip to the Alps, while jointly as a group, this is something that is far more achievable, and something that all pupils will benefit from.

**Q:** Finally, since you merged, what has been the biggest positive for you?



Sharon Schanschieff



Mark Brain



Antony Spencer

**Sharon:** Collaboration and stability. Having knowledgeable people around me that I can speak to at any time for insight or even just for a second opinion, has been amazing.

**Mark:** Being part of a group like this has strengthened our school without changing who we are at the heart.

**Antony:** From a group perspective, it's fantastic to be part of a genuine two-way relationship whereby we can learn from and support each other. Finally, to counteract some of the negativity surrounding school mergers I would add some food for thought – no school is truly independent. All schools have limitations and red tape to navigate regardless of whether they stand alone or as a larger collaborative group. From my perspective, I would say that by merging with the right partners who share the same ethos and guiding principles, schools aren't really giving up much, but united as a group, they potentially stand to gain a great deal from the experience.



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# Supporting neurodiversity in co-curricular activities

How can neurodiverse children be best supported, especially when thinking about co-curricular activities and making participation as accessible as possible? Head of Biology at Bradfield College, Berkshire, Charlotte Rhodes, who has an interest in neurodiversity, recently undertook a project focusing on just that. Here she shares some of her findings and offers some practical suggestions.



Co-curricular life plays a significant role in shaping pupils' sense of belonging, identity, and confidence. Classrooms continue to adapt as our understanding of neurodiversity grows, but we need to remember that profiles exist outside the classroom too. While co-curricular spaces can be extremely rewarding, they are potentially less regulated, and inclusion can become more fragile. Small, realistic adjustments can make a huge difference. As one Sixth Form footballer put it: "Don't ask me to complete a drill first, when I watch others, I then understand."

With a long-standing interest in neurodiversity, and through my work alongside the SEN department at Bradfield College, I took on a project to look at how we might best support neurodiverse pupils in co-curricular activities. This grew from a desire to better support both staff and pupils, and I presented my findings to colleagues in an INSET session. While research formed a key part of the project, my insights were shaped just as much by

staff and pupil voice. In a school where co-curricular participation plays a significant role in pastoral development and wellbeing, even small adjustments can have a disproportionate impact. The aim was not to provide a definitive set of answers, but to start conversations and offer practical, reasonable adjustments that make participation more accessible for everyone.

Co-curricular spaces are different to the classroom – there are unstructured social demands, changing equipment requirements, heightened sensory input, shifting expectations, and teamwork. Anyone can find these situations challenging and overstimulating, but for people with neurodiversity, they tend to be amplified. The strategies I shared work for all, providing a fully inclusive environment. While challenges certainly exist, many neurodivergent pupils also find co-curricular activities deeply rewarding and an essential outlet.

What might this look like in practice? Firstly, we need to recognise that, although some pupils may share similar neurodivergent profiles, these are experienced very differently by individuals. This makes it particularly important to resist stereotyping and to focus instead on understanding the needs of the pupil in front of us. This can also make the thought of meeting everyone's needs overwhelming for us as staff, but there are some easy wins. Taking time to talk to pupils and get to know them as individuals, including the areas of a session they find difficult, is invaluable. Offering regular opportunities for questions and feedback helps to establish a safe space in which pupils feel able to engage and participate. And patience. Pupils with ADHD may forget equipment or instructions – this is not being wilfully difficult but often reflects differences in executive functioning. A calm, understanding response can make a significant difference. Where possible, providing spare equipment can help remove unnecessary barriers to participation. Punitive responses such as "running laps" for lapses risk triggering dysregulated behaviour, which can easily be mistaken for avoidance or lack of effort or rudeness. Make sure pupils are supportive of each other in group situations and that we provide feedback positively. The pupil may have missed a catch in cricket for an important wicket, but being criticised by teammates and coaches can have a long-lasting impact, especially those that suffer with rejection sensitivity dysphoria – a real, overwhelming emotional pain that can have far reaching and long-lasting effects. We wouldn't allow this in the classroom. And those with sensory sensitivities, let them have a time out if

overwhelmed, or wear different kit. In drama and music, give the pupils the lines or music before auditions and rehearsals.

We must remember we are teachers first, before being a sports coach, a stage director, or an orchestra conductor. The wellbeing of pupils must come first. And if we aim to be kind, patient, understanding, and inclusive, then we are doing the right thing, and the best we can.

This work reflects wider thinking around neurodiversity that emphasises a strengths-based approach and the importance of adapting environments rather than pupils. Research into belonging and participation highlights the value of clear expectations, trusted relationships, and opportunities for autonomy. Neurodiversity is recognised as a disability under the Equality Act, and with that comes a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments. Approaching these adjustments as part of inclusive practice, rather than as exceptions to the rule, helps them to become part of everyday provision.

Immediately after my presentation, which featured a fantastic pupil-led pupil-voice video, we split into discussion groups to allow peer conversation to flow, to share what we already do well, to get advice on challenging situations, and occasionally, to admit where we've got it wrong in the past.

This continues to be an ongoing conversation, as with all things in education, it will never be completed. But we are being more open with each other and with the pupils, and we are listening and learning too. And the neurodiverse individuals within our community are growing in confidence, and their unique talents being celebrated.

## MBE for Outstanding Services to Education

Haberdashers' Monmouth School Head, Melvyn Roffe, has been awarded an MBE at an investiture ceremony at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, by HRH The Princess Royal.

The honour recognises Melvyn's contribution to education and

his long-standing commitment to strengthening the relationship between schools and their communities.

Melvyn's educational journey began in Monmouth, where he held early leadership positions at the former Monmouth School for Boys between 1993 and 2001. Over the following two decades, he went on to lead independent schools across the UK and became one of the few individuals elected to chair both the Boarding Schools' Association and HMC – The Head's Conference.

He returned to lead Haberdashers' Monmouth School, in 2025.



Pictured: Melvyn Roffe MBE with his wife Photo credit: Haberdashers' Monmouth School



# Navigating the new financial reality: How modular eco-buildings solve the CapEx conundrum

Canteen with commercial kitchen at Barfield Prep

Bursars are fighting a war on two fronts: aggressively defending the bottom line against rising costs and taxes, while investing enough in their estates to ensure their school remains an attractive, premium choice.

For Independent Schools navigating the current economic friction, the traditional approach to estate management, saving up a multimillion-pound war chest for years to fund a single, disruptive traditional build, is increasingly unviable. Capital is too precious, and the need to remain competitive is too urgent.

Consequently, many independent schools are turning to net-zero modular buildings from TG Escapes to bypass capital expenditure (CapEx) freezes and unlock new revenue.

## Solving the CapEx freeze: shifting to OpEx

When cash reserves must be protected to weather the VAT storm, bursars need ways to upgrade without emptying the bank. TG Escapes offers a distinct funding advantage:

- **Lease financing:** Rather than requiring massive upfront CapEx, these buildings can be procured through lease financing, moving costs to the operational expenditure budget. Through education finance partnerships, costs are spread predictably. For example, a pre-designed 64-place Inclusive Learning Hub, ideal for supporting neurodiverse

students, can be leased from £9k (excl. VAT) per student per annum over a 10-year term.

- **Ownership and longevity:** Schools assume responsibility for the building, designed for a 50-year lifespan, from day one without being locked into rigid maintenance contracts.
  - **Budget certainty:** Traditional builds are notorious for financial creep. Because TG Escapes buildings are manufactured off site, costs are fixed early, providing absolute budget certainty.
  - **Reduced running costs:** True net-zero operational buildings utilise air source heat pumps and renewable energy. Highly insulated, fabric-first designs protect schools against volatile energy markets, significantly lowering utility bills.
- Minimising disruption to the premium experience**  
Turning a campus into a muddy building site for two years damages the premium experience. TG Escapes buildings are completed in a fraction of the time, typically between 16 and 50 weeks onsite. Because the bulk of manufacturing happens off site, the building arrives in manageable deliveries.



Double Storey English Department at the entrance of Ratcliffe College

This eliminates constant drilling, dust, and heavy plant traffic that disrupts lessons and prospective parent tours.

## Boosting revenue streams

A new building must act as a commercial asset. The bespoke, biophilic designs of TG Escapes buildings make them highly marketable:

- **Holiday lettings:** Standalone eco-buildings are attractive to external organisations and can be utilised without heating main buildings.
- **Expanding early years provision:** Early Years is a profitable segment and vital feeder for prep schools. A modular nursery allows schools to quickly increase capacity and capture local market share.
- **Community partnerships:** Modular sports pavilions or performing arts studios can be rented to local clubs during evenings and weekends, generating income while keeping heritage buildings secure.

## The “third teacher” and market appeal

Beyond the spreadsheet, the physical environment must help sell the school. TG Escapes buildings are designed around Biophilia. Utilising natural materials and abundant natural light, these spaces are proven to lower cortisol levels, acting as the “Third Teacher”. The indoor/outdoor flow is designed with biodiversity in mind, leading to improved behaviour, enhanced educational outcomes, and better staff retention. A stunning, timber-clad eco-building makes a powerful statement of modernity and wellbeing.



Early Years provision at Collegiate School

For more information about leasing modular buildings for classrooms, dining halls, performing arts studios, or wellbeing hubs, call TG Escapes on 0800 917 7726 or email: [Matt@tgescapes.co.uk](mailto:Matt@tgescapes.co.uk). Visit: [www.tgescapes.co.uk](http://www.tgescapes.co.uk)

# The protective power of belonging in schools

Schools are increasingly responding to complex challenges around pupil wellbeing, safeguarding, engagement, attendance, and vulnerability. While these are often addressed through separate systems and interventions, research, and practice point to a shared protective factor – a strong sense of belonging to a trusted community. Senior School Head of Wellbeing & Personal Development, Solihull School, West Midlands, Louise Rooney, MBACP, MCCT, examines how when pupils experience belonging in a deep and sustained way, it can underpin both wellbeing and safety and reduces the likelihood of vulnerability going unnoticed.



Louise Rooney

When parents choose a school, they naturally think about academic outcomes, opportunities, and future pathways. The same is true at Solihull School, and our school community both past, present, and future knows that we value all these deeply. But underpinning everything we do is something quieter, and arguably at least equally important: a strong sense of belonging. Now, we know that children belong to their families, of course they do! But we also know that they will have additional spaces, relationships, and environments where they will experience this feeling as they move through life.

While belonging may feel like a contemporary focus in educational conversations, it is far from a passing buzzword. The importance of connection, community, and feeling valued has long been recognised across psychology, education, and human development, with a rich body of writing exploring its role in shaping wellbeing and resilience. From early work on attachment and social bonds to more recent reflections on inclusion and identity, the message has remained consistent: the need to belong is a fundamental part of being human. What may be shifting now is not the idea itself, but our collective willingness to name it, prioritise it, and recognise its influence on how young people experience safety, learning, and growth.

Belonging is not simply about fitting in or feeling comfortable. It is about being known, valued, and cared for as an individual – especially during the moments

when life feels challenging. For young people, school is often the most stable and consistent community they experience. When a pupil truly feels they belong, it becomes a powerful foundation for learning, wellbeing, and personal growth.

At the same time, we recognise that belonging carries responsibility. Young people's brains are still developing, and they are especially sensitive to peer approval, group identity, and social reward. As Rutger Bregman observes in 'Humankind': "We are not selfish by nature, but profoundly social – shaped by the groups we belong to." Belonging can be a force for good, but without guidance it can also pull young people towards unhelpful behaviours, unhealthy conformity, or risky choices in the pursuit of acceptance. For example, the young person that is pulled into being criminally exploited, or connecting with extreme ideologies, or being pressured into engaging in seemingly cool but risky behaviour.

This is why belonging at Solihull School is not left to chance.

I was privileged to be part of a multi-agency project in my role as trauma counsellor and ISVA, exploring patterns of vulnerability across public services, specifically founded on statistics that showed that up to 80% of police demand was not crime-driven but vulnerability-driven. An important learning emerged: many moments of crisis were not rooted in single incidents, but in a quieter, deeper absence of belonging, whether that be from the perspective of a victim or someone causing harm. Patterns of repeated demand were often linked less

to deliberate wrongdoing and more to relational disconnection. As part of the team involved in developing and delivering the foundational training that followed, we worked to translate this insight into everyday practice by encouraging professionals to look beyond behaviour and towards context. This resonates strongly with social connectedness theory, which reminds us that belonging is not a luxury, but a protective factor in human wellbeing. This stayed with me and has influenced much of the work we do in our PSHE/RSHE/Citizenship education at Solihull – for me young people having awareness of vulnerability turns protection into prevention.

For educators, the message is both simple and profound: where belonging is missing, vulnerability can grow. Seen through this lens, behaviour, distress, or withdrawal may not simply be challenges to manage, but signals of disconnection – and opportunities for schools to provide the relational safety that helps young people feel seen, valued and held in community.

It is built through strong relationships with adults who know our pupils well and help them think critically about who they are becoming, not just how they fit in. Pupils should be known by name, character, and story. Staff notice not only achievement, but absence, not only success, but change. This visibility matters. Young people who feel seen are more likely to ask for help, to reflect on their choices, and to recover when things do not go as planned.

Belonging also gives pupils permission to be themselves.

Childhood and adolescence are periods of exploration – of identity, confidence, and purpose. Some pupils might arrive with a strong sense of who they are; others are still finding their feet. Our aim is to provide a community where pupils feel safe enough to grow, make mistakes, learn from them, and try again, knowing that their place in the school is secure.

Importantly, belonging at Solihull School is not conditional on results, popularity, or performance. It exists in classrooms and corridors, on sports fields and stages, in shared traditions and everyday conversations. It is reinforced by clear boundaries, consistent expectations, and a culture that holds pupils accountable while never withdrawing care or connection.

This sense of belonging does not end when pupils leave our gates. Many former pupils remain closely connected to the school, returning for events, seeking advice, or simply staying in touch. That continued relationship reflects something enduring: Solihull School is not just a place pupils attend, but a community they carry with them.

We believe that when young people know they belong – and are guided to belong well – they are better equipped to flourish academically, emotionally, and socially. Belonging does not remove challenge, but it provides the support, direction and moral compass that allows pupils to meet it with confidence, resilience, and purpose.

## Cycling fundraiser

An 11-strong team from Dollar Academy, Clackmannanshire, is aiming to raise £50k for Motor Neurone Disease research through the My Name's 5 Doddie Foundation by undertaking the Doddie's Triple Crown 2026 challenge, an 800-mile cycle from Melrose to Dublin over just four days.

Alongside four pupils and the Rector, the team brings together the wider school community – including staff, a governor, parents,



Pictured: Team members Ian Munro (Rector), Sean McFarlane (Head of Triathlon), and pupils Jessica Evans, Lucy Sweeney, Alexander Smith, and Harry McCleod

and former pupils – all working in relay to cover the full route, mile by mile.

Rector at Dollar Academy, Ian Munro, said: "The My Name's 5 Doddie Foundation holds a very special place in our hearts at Dollar Academy, particularly following the diagnosis of MND in some of our former pupils. Last year, we were delighted to host an overnight stop for Doddie's Grand Tour. This year, we've decided simply hosting was not quite adventurous enough – so we're taking on the full 800 miles ourselves!

"We have set ourselves an ambitious fundraising target of £50,000, with every pound raised going directly towards vital MND research. There will be a fair amount of Lycra, a good deal of determination, and no doubt some sore legs along the way but it's all for a cause that truly matters."



## Record breaking weekend

Bryanston School, Dorset's, A2 (Upper Sixth) Charities Weekend has raised a record £91,000 this year, supporting a number of charities both in the UK and overseas.

The weekend was organised by the A2 charity team and prefects, with events running across several days and involving pupils from across the school.

The programme included a dance show, featuring pupils from Years 7-13 and organised by Nova Dance Company, Bryanston's elite senior dance group; a girls versus boys' hockey match; a dog show; and a fashion show. There was also a pupil art exhibition, including a dome installation, along with live music and tea to round off the afternoon.

Pictured: The Charities Weekend Dance Show

Elsewhere, pupils also organised several other fundraising initiatives, including Valentine's roses, a clothes stall and haircutting station which raised over £300, and a performance of A3 pupil, Tuta H's play about refugees. Entry to the dance show and the £3 per pupil contribution also added to the total.

The largest portion of the fundraising came through JustGiving donations and the silent auction, which together raised £86,000.

The charities supported this year were MS Trust, Little Princess Trust, Child Action Lanka, Ayati, UNHCR, Milgis Trust, and Child of Hope.

Advertorial Feature

# Keeping independent schools safe under Martyn's Law

Under Martyn's Law, or the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, operators of public events are required to adopt standardised anti-terrorism safety practices. [Martyn's Law for schools](#) will require senior leaders to reassess and, potentially, enhance existing safety plans.

Most events held at independent schools will fall under the Standard Tier of Martyn's Law, a new set of public safety requirements for events attended by between 200 and 799 persons.

To achieve compliance, administrators and senior leaders will need to provide evidence that they've appointed a responsible person to oversee the event, developed evacuation and lockdown plans, and provided terrorism awareness training to staff.

For schools in particular, response plans must be created in accordance with current mandatory and statutory safeguarding rules such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) (KCSIE) guidance. School leaders will be required to strike a balance between deploying robust

security protocols and preventing children from feeling distressed, especially in early years settings on independent school sites.

Keeping independent schools safe under Martyn's Law will involve using smart, discreet access control, and observational measures to comply with new standards while maintaining a welcoming environment for children and their families. These measures must be applied to all aspects of each event, from drop-off and guest check-in to logistics and risk management.

To achieve this, leaders should approach compliance with Martyn's Law, the EYFS and KCSIE as a combined objective, factoring all requirements into a unified, coherent school security plan.

In practice, an integrated security solution spanning access control, communications, visitor

management, and video security technologies can help school leaders deter, detect, and respond to safety risks discreetly and effectively. Unknown persons can be blocked from the site, guests can be safely checked in, and access events can be viewed remotely at all times, with AI-enabled cameras that automatically identify suspicious events and trigger live responses.

With support from custom, integrated [Avigilon school security](#)



[solutions](#), independent schools can maintain compliance with Martyn's Law and help school children enjoy safe public events.



# Combined Cadet Force (CCF): Forging confidence, character, and commando spirit

Chemistry teacher and Contingent Commander of the Royal Marines CCF at Dame Allan's Schools, Tyne and Wear, Owain Jones, takes a look at how being a part of a CCF is more about building character than combat, and shares how the use of fieldcraft, navigation, and team challenges can instil resilience, confidence and leadership in pupils.

I'm a chemistry teacher by trade, that's my day job and my first love, but I've always been happiest outdoors – walking, climbing, canoeing, and camping. I grew up in a household where, if the weather was bad, you still put your boots on and went out. You just cracked on.

Looking back, that mindset is exactly what I try to build in our cadets now.

I didn't set out to lead the Royal Marines Combined Cadet Force. I helped with Duke of Edinburgh, then with bushcraft and navigation, and then with supporting fieldcraft sessions. The more time I spent with the cadets, the more I realised this wasn't really just about uniforms or weapons systems at all. It was about something much bigger: self-reliance, teamwork, and learning to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

That's what convinced me to step forward, firstly as a Cadet Force Adult Volunteer (CFAV) then as the Contingent Commander.

We're one of only a small number of schools nationally with a Royal Marines-affiliated section. The Royal Marines ethos is very clear: excellence, integrity, self-discipline, and humility, underpinned by

the Commando spirit of courage, determination and cheerfulness when things are hard.

Those values translate surprisingly well into a school environment.

Our cadets join in Year 9 for a two-year programme. On paper, it covers fieldcraft, navigation, leadership, communication and looking after yourself and your kit. In reality, it's about much simpler things.

- Can you organise yourself?
- Can you support the person next to you?
- Can you keep going when you're tired, cold, or fed up?

All with the single goal of getting the job done. Whatever the job may be.

Those are life skills, not just military ones.

A typical Tuesday parade night might start with an inspection. Not because we're obsessed with shiny boots, but because presentation shows pride and attention to detail. Then we might run navigation training on the local moor, practise section tasks, or work through first aid and leadership exercises. When the nights are lighter, we're outside as much as possible. We're lucky in Newcastle to have green space close to the school, and

being able to walk out and train in the real environment makes a huge difference. You can't learn navigation properly from a classroom slide.

One of my guiding principles is that if you're going to do something, do it properly. So we give the cadets real responsibility. Older pupils plan and deliver lessons. They lead teams. They mentor younger recruits. We step back and guide rather than micromanage. Our job is to create the right environment for them to succeed. No different from working in a school, really.

That's when the growth happens.

I've watched very quiet Year 9s who barely spoke in September end up confidently briefing a group of 20, aged between Year 9 and 13, by the end of Year 10. I've seen pupils who struggled with organisation become the ones everyone relies on because their kit is squared away, they're early, and they take responsibility for others.

Over time, the discipline and expectations kick in, standards rise and presentation improves. Even their school uniform becomes as sharp as their cadet one. The transformation isn't about militarising young people; it's about maturity and pride.

And what parents often notice first is confidence.

Bring a young person into cadets, and their confidence soars. They learn that they can cope. They learn that other people depend on them. They learn that if they hit a low point, someone puts an arm on their shoulder and says, "come on – we've got this," in a supportive way. That sense of shared identity is powerful.

There are also opportunities many families don't realise exist. Because we're affiliated to the



Royal Marines, our cadets can access Ministry of Defence courses – sailing, powerboating, first aid, leadership training – often for little more than a nominal fee. They leave with proper qualifications and experiences they simply wouldn't get elsewhere.

And yes, there's challenge and competition too, but life can be challenging and competitive. Last year, we took a team to the Sir Steuart Pringle Trophy at the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines, and came home with our best result to date. Seeing the cadets standing alongside some of the biggest names in the cadet world and finishing on the podium was a proud moment – not because of the silverware, but because of the teamwork and resilience the cadets showed over two tough days.

For me, that sums up what a modern CCF should be in the independent sector.

It's not about just recruitment, and it's not about playing soldiers, though we do support those with military aspirations. It's about character education in its most practical form.

Put young people in the outdoors. Challenge them. Give them the tools and the responsibility. Let them be a bit cold and a bit tired. Show them they can not only cope but thrive – and that they can help others cope and thrive too.

If this kind of opportunity had existed at my own school, I'd have jumped at it.

Honestly, you'd be mad not to offer it.



Pictured: CCF Cadets from Dame Allan's Schools

# Biology

"Biology is the most powerful technology ever created. DNA is software, proteins are hardware, cells are factories."  
*Arvind Gupta*

**Cells & Microscopy**  
What makes something alive?  
Cells are the building blocks of life.  
Cells are the smallest units of life that can perform all the functions of life.

**Genetics**  
No two humans (except identical twins) have the same DNA.  
A segment of DNA that carries the instructions for making a specific protein is called a gene.  
How many species do you think exist on Earth?  
Homeostasis keeps conditions stable.

**Human Biology**  
The heart beats 100,000 times a day.  
Why are mangroves vital to UAE coastlines?  
Ecosystems are balanced networks.  
Biodiversity = stability.  
Is biodiversity more important than population size?  
How do desert organisms survive extreme heat?

**Ecology & Environment**  
Human actions impact global systems.

**Other elements:**  
Unicellular life  
Mitosis & meiosis  
Mitochondria - powerhouses of the cell  
How does one cell become a human being?  
Camel  
Giraffe  
DNA helix  
Portrait of Nikola Tesla  
Quote: "There is no subject more captivating, more worthy of study, than nature." - Nikola Tesla

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## Welcome to the family

Bickley Park School, Bromley, has joined The Sevenoaks Family of Schools. The Sevenoaks Family of Schools is already made up of Sevenoaks School and Solefield School, which are also both in Kent.

The collaboration has been designed to offer families a broader, more cohesive, and resilient approach to independent schooling.

Each school will retain its own distinct individual identity and Leadership Team.

Headmaster of Bickley Park, Tom Quilter, said: "I am delighted that through joining The Sevenoaks Family of Schools, Bickley Park can build on our longstanding relationship with Sevenoaks School.

"As Bickley Park continues to go

Pictured: Jesse Elzinga and Tom Quilter

from strength to strength following our successful co-educational announcement in 2024, this next phase opens up exciting opportunities for collaboration and development."

Head of Sevenoaks School, Jesse Elzinga, said: "We are delighted to welcome Bickley Park School into the Sevenoaks Family of Schools.

"We share a clear vision for what exceptional education looks like, and by working together we can offer the highest standard of teaching and learning while maintaining the flexibility, individuality and enhanced opportunities that benefit every child. We look forward to a strong and positive future together."

## Planning for the future

Claires Court School, Berkshire, has announced that it has joined the Licensed Trade Charity (LTC), within the LTC Education Group (LTCEG), the LTC's education arm, a charitable family of schools.

The move, which comes after long-term planning by the school owners who are preparing for retirement, is said to represent a natural next step in a long-standing relationship between Claives Court and LVS Ascot, one of the LTC Education Group Schools.

Claives Court will retain its name, identity, ethos, and day-to-day operation, teaching, learning, pastoral care, safeguarding arrangements, and curriculum, ensuring continuity for pupils and families.

The school will also continue to be led by its existing management team, with co-owner of Claives Court, James Wilding, remaining Principal for the foreseeable future in order to facilitate a comprehensive handover to Executive Principal, Christine

Pictured: Claives Court School

Cunniffe, who will work alongside to provide additional strategic support and connection into the wider charitable group.

Mr Wilding said: "This decision has been taken deliberately and from a position of strength. After many years as owners, my brother's and my priority have been to ensure that Claives Court's future is placed in the right hands, hands that understand education, value people, and are committed to long-term stewardship rather than short-term gain as we plan our retirement."



## Group announcements



Lomond School, Argyll and Bute, is to join the QED Schools Group. It is the first Scottish school and first International Baccalaureate (IB) school to join QED.

Principal of Lomond School, Claire Chisholm, said: "I am very pleased to announce that Lomond School is to join QED Schools Group.

"At Lomond, we pride ourselves on our strong community, exceptional teaching and the high level of care shown to every pupil and we were delighted with the outstanding feedback across all these areas following a recent three-day IB

Pictured: Lomond School pupils

Evaluation Visit. These findings show our school is in a very strong place when it comes to educating and empowering every one of our pupils as individuals. The security and platform QED Schools Group provides will enable us to build on that strength and pursue our development plans with confidence, stability and strong financial foundations."

"Life at Lomond School will continue as normal. I will remain as Principal, and the Senior Leadership Team will continue to run the school."



Warminster School, Wiltshire has today that it will also be joining the QED Schools Group.

Chair of Governors at Warminster School, Beverley Sunderland, said: "The Governors, along with the current Head, Matt Williams and the Executive Team, are unanimous in their belief that QED School Group is the ideal partner for Warminster's future. Following

Pictured: Warminster Prep pupils

our announcement last month that from September 2026, the Prep School will 'move over the road' to the Senior School campus bringing the whole community together on one site, this is our final update to provide long-term stability for the whole school community. Life at Warminster School will continue as normal, and the Executive Team will continue to run the school."



# Helping schools save: apetito launches new guide on delivering cost-effective school meals

The current turbulent financial situation for independent school sector appears to show no signs of abating, following several stormy years. The introduction of VAT on school fees in January 2025 led to an increasing number of families moving their children from independent schools into the state system.

According to Julie Robinson, CEO of the Independent Schools Council (ISC), this is a trend that is set to continue, stating:

“Pupil numbers have fallen by more than the government estimates already, and for the OBR’s forecast to hold, pupil numbers would have had to remain steady this year – early indications are that this is not the case and further decreases are expected<sup>1</sup>.”

The fall in pupil enrolment has undeniably resulted in substantial financial repercussions, the effects of which are already clearly emerging, with more than 100 independent schools closing down since the introduction of the VAT on fees policy was introduced<sup>2</sup>.

The removal of charitable business rates relief, rising inflation, and higher payroll costs has placed even more additional pressure on independent schools. These cost challenges are now stretching to the kitchen, as the combination

of rising food and staffing costs and shrinking budgets are having serious implications.

It is against this challenging backdrop that school meals provider, apetito, is launching a free guide packed full of useful information and guidance for schools on how to effectively manage and reduce the rising cost of school catering.

apetito’s guide, titled ‘Helping Schools Save: A Guide to Delivering Cost-Effective School Meals’, explores numerous aspects, including strategies for reviewing catering costs and how to tackle rising staffing costs and reduce meal costs.

The guide also examines how reducing food waste and increasing student engagement can have a real impact on the cost of catering and gives practical and actionable steps that schools can take in this area.

Rupert Weber, General Manager for Education at apetito, spoke on the importance of helping schools

to reduce the rising costs in the kitchen: “Anyone working in a school knows that kitchens are facing unprecedented challenges, and the last few years have been some of the most turbulent in recent memory. Rising food prices, increasing staffing costs, and additional financial pressures across the independent school sector mean that many catering teams are being asked to do more with less, all while maintaining the high standards that pupils deserve.

“Good nutrition is fundamental to a child’s ability to focus, learn and thrive in the classroom, so compromising on quality simply isn’t an option. That’s why we felt

it was essential to create this new guide, which aims to give schools clear, practical, and genuinely actionable steps they can take to control costs without reducing the standard of meals they serve. Whether it’s reassessing staffing structures, reducing food waste, streamlining menus, or improving operational efficiency, there are real opportunities for schools to protect both quality and budgets.

“Our aim is to empower school leaders and catering teams with the tools, insight, and confidence they need to deliver a high quality, cost effective meal service that makes a meaningful difference to pupils every single day.”

**Download your  
FREE Guide:**

<https://apetito.link/cost-effective-guide>



1. Independent Schools Council. (2026). *Pupil numbers: ‘Further decreases are expected’*. [online] Available at: <https://www.isc.co.uk/media-enquiries/news-press-releases-statements/pupil-numbers-further-decreases-are-expected-isc-ceo-warns>  
 2. Independent Schools Council. (2026). *VAT on fees ‘a bridge too far’ for many independent schools, ISC CEO warns*. [online] Available at: <https://www.isc.co.uk/media-enquiries/news-press-releases-statements/vat-on-fees-a-bridge-too-far-for-many-independent-schools-isc-ceo-warns>



# Field Studies Council announces plans to build nation of adventure learners

Leading outdoor education charity Field Studies Council has committed to building a nation of adventure learners with the roll-out of a new programme of school residential trips.

The +Adventure programme has already been launched at three flagship sites including the charity's headquarters at Preston Montford in Shropshire, Rhyd-y-Creiau in North Wales, and Castle Head in Cumbria with plans afoot to expand nationally in the coming months.

The new programme combines centre-specific outdoor activities such as canoeing, hill walking, ghyll scrambling, and climbing with intentional learning outcomes and personal development for all schoolchildren – building on the charity's 80-year heritage as a leader in environmental fieldwork and outdoor learning.

The announcement comes as the government looks to overhaul and modernise the education curriculum to prepare young people for a changing world, boost climate education, and

prioritise enrichment activities for all students.

It also follows publication of the government's first National Youth Strategy and a £500 million commitment to transform youth services including access to nature, adventure, and outdoor learning.

Matt Healey, adventure growth lead for the charity, said: "We are leading the way in bringing environmental learning, expert tutors, and adventure together and we're really excited to launch our +Adventure programme.

"As we expand the programme nationally to our centres, it's our ambition to build an entire nation of confident and resilient adventure learners.

"Students on our +Adventure residential will take part in exciting pursuits but at Field Studies Council we see these as more than outdoor activities. To



us, these are learning adventures – a vehicle for personal growth, environmental stewardship, and resilience.

"So, for example, when students give rock climbing a go, they're not just bravely scaling new heights, they're also discovering the geology that makes it safe to climb.

"This integrated adventure learning brings together fieldwork skills, nature connectedness, personal and

social skills, and a love of learning outdoors."

Joy Blizzard, communication and policy officer added: "The outdoor education sector has been changing fast and our new +Adventure programme directly answers the government's call for enrichment, life skills, practical work, climate education, personal growth, and access to nature for young people."

For more details visit [www.field-studies-council.org/adventure-residential-trips](http://www.field-studies-council.org/adventure-residential-trips)

# We encouraged Alfie to paddle in open water and he realised how brave he is

On our Adventure Residentials, specialist tutors support young people as they face unfamiliar environments and physical challenges that build courage, strengthen self-belief and help them realise what they're capable of.



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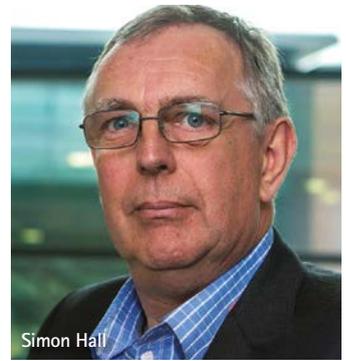


Field Studies  
Council

+Adventure

# When compliance culture becomes a security risk: a school's guide to Safeguarding Children's Privacy

In the third of a series on strengthening Governance, Risk and Culture of data protection in independent schools, Privacy specialist Simon Hall argues that the culture which has developed around "GDPR compliance" is so negative that it is now undermining information security itself, and that replacing it with a culture of "Safeguarding Children's Privacy" may be a school's most powerful defence against growing cyber threats.



Simon Hall

## The threat

Cyber-attacks against schools continue to rise. The UK Government's 2025 Cyber Security Breaches Survey found that education institutions are significantly more likely than businesses to suffer cyber-attacks and data breaches. Ransomware attacks against schools have become so common that the DfE issued guidance last year instructing schools not to pay ransom demands.

And there is an uncomfortable truth here.

Most breaches, including ransomware attacks, are not caused by sophisticated hacking. The National Cyber Security Centre reports that phishing is the most common entry point for ransomware attacks. In other words, attackers usually do not "break in" – they are invited in when staff click on a link or attachment.

Schools are under attack and your staff are your first – and sometimes only – line of defence. Whether that line holds depends, not on policies or completing Subject Access Requests (SARs) on time, but on culture.

## The problem with culture

Many bursars and teachers responsible for compliance activities find GDPR time-consuming, confusing and stressful.

For most staff, GDPR training is annual and jargon-filled, focusing on records of processing activities, legal bases, Subject Access Request time limits – matters with little relevance to their daily work. Engagement is therefore low.

Over time, GDPR has shifted in perception from protecting fundamental rights to being an administrative burden. Compliance becomes something done primarily to avoid complaints or regulatory scrutiny.

The result is a culture in which "GDPR" is associated with

something burdensome, complex and time-consuming.

Under constant pressure to "do more with less", attentiveness to data protection can easily slip.

Data Protection Impact Assessments become recycled documents rather than careful assessments of risks that can cause real harm to children, families, and staff. Small breaches or near misses may go unreported, meaning patterns are missed and lessons are not learned.

Schools know what they should do: keep records of processing activities up to date, carry out due diligence on suppliers, and assess higher-risk processing such as AI-enabled tools. Staff know they should double-check email addresses and be cautious with links and attachments.

So this is not a knowledge problem. It is a culture problem.

## From negative to positive

Now consider a different framing.

Why do your staff spend so much time recording and monitoring safeguarding concerns? Because it is the law?

Of course not. It is because protecting the children in your care is central to your vocation.

If leaders begin to speak not about "GDPR compliance" but about "Safeguarding Children's Privacy", something important shifts.

Protecting a child's personal information becomes inseparable from protecting the child.

A breach is no longer a "compliance issue". It is a "safeguarding failure". Breaches can expose a child's vulnerabilities or sensitive family circumstances, and cause distress, stigma or even physical harm.

When staff see privacy through that lens, they care more and attention rises naturally.

And it is raised attention that stops phishing emails being clicked.

## Why culture affects security

The connection is not theoretical.

Ransomware attacks almost always begin with a phishing email, a spoofed login page or a malicious attachment.

If staff are disengaged from privacy and security messaging, the success rate of those attacks increases.

If staff are alert, cautious, and confident about reporting suspicious activity, attacks are more likely to be intercepted.

In short:

Negative compliance culture >> lower attentiveness >> higher human error >> greater ransomware exposure.

Positive safeguarding culture >> higher attentiveness >> fewer avoidable errors >> reduced attack success.

## Tone from the top

Cultural change has to start at the top. When heads and governors start to view information risk as a safeguarding issue rather than a compliance issue, that signal quickly spreads through the organisation.

Language matters. Replacing "GDPR training" with "Safeguarding Privacy training" removes the barrier of negativity and aligns directly with the school's – and your staff's own personal – values.

It also needs to be reflected in management's response to incident reporting. Staff must feel safe reporting mistakes; if they fear punishment they may stay silent, creating a dangerous illusion that no incidents are occurring.

## Training that changes behaviour

Annual training sessions rarely change behaviour. Habits form through repetition. Monthly five-minute reminders focused on a single behaviour are far more effective:

- Check email addresses before sending

- Never click unexpected links or attachments
- Lock before you leave
- Report incidents and near misses immediately

Each small action reinforces attentiveness.

## Making privacy part of safeguarding policy

Schools already have strong safeguarding cultures around physical and emotional wellbeing. Information protection completes that picture.

Your staff would not allow a stranger to collect a child from school, so why allow an unchecked software vendor to collect and analyse that child's personal information?

When privacy becomes instinctive – like safeguarding already is – everyone becomes safer and all information more secure.

So, consider updating your Safeguarding and Data Protection policies to reflect the switch towards "Safeguarding Children's Privacy".

## The way forward

Organised crime groups know that independent schools – and parents – are attractive targets. They are constantly improving their methods of attack, so schools need to constantly improve their defences.

Until school leaders treat protection of information as a core safeguarding duty, schools will remain avoidably vulnerable. Negative attitudes to "GDPR compliance" weaken schools' defences and increase risk exposure.

Replacing that culture with one centred on "Safeguarding Children's Privacy" is not a silver bullet, but it will improve staff engagement and awareness which, in turn, will improve security. Making it school policy

The strongest firewall in your school is not technical. It is cultural.

Simon Hall is Data Protection Thought Leader on School Business Manager (UK)'s Honorary Thought Leadership Panel

# Safeguarding in the digital classroom: legal risks and responsibilities for schools

With screen-based learning now becoming more widespread, it is thought that the UK could follow the US by seeing a shift from campaigning for action on screen exposure and online safety into lawsuits, where the number of US cases relating to edtech, focused on data protection and pupil harm, are already significant. But what could this mean for the independent sector? Litigator, Ane Vernon, discusses and suggests some actions schools can take in order to keep pupils safe which in turn manages the risk of litigation.



Digital learning continues to expand across the independent sector, with many schools investing heavily in edtech to enhance teaching and learning. The attractions are clear: well chosen technology can ease teacher workload, improve accessibility for pupils with diverse learning needs, and help young people build the digital capabilities they will rely on far beyond school. For many bursars and governors, edtech also carries the promise of long term efficiencies – a compelling consideration at a time when independent schools are under increasing financial pressure.

Yet enthusiasm within schools is not always matched by confidence at home. A significant number of parents remain uncertain about the growing presence of technology in classrooms, and campaigns questioning edtech's value – or warning against its risks – are gaining momentum.

One area resonates particularly strongly with families: safeguarding. Parents want reassurance that edtech devices, school issued hardware, and school wi-fi networks are safe, and that children cannot inadvertently access harmful or inappropriate material – particularly in boarding schools, where the school assumes a more extensive duty of care outside normal classroom hours.

Incidents are emerging, including a case last year in which primary pupils in Scotland were able to

view explicit material via search engines on school issued tablets.

For independent schools, the reputational risk of such an incident would be significant. In a fee paying environment where trust and parental expectations are high, scrutiny on a school that inadvertently enables harmful access would be intense. But beyond reputational fallout, another question arises: could the school also face legal liability if a pupil suffers harm after accessing inappropriate content on a school provided device or network?

Discussions around liability are already advancing internationally in two cases in California. The first – *MC v Google* – alleges that by failing to prevent a child from accessing pornography on a school-issued Chromebook, Google is responsible for the child's pornography addiction. The second – *ZG v Google* – alleges that by failing to prevent a child's access to Discord, Google is responsible for the child being targeted and sexually victimised on that platform. One can see how similar principles might be applied against schools where they are responsible for providing the devices, or access to the school network.

With campaign groups increasingly active in the UK, and with independent schools often positioned as digital innovators, it seems only a matter of time before similar questions are tested in the UK.

What then can schools do to protect pupils and by corollary protect themselves from being on the wrong end of such a claim?

The first step is to take a clear, strategic view of the school wi-fi and device-provision model. Unlike maintained schools, independent schools often have greater freedom in their choice of hardware, filtering systems, and parental agreements. But with that autonomy comes increased responsibility for ensuring systems are fit for purpose and defensible.

Two key aspects of protecting these devices from safeguarding issuers are the filtering and monitoring solutions that are applied.

Filtering systems must strike an appropriate balance between safeguarding and educational access. Whilst the principle may seem simple, the line between the two can be blurred. Additionally, what to filter within a school is something of a moving feast given that pupils' ages, curriculum design, and parental expectations can vary widely.

Because filtering solutions are rarely infallible – and some pupils can circumvent restrictions – monitoring becomes essential. Monitoring should enable visibility as to what pupils are attempting to view, what is being permitted and what is being blocked. The monitoring needs to be regular and not simply in response to an incident.

Even when filtering and monitoring are in place, given the speed of technological development, schools need to ensure these are subject to regular and robust review. The risk in not doing so is that any issues that do occur are simply not spotted at all or not until it is too late. It is in this vacuum of "What did you know and when" or indeed "What should you have known and when" that legal liability can arise.

A recent DfE survey raised concerns in the state sector as regards both the filtering and monitoring of the devices that they provided to pupils. Whilst similar statistics are not available for the independent sector, all schools are well advised to take the issue seriously.

Schools may also wish to review the terms governing the supply of devices and applications. Where appropriate, providers should accept responsibility – including through indemnities – for the suitability and safety of their products.

Finally, a third aspect is to review the internal policies that govern provision and use of edtech devices. Policies need to be clear, transparent, and consistently followed. If issues do occur it is critical to address them immediately, to prevent further harm and reduce associated legal risks.

Ane Vernon is a partner at law firm Payne Hicks Beach. She specialises in disputes arising in the commercial, education, and regulatory sector, including safeguarding. Visit: [www.phb.co.uk](http://www.phb.co.uk)

# Overseas enrichment: how global trips nurture confident and resilient global citizens

What are the benefits of overseas travel for students, and how does this translate in the classroom? Head of Lower School at St Albans School, Hertfordshire, Nicolette Liston, discusses how school trips foster global citizenship and the impact they can have on student confidence and resilience.

Overseas residential trips offer an irreplaceable form of experiential learning that simply cannot be replicated in a classroom. For many students, these journeys spark “lightbulb” moments where theory becomes tangible. Geography textbooks come alive when standing at the foot of the Atlas Mountains or watching advection fog roll in off the Atlantic and explaining on the spot, how this is illustrative of a temperature inversion. Just as lessons on global inequality resonate differently when witnessed first-hand, these kinds of trips create the conditions for deep intellectual curiosity, prompting questions students might never have considered within familiar surroundings.

Beyond curriculum links, overseas experiences foster humility, self-awareness, and perspective. Students begin to understand how their own lives, often shaped by stability and privilege, contrast with the realities of others around the world. The extended residential

nature of the trips also cultivates independence: managing personal belongings, keeping to itineraries, and navigating new cultural expectations, all contribute to personal growth. Equally important is the social dimension, as students build new friendships across year groups and collaborate in unfamiliar environments. Immersive, challenging, and memorable, overseas trips broaden horizons in ways that shape both academic understanding and personal development.

## Exposure to global issues

Travelling abroad also develops a sophisticated range of transferable skills essential for young people preparing for adulthood. Communication skills grow rapidly as students interact across language barriers, whether using basic Arabic or French in Moroccan souks or relying on non-verbal communication to show respect and navigate cultural differences. Many discover the challenge and reward of bartering, which demands confidence, numeracy, critical thinking, and cultural

awareness. Problem-solving becomes second nature as students negotiate new environments, from converting currencies to deciding what constitutes fair tipping for local services.

Time management and personal responsibility are also sharpened: for possibly the first time, students must safeguard their passports, manage hydration and hygiene, pack effectively, and stay within weight limits for flights. These routine, yet essential, tasks, build independence and resilience. Critical thinking is strengthened through exposure to global issues, such as sustainability, informal economies, water scarcity, and the environmental footprint of tourism. Students learn to question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and reflect on the complexities of global interdependence. Collectively, these skills equip students for higher education, employment, and life beyond school.

Likewise, international travel pushes students gently but firmly beyond their comfort zone, encouraging them to adapt to unfamiliar environments and embrace new experiences with an open mind. Navigating busy markets, unfamiliar foods, different social norms, and challenging climates teaches students how to manage uncertainty which is an essential ingredient of resilience. These trips also provide safe opportunities for overcoming fears.

## Maturity and perseverance

Each small victory builds confidence. Resilience grows further through the natural unpredictability of travel:



Nicolette Liston

long bus journeys, heat, early mornings, changes in plans, and new routines all demand flexibility and patience. Students also learn to take responsibility for themselves and one another. They learn how to maintain group safety, follow guidance, and support peers during moments of challenge. Importantly, students realise that confidence isn't about being fearless but about coping with discomfort and persevering despite it. These moments of growth endure long after the trip ends, empowering students to face academic pressures, social challenges, and future workplace demands with maturity.

For example, a recent overseas geography trip to Morocco offered St Albans School Sixth Form students a transformative enrichment experience. The tour centred on academic exploration and cultural immersion, exposing students to spectacular landscapes and enabling them to observe geological processes, settlement patterns, and cultural diversity first-hand. Camel treks into the dunes, nights under starlit skies, surf lessons on the Atlantic coast, and haggling in Marrakech's vibrant souks brought geography to life in unforgettable ways.

The purpose of this trip was to deepen students' understanding of landscapes, climate systems, and development issues. Travelling from Marrakech across the Tizi n'Tichka Pass, students observed dramatic geological formations that illuminated theoretical concepts such as orogenesis, strata, and tectonic processes. Visits to Ait Ben Haddou and



Trekking across the Sahara Desert



Students from St Albans School

Essaouira highlighted settlement adaptation, cultural palimpsests, and the role of heritage in shaping identity and tourism. In the Sahara Desert, students trekked by camel to a Bedouin-style camp, experiencing diurnal temperature ranges and nomadic lifestyles beneath extraordinary night skies. The itinerary also exposed students to local economies: they visited saffron cooperatives, observed artisan woodworking, and explored Essaouira's maritime trade heritage.

### Immersive adventures

The impact of overseas enrichment extends far beyond the week spent abroad. Classroom learning becomes more vivid, grounded, and memorable when students can draw on personal experiences. Topics such as desertification, global trade networks, tectonics, economic development, and cultural geography become anchored in real observations, strengthening comprehension and long-term retention. Students return with sharper analytical skills, having questioned and contextualised global issues in situ. This often leads to richer discussion, more sophisticated essay writing, and increased confidence in applying case studies or personal reflections to academic assessments.

Creative subjects also benefit; travel experiences provide powerful stimuli for art, photography, creative writing, and project-based learning. Students often capture striking imagery, from the geometry of Medina

streets to the colours of coastal markets, that inspires creative expression. Exposure to diverse cultures encourages originality, imagination, and empathy, essential qualities in innovative thinking. Ultimately, overseas trips act as intellectual catalysts, transforming abstract concepts into lived experiences that broaden students' academic and creative potential. Trips provide an excellent platform for cross-curricular and co-curricular links and development.

Global citizenship is not something that can be taught solely through textbooks – it develops through immersion, perspective-taking, and reflection. Overseas experiences encourage students to recognise their place in an interconnected world and understand the impact of their actions on global communities. By engaging respectfully with different cultures, students develop ethical awareness and a sense of global responsibility. Exposure to diverse values and traditions helps students appreciate difference without judgement, fostering the cultural sensitivity essential in today's globalised society. The independence and self-management required while travelling build maturity and readiness for future opportunities such as gap years, higher education, and international work. Ultimately, overseas enrichment nurtures confident, adaptable, and compassionate young people who are active participants in a global community rather than distant observers.

## Land of Fire and Ice



Years 10 to 12 Geography Field Trip to Iceland

Forty Year 10 to 12 pupils from Haberdashers' Monmouth School have returned after a five day Geography tour to Iceland.

Organised by the Geography Department and supported by Discover the World, the trip began in Reykjavik with a live lava show and an evening walk along the regenerated waterfront, made even more memorable by a display of the Northern Lights.

The group explored Iceland's approach to renewable energy with visits to the Hellisheiði geothermal power station, the geothermal fields at Hveragerði and Urriðafoss on the River Þjórsá, before discovering the island's tectonic past at the interactive LAVA Centre.

Photo credit: Haberdashers' Monmouth School

Pupils also enjoyed the winter beauty of Seljalandsfoss, the cliffs and sea stacks at Dyrhólaey, and the black sands of Vík. A guided walk on Sólheimajökull also provided insight into glacial processes and climate change.

The tour concluded with a visit to the Blue Lagoon and a stop in Grindavík, where pupils learned about the community's recent evacuation following volcanic activity.

Head of Geography, Mr Scott Rentell said: "It was wonderful to see pupils applying their classroom learning to real-world environments, from glacial landscapes to geothermal power stations. Opportunities like this bring geography to life in a way no textbook ever could."

## On top of the world!



Sixth form ski trip

The school trips programme from Ashville College, North Yorkshire, is marking the milestone of topping 50,000 miles of global opportunities, with the most recent trips seeing more than 100 Year 9 and Sixth Form pupils taking to the slopes on two skiing adventures.

Among the other highlights are Geography field trips to Iceland, the Lake District, and the Holderness Coast; a Science trip to Switzerland; History and Politics trips to New York and Washington DC; Modern Languages trips and Music tours to a variety of European cities; a

community project expedition to Malawi; and a sports tour across South Africa.

Head of Ashville, Rhiannon Wilkinson, said:

"This global programme of trips complements our Future Ready programme, designed to equip pupils with the skills and confidence to thrive in an ever-changing world."

In the most recent trips, Year 9 skiers headed to Folgarida, in the Italian Trentino region, while Sixth Formers headed to Les Deux Alpes, a high-altitude French ski resort.



# Profile

In conversation with Dr Fiona Miles

**Born:**

Proudly Generation X

**Schools and Universities**

**attended:**

University of Cambridge; King's College, London

**First job:**

Hospital Cleaner

**First job in independent**

**education:**

Teacher of English, Habs Girls, Elstree

**Appointed to current job:**

April 2019

**Favourite piece of music:**

One of JS Bach's organ works or anything by Metallica

**Favourite food:**

Grape nuts

**Favourite drink:**

Tea

**Favourite holiday destination:**

Rocky Mountains, Canada

**Favourite leisure pastime:**

Playing the organ and piano, and a game of netball when I get the opportunity

**Favourite TV or radio**

**programme/series:**

'Gladiators' or anything with David Attenborough

**Suggested epitaph:**

"School's out forever"

**Q** You started teaching after obtaining a degree in English Literature but then stepped away to study medicine. Did you practise medicine?

**A** For a combination of reasons, I stepped away from medicine soon after qualifying as a doctor. I had intended to return, with a view to pursuing a career in military or forensic psychiatry, but a series of chance conversations led me to covering a role in the English department at Habs Girls Elstree. One thing led to another and by 2019, I was Senior Deputy Head and excited to be taking up the headship of Loughborough High School.

**Q** What made you decide to return to teaching?

**A** Studying medicine was a life-changing experience: it is the most incredible privilege to have encountered human beings at the most critical moments in their lives, to have worked alongside so many dedicated NHS colleagues, and to have been taught by world experts in medicine and surgery. Watching a successful parent-to-child liver transplant involving a five-day old baby and his father is perhaps one of the most transformative things that I have ever witnessed. What I missed about teaching—and what ultimately drew me back – was the energy, creativity, and optimism of young people and the satisfaction of watching them grow and mature, day by day, over a period of seven years or more. That, too, is the most enormous privilege.

**Q** As a head helping and inspiring students with their own future pathways, how does your own double-career reflect in your approach?

**A** Our brilliant Head of Futures, Ruth Grainger, often talks to students about having a 'squiggly career'—one that doesn't follow a set plan and takes you in different directions throughout your life. Students sometimes worry that everyone else seems to have their life mapped out by the age of 18 and it is important to show them that it is normal to have doubts and to change your mind (and then change it again!). I hope I also show them that the world doesn't divide up neatly into artists and scientists: it is easy to pigeonhole ourselves

from an early age and I talk to students a lot about being open to new possibilities. I discovered the beauty of A Level Chemistry in my late twenties, just before I went to medical school, and I encourage all students to keep on learning throughout their lives.

**Q** It was your love of science that led you to the study of medicine. Women and girls are still under represented in STEM subjects; how do you think that can that best be addressed?

**A** Girls' schools have a more important role than ever here. We have just celebrated International Day of Women and Girls in Science, where our senior pupils spoke passionately about the way in which an all-girls' environment combats gender stereotypes and supports the scientific ambitions of every girl. Girls' schools buck the national trend for girls' participation in STEM: at Loughborough High School, over 70% of pupils take at least one STEM A Level and over half take STEM subjects at university. The girls have fantastic role models here, too, from senior pupils blazing a trail ahead of them to our staff, among whom we have a qualified veterinarian, a vaccine developer, a physiotherapist, and a former construction site agent.

**Q** One of your key aims since becoming head has been to create a sense of belonging in school. One initiative has been the introduction of pupils as role models/mentors. How has this worked? Have you measured outcomes?

**A** The return to in-person learning following the Covid-19 pandemic gave us a real opportunity to reinforce our sense of community as a school. We have been quite intentional in our use of language around belonging, using it often in assemblies, communications with students and parents, PSHCE, our regular wellbeing surveys and other areas of school life. A recent assembly led by our Wellbeing Prefect showed just how much ideas of belonging and community underpin the ethos and everyday life of our school. One lovely initiative introduced by our senior pupils is the 'Time to Talk' scheme, where students from different year groups come together over hot chocolate and conversation in the Sixth Form common room. Our Sixth Formers are skilled at drawing younger

Dr Fiona Miles has been head at Loughborough High School (LHS), Leicestershire since 2019; she was previously Senior Deputy Head at Habs Girls, Hertfordshire. She is a member of the Council of the Girls' School Association.



pupils out of their shells and have created a culture where discussing wellbeing and mental health is normal rather than exceptional.

**Q** Research suggests that one in five girls aged between 13 and 15 are struggling to limit time on social media or find that it can cause conflict with families and friends, compared with one in ten boys of the same age. What are your thoughts on a ban, or is there a better approach?

**A** Social media can be a vital tool for building friendships, sharing information, and creative self-expression; it can also be addictive, anxiety-inducing, and downright nasty. Our role as educators is to help our young people navigate this complex digital landscape safely and ensure they are fully equipped for adult life when they leave school. Without question we must do all that we can to keep them safe from harm and restrictions on content and usage should certainly be part of this. Nonetheless, a complete ban is quite a blunt instrument that risks alienating our young people and possibly driving other unwanted and unintended behaviours. Ultimately, the adults – tech companies, the government, parents, influencers, and educators – need to pull together to commit wholeheartedly to modelling a sustainable and healthier environment for all online users. The Australian social media ban will act as an important test case and I am watching developments there with interest.

**Q** Opportunities afforded by being part of the Loughborough Schools Foundation include being part of a co-ed campus while remaining an all-girls' school. What are the benefits of this model? Would you recommend it to others?

**A** It really does offer the best of both worlds for students. The benefits of an all-girls' school are well known: girls tend to do better academically, they are much more likely to choose STEM subjects, they participate in sport more readily and for longer, and in every aspect of school life, they see other girls leading and succeeding. Being part of a foundation of closely-knit schools offers the added bonus of some joint lessons in the Sixth Form and many shared co-curricular opportunities in all year groups, including drama productions, music ensembles, sporting events,

debating, enrichment, and CCF to name but a few. As a head, I really enjoy getting to know the boys who visit our school on a daily basis but I am also proud that we hold a space that prioritises girls as learners and as the leaders of the future.

**Q** LHS girls are fully embedded in the Loughborough Grammar School CCF Contingent. What has this development brought to the individuals involved?

**A** Several years ago, and in a fantastic example of pupil voice in action, Year 9 pupils petitioned me for the opportunity to participate in CCF from Year 10, like their peers at our brother school. With support from colleagues at LGS and a re-structure of the GCSE timetable, we worked together to bring this to fruition. Those Year 9 girls are now in Year 13 and many have progressed through the ranks to achieve leadership roles, such as Elena, who commands the Army section across both schools. Others have become experts on the target shooting range, contributing to success of our joint teams in both the British Shooting Schools finals and in the Royal Air Squadron Trophy, which we currently hold as winners.

**Q** The school marked its 175th anniversary last year. Much has changed since the school opened its doors in 1850, but its original aim of providing girls with the same educational opportunities as boys remains true today. Thinking about the next chapter in the life of the school what do you think are the three key challenges facing girls' education today?

**A** One of my aims as we celebrated our 175th anniversary year was to highlight to pupils the inequalities that still exist in girls' education across the globe: in some parts of the world, barely one in five girls completes a full secondary education and under certain regimes, formal education is denied to girls over the age of 12. Without access to education, it is much harder for girls to break out of a cycle of poverty, child marriage, and sexual violence. With my medic hat on, I am especially concerned about the lack of future training opportunities for female healthcare professionals and the impact this will have on women's health, safety in childbirth, and the care of babies in the future. Closer to home, I see a world that is still unequal for girls and this is where girls' schools and organisations that champion them, such as

the Girls' School Association, are so powerful: for a few hours a day, girls have the opportunity to see how we might do things differently and they leave us with an unshakeable belief that nothing is out of reach for girls and women.

**Q** LHS is proud of its Wellbeing Prefects, a team which certainly would not have been in evidence 175 years ago. How are its members chosen and what training do they receive?

**A** Wellbeing at Loughborough High School is student-led as much as it is staff-supported. Our wellbeing committee includes girls from Year 7 through to Year 13, alongside a Senior Wellbeing Prefect, who is elected by peers and staff. Prefects receive weekly mentoring and support from members of the leadership team and feel empowered to lead on initiatives throughout the school. Peer-led support circles, a wellbeing representative in every form, mindfulness as part of our curriculum and a wide variety of recreational clubs are an important part of our wellbeing offering.

**Q** You enjoy playing the organ and piano. What has music brought to your busy life?

**A** Music has been a golden thread connecting me to others throughout my life. As an organist, I have found myself stepping in to play at weddings, services, school assemblies, and even in a small Alpine church on my honeymoon. It is lovely to connect with communities in this way and to bring a little joy to others through music. At Loughborough Schools Foundation, our superb joint music department feels like my second home: our Friday 'Lunchtime Live' concert is an oasis at the end of a busy week, where I enjoy listening to musicians from across the schools showcasing their talents. With some two hundred concerts and recitals taking place throughout the year, there is always something to admire, from our Year 2 String Scheme musicians to our senior soloists in the annual concert at De Montfort Hall. I can't think of many other jobs where you can experience such talent and creativity in action as part of your working week!

# The true value of pupil voice in practice

In its latest ISI report, Radnor House Sevenoaks, Kent, was awarded a significant strength for promoting pupil voice. Whilst this is a powerful long-term strategic decision, it begs the question, what does effective pupil voice look like in practice? Headteacher and founder, David Paton, discusses day-to-day implementation and why this is so fundamental to a successful school.

Students are our most important assets. This belief underscores our school's culture and reiterates our values; it is also key to our success.

## Pupil voice in practice

To ensure the student body feels genuinely heard we have established structured and consistent platforms that go beyond mere suggestion boxes. Our discursive and dynamic weekly student council meetings serve as the central point for student advocacy. Additionally, regular and comprehensive student and parent surveys supply vital information on our community's evolving needs. Most importantly for me, weekly 'Head's lunches' with a selection of pupils of all ages in my office provide an open forum for discussion of the most pressing issues.

While many schools may have similar feedback systems and listening channels, our students know that when they speak, we listen and we act. Feedback from the student body has led to significant upgrades across the school. Student advocacy drove the resurfacing of our netball and tennis courts last summer. Their practical feedback brought

card reader machines to the tuck shop and their input completely reshaped our current sports kit. Presently our Sixth Form leadership team is developing a student mentorship scheme, which we plan to launch in September.

However, the importance of pupil voice extends beyond mere facility upgrades and new uniforms. It actively shapes the character of our students and the culture of our school in three important ways.

## Establishing a culture

Firstly, a robust system of pupil voice develops a sense of empowerment within the student body, which leads to a can-do attitude. When young people know their voice matters, they own the environment around them and understand they have an integral role in developing a positive school culture. In this vein the systems and processes we provide act as natural pressure valves. They avoid bubbling frustrations around unaddressed issues and connect students directly to the decision-making by presenting dedicated and significant opportunities to voice their concerns. This builds a foundation of mutual trust between students and staff

which further fosters a happy and harmonious school environment.

## Building skills

Secondly, when adults expect children to articulate their opinions cogently, pupil voice becomes an engine for oracy. Students understand that we do not just ask them what they want. We challenge them to communicate why they want it and how it will benefit the wider community. We bring them into the policymaking process by talking through the financial and wider stakeholder implications of various decisions. They understand that good ideas fail to survive impact with reality. As a result, pupils are encouraged to express themselves clearly, formally, and persuasively. In doing so they learn to structure arguments, listen to counterpoints and promote their viewpoints with confidence. These humanistic skills will be invaluable in the workplace of the future.

## Developing grit

Finally, and in some ways most importantly, engaging in this democratic process builds resilience. When encouraged to open your ideas up to logical challenge or financial viability, pupils develop additional skills



David Paton

of perseverance and resilience. If students put forward a proposal that is ultimately declined, they learn to process disappointment constructively. And, when sound reasoning is given to explain rejection, students understand the complexities of leadership and the necessity of compromising with the reality of competing priorities. As with any team, we all may have a voice and we all may be valued but not every suggestion can be actioned. Navigating this reality builds strong and mature young people preparing them to be effective future leaders.

Ultimately, prioritising pupil voice strengthens our commitment to all four of our school values: Excellence, Respect, Courage, and Perseverance. In the provision of robust platforms for dialogue, feedback and reasoning we ensure that all pupils feel genuinely seen and heard. We are incredibly proud of the recent ISI recognition but even prouder of the empowered, articulate and resilient young adults our students are becoming as they make their voices heard.

## Debating competition

Prep school pupils from St Helen's College, Middlesex, have been crowned overall winners of the inter-school Forfar Debating Competition in a final against Brackenfield School, North Yorkshire.

The St Helen's College team successfully argued against the motion: "If children ran

the world, it would be a better place," in the online debate where they presented a compelling argument and worked together to tackle questions from the judges and the Brackenfield team.

Ten schools from the Forfar Education group across the UK participated in the competition.

The final was chaired by Country Director UK at Forfar Education, Mrs Jo Storey and judged by Head of Badminton School, Bristol, Mrs Jessica Miles, retired CoEd Preparatory School Head, Mrs Caroline Wethey, and the Assistant Director of Education at Forfar Education, Mr Alex Brough.



Pictured: The successful debating team

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# Beyond the snapshot:

Snapshot data, like assessment data in prep schools, is just one piece of the puzzle. Deputy Head at Banstead Prep, Surrey, Lisa Crook, explores how, when used effectively, data that has been thoughtfully triangulated and used as part of an inquiry-led culture, can become a powerful tool to help understand and support decision making, especially when thinking about setting.



Lisa Crook

In the UK preparatory sector, data can sometimes feel like an uneasy companion. Prep schools rightly pride themselves on knowing pupils as individuals: nurturing confidence and character, developing curiosity, and preparing children not only for senior school but for the wider world beyond it. Against this backdrop, assessment data can sometimes feel reductive – a snapshot taken on one day, in one moment, that doesn't always reflect the child as a whole.

And yet, when used well, data can be incredibly powerful as a conversation starter – one of several lenses we use to understand value added, equity, and impact, and to support thoughtful decision-making, including around one of the most debated practices in independent schools: setting.

## One piece of the jigsaw

Assessment data in prep schools will always be partial. Cohorts are small. Pupil mobility is high. Outcomes are often already above national averages, particularly in selective-entry contexts. No single score can ever capture a child's curiosity, resilience, confidence or readiness for the next stage.

From experience, we also know something else to be true: happy, secure children make strong progress – and strong progress, in turn, builds confidence. The value added by a genuinely rounded education is often far greater than any headline measure suggests.

The issue, then, is not snapshot data itself, but the temptation to treat it as definitive.

Research and professional learning frameworks consistently remind us that relying on a single source of

evidence can introduce bias. We risk seeing what we expect to see – or what we hope to see. Data becomes far more meaningful when it is triangulated with what we already know well in prep schools: teacher observation, work scrutiny, pupil voice, pastoral knowledge, and curriculum understanding.

## Asking better questions

Against the quantitative information raw attainment gives, value-added data is often a second measure for efficacy. However, this should not be used to “prove” effectiveness in isolation. Real strength lies in the questions data prompts:

- Which pupils or groups are accelerating most?
- Where is progress strong, but attainment still lags – and why?
- Which strategies appear to be supporting learning, and for whom?

This aligns with an inquiry-led approach to improvement. Evidence is gathered not to pass or fail a strategy, but to refine teacher practice, respond more precisely to pupil need, and remain professionally curious.

## Reflection on setting

Setting remains a common practice in the independent sector, often in core subjects, and is purported to support pace, challenge and preparation for senior school. Evidence, including that summarised in the EEF (Education Endowment Foundation) Toolkit, suggests that its impact is variable and closely linked to how it is implemented.

When used thoughtfully, setting can allow teaching to be more closely aligned with prior

attainment, enabling some pupils to move at a faster pace while others benefit from targeted reinforcement; in prep schools, small class sizes and strong pastoral relationships can help support this. However, research also indicates that outcomes are not consistently positive for all pupils, particularly if groupings become fixed, expectations vary between sets, or the social and emotional dimensions are overlooked.

As with any educational approach, setting is therefore best understood not as a universal solution but as one option among many, requiring regular review and careful consideration of whether it is serving the needs of individual children.

## Five data lenses for Senior Leadership Teams

For leaders overseeing teaching and learning, data is most useful when viewed through deliberate, reflective lenses.

1. **The Progress Lens:** who is making accelerated progress – and who is not?
2. **The Equity Lens:** who benefits most from our approaches? Consider SEND, Gender, EAL and Cultural Capital
3. **The Curriculum Lens:** is ambition consistent across all groups?
4. **The Assessment Lens** – are we measuring learning in ways that support it?
5. **The Impact Lens:** what changed because of this evidence?

The final lens is perhaps the most important question of all. If data does not lead to adjusted teaching, regrouping, curriculum refinement,

or targeted support, it risks becoming performative.

## Using data without losing the child

Prep schools rightly place wellbeing and confidence at the heart of what they do.

Any use of data must sit within a culture where:

- Pupils are not defined by scores or sets
- Movement between groups is normalised
- Assessment is understood as part of learning, not judgement

When this culture is secure, data strengthens professional decision-making rather than constraining it.

Snapshot data will never tell the whole story – and it shouldn't try to. But when interpreted over time, triangulated thoughtfully and used as part of an inquiry-led culture, it allows prep schools to move from tradition to intentionality, particularly in complex areas such as setting.

For senior leaders, the challenge is not to collect more data, but to use it wisely:

- To question established practices
- To refine curriculum and grouping structures
- To evaluate impact honestly
- And to ensure that every child continues to thrive

Used well, data does not diminish the human heart of prep education. It sharpens it – while always remembering it is just one part of the story.

# using data thoughtfully

## Reflection checklist

### Using data thoughtfully – with the whole child in mind

#### 1. The big picture: What does our data represent?

- Are we clear that any assessment score reflects one aspect of a child, on one day?
- Do we routinely discuss data alongside pastoral, social and emotional information?
- Is data framed as a conversation starter, not a conclusion?
- Do staff feel confident challenging data with professional judgement where appropriate?

#### Reflective prompt:

*If this were the only information we had about a pupil, what would we be missing?*

#### 2. The Progress Lens: Who is moving – and who is not?

- Do we prioritise progress from starting points over raw attainment?
- Do we track value added over time rather than reacting to single data points?
- Are we clear which pupils or groups are accelerating – and why?
- Do we identify pupils whose progress has stalled early enough to respond?

#### Reflective prompt:

*What does our progress data tell us about the impact of our teaching, rather than the profile of our intake?*

#### 3. The Equity Lens: Who benefits most?

- Do we routinely analyse progress by:
  - Gender
  - SEND
  - Entry point (early joiners / late joiners)
  - Grouping or set
- Do we look for patterns, not just outliers?
- Are gaps narrowing over time – or becoming embedded?
- Do we treat “unexpected” outcomes as prompts for inquiry rather than concern?

#### Reflective prompt:

*Which pupils benefit most from our current approaches – and which may need something different?*

#### 4. The Curriculum Lens: Is ambition consistent?

- Do all pupils, regardless of group or set, have access to:
  - The same curriculum entitlement
  - High-quality explanations and modelling
  - Stretch and challenge
- Do assessment outcomes prompt curriculum review rather than pupil labelling?
- Is curriculum sequencing reviewed in light of where misconceptions persist?

#### Reflective prompt:

*Are differences in outcomes more likely to reflect curriculum design than pupil ability?*

#### 5. The Assessment Lens: Are we measuring what matters?

- Are assessments:
  - Low-stakes and proportionate
  - Embedded in everyday teaching
  - Clearly linked to teaching decisions
- Do staff understand the purpose of each assessment point?
- Are assessment windows flexible enough to reflect readiness?
- Do we regularly review whether an assessment still serves its intended purpose?

#### Reflective prompt:

*What decision does this assessment inform – and what would we do differently if it were removed?*

#### 6. The Setting Lens: Is grouping a strategy or a habit?

- Are grouping or setting decisions reviewed regularly using progress, not just attainment?
- Is movement between groups normalised and expected?
- Are expectations and curriculum depth consistent across all groups?
- Do we evaluate the social and emotional impact of grouping structures?

#### Reflective prompt:

*If we were designing our grouping model from scratch, based on evidence, would it look the same?*

#### 7. The Impact Lens: What changed because of the data?

- Can we clearly articulate:
  - What the data showed
  - What we did as a result
  - What changed for pupils
- Do we revisit decisions to evaluate their impact over time?
- Are “negative” or unexpected findings welcomed as learning opportunities?
- Is professional inquiry embedded in improvement planning?

#### Reflective prompt:

*How has this data improved learning, rather than simply describe it?*

#### 8. Culture Check: Are we keeping the child at the centre?

- Are pupils described in meetings as learners, not scores?
- Is language around data careful, humane and provisional?
- Do parents understand that assessment is one part of a much wider picture?
- Does our use of data align with our school’s ethos and values?

#### Final reflective question:

*Would a pupil recognise themselves in how we talk about their progress?*

# 10 Minibus must-haves

This article is based on a talk and workshop delivered by Rivervale Minibus at the Schools and Academies show in November, and the Welsh Independent School's Council in October. It was written as a whistle-stop tour through the obligations of running minibuses for schools and organisations operating minibuses for hire or reward.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the Rivervale Minibus team.

## 1. Operate under the correct licence or permit

Your organisation needs to ensure they have the correct licence or permit as you will be operating for hire or reward. The definition of hire or reward being that you are taking direct (charging for carriage) or indirect payment (school fees) for the use of your minibus. The DVSA's definition of hire or reward: "It's any payment, in cash or kind that gives a person the right to be carried on the vehicle, regardless of whether or not that right is exercised. Hire or reward takes place if the journey is organised in a way that goes beyond the bounds of mere social kindness."

If you are a limited company and/or are profiting from your minibus operations, you will need a PSV Operator's Licence. If you are in the education sector, have charitable status, or meet one of the other exemptions and are not making a profit from your minibus operations, you can apply for a Section 19 Permit, which replaces the PSV Operator's Licence.

## 2. Complete minibus safety inspections every 6-10 weeks

Minibus safety inspections are a vital part of proving roadworthiness and are required in addition to MOTs and regular services. They are ideally completed by different engineers, so they are not checking their own work.

Minibuses aged 12 years and over need safety inspections every 6 weeks, and every 10 weeks for minibus under 12 years.

Safety inspections now also need to include a brake performance assessment which can be a decelerometer, and thermometer test.

## 3. Ensure daily walk-around checks are being completed

Daily walk-around checks are not only a DVSA requirement, they are your driver's first line of defence when it comes to preventing problems out on the road. They also serve as protection for your drivers when it comes to being 'blamed' for any scrapes or bumps. It is their chance to protect themselves from liability for any faults. A bald tyre could cost them up to £2500 and three points on their licence, whether driving a car or a minibus.

## 4. 6-month maintenance plan

The DVSA requires you keep a rolling 6-month maintenance plan completed and displayed that includes all your services, MOTs, and safety inspections. You also need to keep all maintenance and repair records for at least 15 months.

## 5. Understand that the weight of your minibuses is important

Knowing your weights is important for two reasons:

- Understand who can drive your minibus. Minibuses with a GVW over 3.5 tonnes require D1 entitlement on a licence. Buses with a GVW of 3.5 tonnes and under can be driven on a car under a Section 19 Permit and under certain conditions, including not paying your drivers.
- To ensure you are not overloading your minibuses. It can be tempting to load as much as you can fit into a minibus for a Duke of Edinburgh trip, for example. If you are overweight this can lead to problems out on the road and may also be a breach of your insurance.

## 6. Create and update an approved drivers list

Once you understand who can drive your minibuses, what their weights are, do they have D1 entitlement etc... then you can keep an up-to-date list of approved drivers, where you can record their licence checks and their driver training history. By keeping your keys secure you can then ensure only approved drivers have access to the right minibus.

## 7. Check your driver's licences and fitness to drive regularly

You can check your drivers' licences regularly through the DVLA to check they're not expired or have new penalty points. You should also be checking on your drivers ongoing fitness to drive. New medications, health issues such as sleep apnoea and diabetes can affect a person's fitness to drive. You need to be proactive in routinely asking your drivers about any changes to their health.

## 8. Provide regular training for all your drivers

Minibuses are not just big cars. There are different speed limits for minibuses, different rules with bus lanes, and the size of the vehicle makes handling, manoeuvring and stopping in an emergency very different from a car. To protect your wing mirrors, roofs, and your organisation's reputation training your drivers regularly with MiDAS and online or practical assessments will help reduce the risk of any incidents on the road.

## 9. Plan and prepare your drivers for emergencies on the road

Would your drivers know exactly what to do with 9-16 children in the event of a breakdown or

incident on the motorway or rural road? Do you have provisions in your minibuses for such eventualities? Equipping your drivers with the information they need to handle any situation safely will help ensure the safety of your passengers and limit any issues that could lead to reputational damage in the event of an emergency.

## 10. Have robust policies and systems in place to protect your drivers, passengers, and reputation.

Management oversight is crucial in ensuring everything that should be happening with your minibuses is happening. Having policies in place that are read and signed by your drivers, and anyone involved in minibus operations, is a way for your organisation to increase its defensibility in the event of an incident or refer to if disciplinary action against drivers is needed.

All of these points, and more are covered in detail in our Advance Minibus Management Course designed to ensure schools and organisation running under a Section 19 Permit understand all their obligations and can be reassured they have everything covered.

The course includes input from a specialist solicitor and a Health and Safety consultant to provide insight into the "grey areas" of running minibuses such as "are teachers paid drivers?". You can come and discuss your unique challenges with Rivervale experts and your peers. The course is a full day 9.30-3.00 and held in venues around the UK, including regularly at Rivervale Minibus in Bicester.

To find out more and book your place please call our friendly team on 01869 253744 or email [minibus@rivervale.co.uk](mailto:minibus@rivervale.co.uk)

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## 'Beauty and the Beast'



Luckley House School, Berkshire, has recently held its biennial full school musical, 'Beauty and the Beast'.

With music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice, book by Linda Woolverton, and originally produced by Disney Theatrical Group, the production featured four evening performances and a special matinee for local primary schools.

Pictured: Performing 'Beauty and the Beast'

Principal roles were shared across the run, with a number of pupils stepping into leading performances on different evenings.

Led by Director of Drama, Mrs Esther Brown, and Director of Music, Mrs Janice Ellwood, the production was supported by a professional orchestra, lighting designers and backstage team, whose expertise brought the production to life.

## Choir Schools' Association

New Hall School, Essex, is now an Associate member of the Choir Schools' Association, an organisation dedicated to supporting the education of choristers in schools, cathedrals and churches.

Director of Music, Mr Jonathan Turner, said: "Joining the Choir Schools' Association recognises the quality of our choral provision. It supports our vision to place young musicians at the centre of a thriving liturgical tradition."

The New Hall Chapel Choir is a mixed-voice ensemble of approximately 50 singers, comprising 18 boys and 32

girls, from Year 3 to Year 13, and supplemented by a small number of adult singers. The choir sings at Mass every Sunday during term time and performs regularly in venues such as New Hall's Chapel, Chelmsford Cathedral, Brentwood Cathedral, Westminster Cathedral, and, most recently, King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

In addition to its school choirs, New Hall has also launched a new choral society, the Beaulieu Park Singers, bringing together local residents, parents, staff and members of the boarding community through a shared love of music.



Pictured: New Hall School Choir in New Hall School Chapel

## Performing for HM The King

A student from Westholme School, Lancashire, has performed for His Majesty King Charles III during his recent visit to the county.

Neve Cowan, was part of a string quartet selected to perform at Samlesbury Hall as the King met with Lancashire dignitaries, organisations, and charities. The quartet played as His Majesty entered the historic hall, performing 'God Save the King' before continuing with a programme of classical music during the visit.

Neve, 14, and a music scholar at Westholme, played the cello, performing alongside three fellow members of the Lancashire Youth Symphony Orchestra, including Lucy Lai, Laura Kesiak, and Lydia Harris.

The performance formed part of the King's official visit to the region, during which he learned more about the work of local organisations and charities.

Pictured: Neve Cowan waiting to meet HM King Charles III



Neve said: "It was a real honour to play for the King and as part of such a wonderful quartet. He was so friendly and warm to all of the guests – it was an experience and day that I will never forget."

The quartet are all first desk players in Lancashire Youth Symphony Orchestra and were asked to perform by Lancashire County Council, following a successful concert at County Hall last year.

## 'Come From Away'

Burgess Hill Girls, West Sussex, have celebrated the success of its 2026 senior school production of 'Come From Away', which brought together students, staff, and visiting performers to share a story rooted in empathy, resilience, and togetherness.

The school was the first in Sussex to stage a production of the musical, and has been recognised with a Certificate of Nomination for Best Musical from the National School Theatre Awards 2026.

The musical tells the true story of how the small town of Gander, Newfoundland welcomed nearly 7,000 stranded passengers when 38 planes were unexpectedly diverted there following the 9/11 attacks.

Director of the show and Director of Drama at the school, Emma Cassim, who celebrated her 40th production at Burgess Hill Girls, reflected on bringing the musical to life:

Pictured: Performing 'Come From Away'



"Even in the darkest moments, kindness and community can prevail. 'Come From Away' reminded us of the extraordinary capacity for empathy that exists in all of us; something this remarkable group of students embodied throughout the entire run. This production demanded total focus, unity and trust, and the cast rose to the challenge with energy, precision, and extraordinary generosity.

"My sincere thanks to our wonderful Musical Director, David Black, our Production Designer and Manager, Dan Pook Barnes, and our Choreographer, Bethany Gavin; working with her had been a 15 year dream in the making."

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# Supporting multi-lingual learners to thrive

Children who speak English as an additional language may be high achievers and appear proficient in everyday English. But even confident speakers can face subtle gaps in subject-specific language or social communication that can limit their participation and achievement.

Education consultant, and former Head of Primary English at Kings' School Al Barsha in Dubai, Laura Spargo, provides some practical strategies schools can use to remove hidden language barriers for multi-lingual pupils, which in turn will give pupils the tools to engage confidently in lessons, understand subject content more deeply, and feel included in the school community.



Laura Spargo

According to the British Council's Language Trends England 2025 report<sup>1</sup> published in June 2025, over 90% of schools across England were supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Multi-lingual classrooms have become the norm. But when pupils appear to have a good grasp of English, it can be easy to miss the areas where they still need support, such as using subject-specific terminology in lessons, understanding instructions, or taking part in group discussions. With the right strategies in place, teachers can make sure all pupils are able to fully engage in school life.

**1. Build confidence early on**  
When children feel confident in their ability to understand and speak English, they are more likely to participate in discussions, ask questions, and get involved in what they are learning.

Structured group activities encourage pupils to use and develop English without the pressure of formal assessment. Children can be asked to describe paint, brushes, and other art materials during a lesson, for example, providing opportunities for modelling and language practice in a fun, collaborative way. Strategies such as “Translanguaging”<sup>2</sup> actively support pupils to take pride in their multilingualism. With this approach, children are encouraged to draw on their first language alongside English, for example

discussing ideas with peers who share the same language before expressing them in English. This allows pupils to explore concepts in depth and develop more confident, considered responses.

Giving children time and space to practise and develop their English with others reduces anxiety and encourages them to fully participate in learning. More often than not, they'll also build friendships as they improve their communication skills.

## 2. Develop specific language for learning

Research commissioned by The Bell Foundation<sup>3</sup> shows that it can take children who are new to English up to six years to become proficient in the academic language required for school. One effective way to support these pupils is to pre-teach subject-specific vocabulary.

Words such as “migration” have very different meanings depending on the context. In a lesson on the lifecycle of zebras on the African plains, for example, the word refers to the movement of animals. In a discussion about global economies, it describes the movement of people between countries, which can cause confusion. Highlighting these differences before the lesson means pupils can focus on the ideas being taught rather than trying to figure out what the vocabulary means at the same time.

Dual coding, a theory developed by Allan Paivio, combines words

and imagery to help children process complex information and nuances in language. By using simple illustrations such as Widgit Symbols<sup>4</sup>, teachers can make abstract concepts more concrete, strengthen students' understanding, and build vocabulary for learning. The contextual differences in the meaning of migration in this example could be easily taught using symbols of a zebra or people, alongside arrows on a map to represent their movement from one location to another.

## 3. Create a sense of belonging

When a child with EAL starts at a new school, it can be bewildering, particularly if the experience is very different from what they knew before. Younger children might wonder when it's time to eat lunch or where to hang their coats, for example. For an older student, making their way through a packed timetable of subjects in

an unfamiliar language can be especially daunting. If pupils are worried about routines, it's much harder for them to concentrate and take part in lessons.

Timetables that include symbols for subjects such as maths, science, and PE, or activities like library visits or playground time, help children settle into new routines quickly. Teachers can also use personalised “now and next” boards to set pupils' expectations and break time down into manageable steps to reduce anxiety.

Supporting pupils whose first language is not English with strategies such as collaborative learning and visual prompts does not lower expectations of what they or their peers can achieve. It removes unnecessary barriers and helps each child to feel included in the wider learning community, encouraging them to achieve their goals and thrive.

My Timetable								
	9:00	10:00	10:30	12:00	12:30	1:30	2:00	3:15
Monday	Literacy	Playtime	Maths	Lunch	History	Playtime	Art	Home
Tuesday	Literacy	Playtime	Maths	Lunch	Geography	Playtime	P.E.	Home
Wednesday	Literacy	Playtime	Maths	Lunch	Science	Playtime	D.T.	Home
Thursday	Literacy	Playtime	Maths	Lunch	R.E.	Playtime	Music	Home
Friday	Assembly	Playtime	Maths	Lunch	P.E.	Playtime	Storytime	Home

1 Language Trends England 2025: Language teaching in primary, secondary and independent schools in England, British Council, [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language\\_trends\\_england\\_2025.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_england_2025.pdf)  
2 Translanguaging, The Bell Foundation, <https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/resources/great-ideas/translanguaging>

3 Report: Proficiency in English is central to understanding the educational attainment of learners using EAL, but how long does it take to achieve, and what support do these learners need? The Bell Foundation, <https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/news/new-report-proficiency-in-english-is-central-to-understanding-the-educational-attainment-of-learners-using-eal-but-how-long-does-it-take-to-achieve-and-what-support-do-these-learners-need>

4 <https://www.widgit.com/sectors/education/eal.htm>

Laura is also a contributor to the recently published report 'Unlock Understanding for Children with EAL', available at: <https://www.widgit.com/about-symbols/booklets/eal-guide.pdf>

## Overseas opening



Rugby School Group is opening a new co-educational school in Vietnam, initially with a pre-prep facility in Hanoi in September 2026, followed by prep and senior provision in 2027.

The project is being delivered in cooperation with Khai Sang Corporation, an education investor in Vietnam, led by Mr Tuyen Nguyen. With five schools already in operation, Khai Sang will establish its first capital-based school at Rugby School Hanoi, located in Ciputra, near Hanoi's West Lake.

Rugby School Hanoi will be the ninth school in Rugby School

Group, joining Rugby School Thailand, Rugby School Japan, Rugby School Nigeria, and Rugby School Dubai, in addition to three prep schools in the United Kingdom (Bilton Grange, Warwickshire, Aysgarth, North Yorkshire, and Old Buckenham Hall, Suffolk).

Chair of Rugby School Group Governing Body, Nick Bacon, commented: "We are honoured to be working in Vietnam, a country with a vibrant cultural and educational tradition. We seek to support educational development both in Hanoi and in the country as a whole."

Pictured: Planned interior of Rugby School Hanoi

## Global expansion

In a partnership announced at the British Consulate-General in São Paulo, Malvern College, Worcestershire, and Bossa Nova Edulink LTDA, have confirmed plans to open Malvern College São Paulo in the 2027/2028 academic year.

The move will establish the first British heritage-branded school in the region, and forms part of Malvern College's global expansion strategy.

The announcement is in line with the UK government's new International Education Strategy, unveiled in January, to export the country's world-class education expertise worldwide.

Located in São Paulo's metropolitan area, the new school will welcome students

from Early Years through Year 13 (ages 3-18), offering an internationally recognised curriculum combining the International Baccalaureate (IB) and British-based education frameworks, adapted for Brazilian students.

English will be the primary teaching language, complemented by strong Portuguese provision to ensure students are both internationally competitive and deeply grounded in Brazilian culture.

The announcement follows Malvern College's September 2025 partnership announcement with KSA Education Investment Partners to launch Malvern College Riyadh, also scheduled to open in 2027.



Malvern Head Keith Metcalfe



Chairman of Bossa Nova Edulink Maged Ezzeldin



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# Why modern pastoral care is a partnership, not a provision

Shiplake College, Oxfordshire, recently held its very first Wellbeing Day, that was open to all parents in the wider local community. Its aim was to provide advice and practical strategies that could help teens to thrive. Head of Community and Development at the college, Natalie Spearing, outlines the background to the event, what the day itself looked like, and shares some plans for the future.

In the independent sector, we often talk about a holistic education. We pride ourselves on developing the whole child, ensuring that academic rigour is balanced by a robust co-curricular programme. However, as the pastoral landscape shifts under the weight of a post-pandemic world, it is becoming increasingly clear that the whole child cannot thrive if their physical, mental, and emotional foundations are not solid and supported.

At Shiplake, we are in a highly privileged position to have an excellent pastoral team; indeed, our recent ISI inspection cited a significant strength in this area. However, as we know this is an ever-evolving landscape, we certainly do not take this for granted. We are always looking at new and innovative ways to strengthen this offer while providing bespoke support and care to our pupils and parents.

## The ripple effect

When a pupil struggles with anxiety, neurodiversity, poor nutrition, or heightened concerns about exams, the ripple effect impacts siblings, parental relationships, and the overall harmony of the home. Those ripples are felt throughout the pupil's school life and can have a lasting effect if not identified and managed. By sharing the load and opening up the conversation, we are sending a clear message to our families that it is a team effort, and we are partners in this most unique, challenging and rewarding of journeys.

## Beating the January Blues

On 31 January 2026, Shiplake College hosted its very first Wellbeing Day. This was a wonderful opportunity to share knowledge and understanding on the challenges our young people face in today's world.

We chose late January, which is often a challenging month for us all; the festive cheer has faded, and the shadow of the summer

exams begins to cast itself over Year 11 and 13 households. However, the work to put together this event started many months prior.

## Speakers that resonate

It was important to us to align the values of our school – Individual, Inclusive, and Inspirational – with the needs of our parents and the wider community. We consulted on content and spent considerable time formulating the line-up of speakers and specialists. These were then curated to address specific areas moving away from generic “wellness” and leaning into the complexities of contemporary parenting.

Hosted by broadcaster Ginny Buckley, the day was opened by our Headmaster, Tyrone Howe, followed by a keynote speaker, Q&A session and a specialist carousel:

- **Building resilience:** Alicia Drummond, CEO of the Wellbeing Hub and our keynote speaker, discussed the importance of letting children fail safely in her talk, ‘Every teenager needs a parrot’. She focused on building the grit necessary to navigate a world that isn't always kind or predictable.
- **Menopause and perimenopause:** Dr Shilpa McQuillan (The Berkshire Menopause Clinic) joined us for a Q&A session which provided inspiration and key learnings for everyone in the room. Whilst not directly linked to teenage wellbeing, the connection was immediately obvious when considering the pressures of the modern “sandwich generation” family.
- **Neurodiversity (ADHD):** Rory Aberly (R4ndom Rory) talked with sincerity and lived experience about ADHD. He helped to reframe the narrative as a learning difference rather than a deficit, one that



requires an alternative, tailored approach.

- **Nutrition and the brain:** Nutritionist Michelle Smith (Forage Nutrition) examined the physiological link between gut health and mental clarity, helping parents understand how modern diets impact mood regulation, focus, and sporting performance.
- **Personal and travel safety:** As our pupils gain independence, the “outside world” presents new risks as well as great opportunities. Simon Faulkner (My Travel Safety) provided practical advice on personal safety, from the first foray into festivals to gap-year travel, addressing the anxiety parents feel as the “apron strings” start to fray.
- **Exam stress and anxiety:** We closed with a session on how parents can manage exam stress, led by Helen Frost from the Shiplake pastoral team.

## The vision: A new wellbeing centre

Underpinning this event was a wider ambition to build a new, purpose-built space for wellbeing. The event acted as the launch for our Paws for Thought Campaign, running through 2026 to raise funds for this new facility.

We worked with Rupert Fawcett,

the cartoonist well known for the ‘Fred’ and ‘Off the Leash’ series, to create a clean campaign design reflecting a simple narrative around wellbeing with a humorous edge. The campaign featured hand-drawn cartoons of our ‘Shiplake Dogs’ – a famous feature of our college – which worked hand-in-hand with our wellbeing narrative.

## A positive start to 2026

The feedback from the day has been overwhelmingly positive. Parents have found great value in the sessions and are offering support for future events. We were incredibly buoyed by such a supportive response with all profits raised from the ticket prices going towards our Paws for Thought Campaign.

Our journey towards the new Wellbeing Centre has only just begun, but the energy from 31 January has proven that there is a significant appetite for more knowledge and a desire to build on the foundations of our first event. With feedback provided, we are now looking to 2027 and how we can enhance and evolve this event to bring more meaningful, purposeful knowledge and shared experience to our community.

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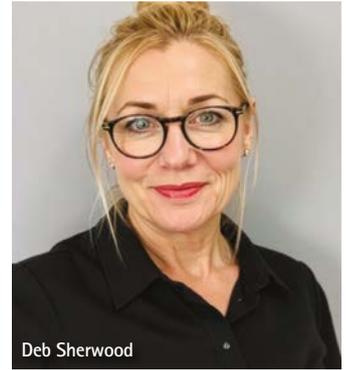
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# The KGS Accelerator: Empowering students to develop a "future-focused" mindset for the workplaces of tomorrow

Last September, Kingston Grammar School, Surrey, launched what is known as the KGS Accelerator. A careers and futures programme aimed at Lower Sixth students, it features alumni who come in and give TED Talk-style sessions each fortnight. However, the focus of the initiative is less on delivering a traditional careers talk but more on inspiring students to think differently about their future (non-linear) career pathways, the skills they might need, and what the workplace might look like to them. Programme lead and KGS Director of International, Deb Sherwood, explains what it is all about.



Two challenges, one proactive approach: in late 2024, the prospect of VAT on independent school fees was looming. At the same time, a conversation amongst global educators challenged us to think deeply about how we could better support our Sixth Form students in preparing for a workplace that is uncertain, disrupted and changing faster than ever before.

In a highly competitive local market – surrounded as we are by excellent independent and state schools – alongside a challenging economic landscape, it has never been more important to demonstrate the added value of an education at Kingston Grammar School. How could we enrich the Sixth Form experience in a genuinely relevant and engaging way whilst creating a marketable initiative that would help set us apart?

The KGS Accelerator was part of our answer. Launching to Lower Sixth students in September 2025, it has been developed as an exciting addition to the academic curriculum.

Built into the timetable each fortnight, our inspiring alumni –

whose accomplishments span the creative industries, technology, finance, aviation, sport, healthcare and academia – come back to school to deliver TED Talk-style sessions, discussing their entrepreneurial or non-linear career pathways and talking about why key transferable skills are crucial in a rapidly evolving workplace. Leaders, innovators, and changemakers, each offers unique insights to our student community.

Data from the World Economic Forum's 'The Future of Jobs' report suggests that the future employment market will experience significant disruption. From critical thinking and creativity to technological literacy and adaptability, KGS is focussed on highlighting the need for agility and durable skills, alongside the more traditional diet of academic success, a culture of service, and co-curricular engagement.

We were motivated to start a conversation amongst our students to get them thinking differently about their future pathways. We know the alumni story is always enormously powerful, and as we enter a new era of technological, societal, and economic change, alongside transformational

breakthroughs, particularly in generative AI, we wanted to help students make informed decisions around higher education courses and careers choices, leaning on – and learning from – those at the forefront of some of this change.

A key focus of the KGS Accelerator has been to create a dynamic and energetic brand that is complemented by a delivery format that turns the traditional "careers talk" on its head. With presentations focusing on "what I would tell my 16-year-old self," our alumni discuss pivotal decisions, successes – and the inevitable failures.

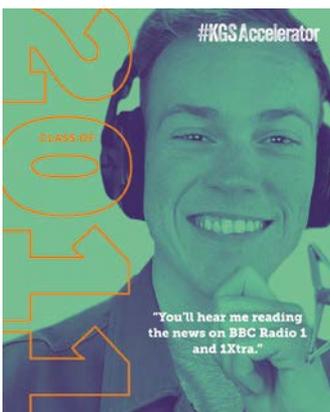
Using our 200-seat theatre means that each session is colourful and energetic; being able to make use of the audio-visual facilities makes an immediate impact and point of difference from a normal classroom-based lesson. As students take their seats, a track chosen by the alumni speaker is played. On a large screen, we show their biography, designed to make the speakers relatable whilst giving students context about their careers. These biographies are shared in the days preceding each Accelerator session to encourage engagement in the Q&A. These

points of presentational difference, along with a curated colour palette, have helped us create a fresh and engaging programme.

A year in the planning, it is now an ingrained and popular element of the Lower Sixth academic enrichment programme. Designed to inspire and provoke, the emphasis is clear: thriving in tomorrow's world means sharpening key transferable skills. And nothing lands quite as powerfully as the alumni story – honest reflections on pivotal choices, bold moves, the inevitable setbacks, and the breakthroughs they couldn't have predicted.

It has been a real pleasure reconnecting with alumni for our first term of live events. As the programme evolves, we are delighted to be expanding it to include overseas alumni who will deliver online sessions. We will also be welcoming external industry experts who will bring specific insights around entrepreneurial mindset, creative leadership, and human-centred AI innovation.

As future employment is disrupted and reshaped, this programme is about giving our students the tools – and the courage – to make confident, informed decisions. Through the KGS Accelerator, we want to empower our students to pause, think, pivot, challenge, imagine, and be inspired, and look forward to developing this element of their time in the Sixth Form at Kingston Grammar School.



Pictured: Speaker posters

## Careers EXPO

RGS Worcester has hosted its 12th annual Careers & Higher Education EXPO, welcoming universities, employers, and industry professionals from across the UK to support pupils as they explored future education and career pathways.

The event brought more than 80 exhibitors and over 600 attendees to the school, with pupils from Year Seven to Upper Sixth, alongside families and



visitors from local schools, given the opportunity to speak directly with experts and gain insight into the wide range of opportunities available beyond school.

Head of Careers at RGS Worcester, Mrs Audrey Williams, who organised the event, said: "This year we welcomed representatives from a wide range of universities across the UK, advising students on Higher Education options, applying to competitive courses and studying in Scotland. Many delegates were also able to offer guidance on Degree Apprenticeships and application routes, while students showed strong interest in exploring work experience opportunities and future career pathways."

Throughout the evening, pupils also attended specialist careers talks delivered by visiting delegates, covering topics including competitive university applications, gap years and careers linked to Psychology.

Pictured: The 2026 Careers EXPO at RGS Worcester

## Futures Fair



Bishop's Stortford College, Hertfordshire, has hosted its first ever Bishop's Stortford Educational Trust (BSET) Futures Fair.

Free, and open to all in and around the Bishop's Stortford community, the fair saw over 950 attendees from 19 local secondary schools.

Pupils from Years 8-13 had the opportunity to explore the range of post-18 options available to them with 38 exhibitors in attendance, across universities, employers, and school leaver opportunity providers including University of Cambridge, University of Exeter, Durham University, The

Pictured: The BSET Futures Fair  
Photo credit: Bishop's Stortford College

Degree Gap, Manchester Airport Group, Unilever, GSK, and more.

A talks programme also provided expert insights into competitive university applications, degree apprenticeships, studying abroad, and how parents can support their child's post-18 options.

Head of Futures at Bishop's Stortford College, Louisa Piercy, commented: "By bringing universities, employers and training providers together in this way we've been able to give students across the community a valuable opportunity to explore the many pathways open to them and to broaden their horizons."

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## End the evening with a campfire...

It is time to refuel after a fun-filled day. Choose from delicious, hearty and nutritious meals which cater to all dietary requirements. From enjoying home-cooked classics, like Beef Ragù to international flavours like Chickpea & Lentil Curry – there is something for every taste bud! After your evening meal,

reflect on your action-packed day by toasting marshmallows on the campfire.

## Sail the straits

Start your day off sailing the straits right from our very own private dock! Led by expert tutors with RYA qualifications, young people will learn all about the different parts of a Sailing Boat before it is time for them to take control. As they tack and jibe the boat through the waves, they will sail the local environment exploring under the Menai Bridge, Caernarfon and "the swellies."

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## Playing to fail vs failing to play

Director of Sport at Loretto School, East Lothian, and former Scotland pro rugby union player, Jason White, discusses the role sport can play in helping children shift from a fear of failure to a preparedness to fail both on and off the pitch, and what teachers can do to nurture a genuine love of sport.



Jason White

Like many others, I have been tuning into the Six Nations Championship, cheering on team Scotland as they strive to win the tournament – and, in doing so, inspire the next generation of young players.

Watching the games conjures reflections of my own pro rugby career: the life-affirming wins, the losses, the camaraderie with fellow players, and the tenacity required to head out on the pitch after a painful defeat.

As I was reminded watching Scotland lose against Italy early in the competition, the reality is that professional athletes fail so much more than they win. That was certainly true of my career: there can only ever be one winner, and for everyone else that means missing out.

Roger Federer, arguably the most globally celebrated tennis player, reported losing almost half of the points he played at the peak of his career. The frequency of these losses instilled within him

a resilience and ability to handle repeated failure with composure and grace, ultimately contributing to his victories. Even at the very top of the sport, champions are shaped by the moments in which they fail.

The ability to try in the face of failure is something we, as teachers, should be nurturing in all our pupils. As Director of Sport at Loretto School, I have come across children unwilling to participate in sports due to fear of failure. Rather than risk embarrassment or disappointment, they choose not to engage. I see it as my job to encourage pupils to try despite the possibility of defeat, or in fact, just because they might lose – and learn something from it.

Sport offers young people so much beyond the physical health benefits. It builds self-belief, resilience, determination, confidence, dedication, and passion – qualities that are strengthened every time they show up and push themselves just

a bit further. It teaches children not to underestimate themselves, to put their best foot forward, to enjoy taking part and to give it their all – even when success isn't guaranteed.

After all, it is through defeat that we better our game, and ourselves. At Loretto, when an aspiring athlete loses an important match, we objectively review their performance, identifying possible weaknesses and evaluating the areas in which their competitor was superior. Doing so allows us to address performance issues and ultimately build a stronger player.

So, what can teachers do? Nurture a genuine love for sport by giving young people the opportunity to explore different options and discover their passion – regardless of their perceived ability. At Loretto, our breadth of offering affords children the chance to participate in an array of sporting options, from athletics to cricket, rock climbing to rugby, and more. Whether they show

immediate talent or otherwise, pupils are encouraged to have fun, experiment, and take part, cultivating a long-lasting love for physical activity.

This broad approach prevents the risk of athletic burnout and allows younger players to develop a variety of skills. Then, should a pupil show a flair for running, be enthusiastic about swimming, or have ambitions of becoming a professional golfer, we can streamline their programme and focus on nurturing athletic prowess.

Whether a budding sportsperson or a hobbyist, the lessons we learn from sport can be applied across all aspects of life. Taking part in regular physical activity develops problem solving, strategic thinking, communication, cooperation, commitment, and mental fitness – qualities that are not only important in young athletes, but all young people.

As Loretto's Director of Sport, my role isn't to produce trophy-winners. It's to nurture well-rounded, resilient, fulfilled, and energetic individuals with a genuine love of sport. So, when a team wins at Loretto, we celebrate their success. And when they don't, we pick them up and get back out there. This is true of life outside of the game, too: it is our responsibility as educators to encourage children to get out there, embrace different challenges, and learn from their mistakes.

Top performers are not defined by winning every game, but by their ability to overcome losses and get back on the pitch. It is this mentality that we seek to instil in our pupils.



Pictured: Rugby at Loretto School



## Expansion of sports facilities

Surbiton High School, Surrey, part of the United Learning Group, has announced that United Learning have purchased buildings at Harts Boatyard in Surbiton.

It will become the home of the school's rowing programme and an additional base for its sports provision.

A five-minute walk from the school, the new facilities will offer convenience and ease of use. The school's intention is to refurbish and adapt the site to provide a base for pupils to train, both on

Pictured: The proposed facilities at Harts Boatyard

the water, and for land training through, in due course, providing a large fitness space, conditioning gym, changing rooms, and boat storage. In doing so it will provide additional gym space for all sports at the school.

Principal Mr Matthew Shoultz stated: "This significant investment in our sporting facilities will provide an ideal base for our pupils to train and is a welcome addition to our 39-acre sports ground at Hinchley Wood and our current boathouse in Teddington."



## Hockey bronze

The U16 girls' hockey team from Stephen Perse Cambridge have beaten off the competition to secure a place in the top three teams in this year's England Hockey Girls U16 Schools Vase Finals in Nottingham.

Deputy Head of Co-Curricular at Stephen Perse Cambridge,

Pictured: Stephen Perse Cambridge U16 girls hockey team  
Photo credit: Adam Scott

Jenny McLeod, said: "The squad secured a well-deserved top three finish, building on last year's already impressive fourth place. Sports, such as hockey, help our students build important skills such as teamwork, leadership and discipline, all of which were evident during the tournament."



## Netball

Wrekin College, Shropshire, is celebrating after its U19 Netball team has secured places in both the National Schools Cup Final and the National Cup Final – reaching two national finals within the space of just two weeks.

The team will now travel to compete at the National Schools Cup Final at Loughborough University this month, followed by the National Cup Final at the English Institute of Sport (EIS) in Sheffield."

Pictured: The U19 netball team

Leading the side is captain Millie, who balances her commitments at Wrekin with competing at an elite level as a Roses Academy player as well as representing Nottingham Forest NXT GEN.

Supporters from the school community plan to travel to both finals to cheer on the team.

The news comes as the school also celebrates a number of regional titles in hockey and swimming success at both regional and national level.



## Sports development plans

Repton School, Derbyshire, has announced a major investment in its sporting infrastructure with the development of two new full-size floodlit 3G football pitches, a modern multi-use pavilion, expanded parking facilities, and four covered padel courts.

The new FA-standard 3G pitches will enable year-round training and competition, supporting both performance and participation across all age groups.

Central to the development is a pavilion designed to support athletes and visitors with high-quality changing facilities, social and viewing spaces, and flexible areas for coaching, analysis, and events. Expanded on-site

Pictured: Artist impression of the new facilities

parking will improve accessibility for parents, visiting teams, and community users, ensuring the new complex can host large-scale fixtures and programmes with ease.

The facilities are expected to benefit not only Repton pupils but also the wider sporting community, creating new opportunities for partnerships, training camps, and player development initiatives. The school plans to work closely with leading professional clubs and academies, welcoming elite pathways onto campus while also growing grassroots participation and community engagement.

Construction is set to start Summer 2026.



## School of the Year Award

Bede's School, East Sussex, are celebrating after winning at the Tennis Sussex LTA Awards. In a ceremony celebrating the very best of Sussex tennis, Bede's secured the 'School of the Year' award.

The evening saw 12 LTA Awards and 22 Tennis Sussex Awards presented to the region's top athletes, coaches, and institutions. Bede's was recognised for its commitment to tennis in the county.

The 'School of the Year'

Pictured: Bede's Tennis Photo credit: Bede's School

accolade follows a landmark year for the Bede's Tennis Academy. Most notably, Bede's was one of only four schools in the entire country to successfully qualify both its Boys' and Girls' teams for the National Finals.

Upper Sixth pupil, Jack Ford, also won the Brian Edwards Award for the second consecutive year, with Bede's alumnus and Wimbledon Men's Doubles Champion 2025, Julian Cash, named Player of the Year.



## Golf partnership

Loughborough Schools Foundation (LSF), has announced a new partnership with Longcliffe Golf Club.

The partnership will offer structured coaching for pupils from Year 5 in Fairfield Prep School, Leicestershire, through to Year 13 at Loughborough Grammar and Loughborough High Schools, with the programme including after-school coaching clubs. Senior pupils will also have the opportunity to select golf as part of the optional games programme.

During the sessions provided by Longcliffe's PGA Professional, Ed, full use of the driving range will be exclusively allocated to LSF pupils. All equipment and balls will be provided, ensuring accessibility for beginners as well as those looking to refine their technique. In addition, pupils wishing to further

their golf development will be able to join Longcliffe's junior weekend sessions independently.

The connection between LSF and Longcliffe has also been further strengthened by the appointment of Loughborough Grammar School sports scholar, William Simpkin, as Junior Captain at Longcliffe Golf Club.

William was officially appointed at the club's traditional Captain's Drive-In ceremony earlier in the year, where captains marched from the clubhouse to the first tee accompanied by bagpipes before teeing off, followed by a celebratory reception. William is looking forward to his year of captaincy and has ambitious plans to support junior golfers at the club while raising funds for LOROS, a local hospice.

Pictured: William Simpkin with Pat Larkin, the Pipe Major of Notts Pipe Band (played as the new Captains arrived to the first tee) and Longcliffe Golf Club

## District swimming champs

Pupils from Ursuline Prep School, Warley, Essex, have taken part in a District Swimming Gala held at Brentwood School, Essex.

Separated into A and B teams, and boys and girls, they participated in

several different races incorporating the key strokes within this field of sport. After a successful day, which saw both teams finishing in the first place, they were crowned Small Schools District Champions.



Pictured: The winning girls and boys teams



## European Shooting Championships

Matilda, a Year 13 pupil from Ipswich High School, Suffolk, has represented Great Britain at the 2026 European Championships 10m Rifle/Pistol in Burgas, Bulgaria.

Competing in the U18 Women's Air Pistol category, Matilda qualified 11th in the Solo Match and took part in Individual, Duet, and Trio events alongside her British Shooting teammates.

Pictured: Competing at the European Shooting Championships

# Romilly School, Wales, delighted with Fast Track Sports Hall transformation using Taraflex SL Sports Flooring from Gerflor

Romilly Primary School in Barry, Wales, faced a key challenge! The urgent need to replace their aging sports hall floor fast and with minimal downtime! The education facility was well overdue with its flooring upgrade and required a fast-track sustainable renovation. The sports floor would need to meet a high-performance criterion for safety and comfort to protect its young users, whilst also meeting modern standards. Gerflor were delighted to assist with this transformation with the supply of its Taraflex Evolution SL Sports Flooring.

Commenting on the project, Tony Thorne, Gerflor Sales and Specification Manager, South Wales said: "The refurbishment of the school's sports hall flooring was a proven example of how Gerflor's Taraflex Evolution SL sports flooring was able to supply the ideal solution for the client, with the minimum of fuss and disruption to the schools' day-to-day activities. Specifying the Taraflex SL sports floor covering also pressed a number of eco buttons which was high on the school's agenda."

From a sustainability perspective, the project incorporated the Taraflex

Evolution SL product, a loose-lay flooring solution selected for its environmental benefits. By removing the need for adhesive, this option not only reduces the environmental impact but also allows the floor to be recycled at the end of its 25-year life cycle. Installed using double-sided tape, the floor can be easily removed, enabling minor repairs to the undercarriage before a new floor is laid. In contrast, using adhesives would have compromised the undercarriage, making Taraflex SL Sports Flooring the natural choice as a more sustainable and practical solution.

Delivering a solution that was both visually striking and highly practical for a demanding sports facility was a challenge expertly met by Cardiff-based Trefoil Interiors. Dan Townsend, Commercial Director at Trefoil Interiors said: "It was clear that there are very few products on the market that could meet the specific requirements for this education project. Due to time and cost constraints, a screed system simply wasn't viable. With the Taraflex SL sports flooring solution and also with the exceptional support throughout

the process from Tony Thorne at Gerflor, the end result would not have been possible, a successfully delivered fit for purpose sports floor for the school and the variety of its users."

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# CHANGING FACES... CHANGING PLACES...



Stephen Campbell, has been named as the next Head of The King Alfred School, London. He will be taking over in September from current Head, Robert Lobatto, who is retiring from Headship in the summer after 11 years at The King Alfred School (and after 19 years as a Head). Currently Chief Strategy Officer at Pymble Ladies' College, an

independent, non-selective school in Sydney, Australia, Stephen has also worked at an international school in Kuala Lumpur, served as Head of English at Kingswood School in Bath, and spent seven years at Haileybury, Hertfordshire, where he was Deputy Head (Academic).

He will be returning to the UK in the spring with his wife and two teenage children.



Mrs Claire Gilding-Brant has been appointed as the new Head of Luckley House School, Berkshire, from the spring term 2026.

Having served in senior positions at Luckley for over a decade, Mrs Gilding-Brant, has most recently been the Interim Headmistress following her tenure as Senior Deputy Head.

Claire is also an ISI Team Inspector and holds an MA in Education from the University of Reading. She is currently pursuing doctoral research in educational leadership, focusing on peer influence in implementing behaviour policies.

In addition to her work at Luckley, Mrs Gilding-Brant also serves as a Governor of a Prep School in nearby Windsor.



St Margaret's School, Hertfordshire, has announced the appointment of Ben

Turner as their new headteacher from August 2026. Ben will be the second male headteacher to lead the school on its Bushey site since it opened there in 1897.

Currently Senior Deputy Head at Wimbledon High School, London, Mr Turner will succeed Lara Péchard, who is to become the head of Felsted School, Essex.

Educated at Royal Holloway, University of London, and the Institute of Education, and a teacher of History and Politics, Ben has worked in independent education for the past 16 years.

Prior to Wimbledon High School, Ben spent eight years at Whitgift School, Surrey.

Outside of school Ben enjoys the outdoors, running, and skiing, and is an enthusiastic cook who enjoys discovering new restaurants and cuisines.

## HMC Chair

HMC (The Heads' Conference) has announced the appointment of Lisa Kerr, Principal of George Watson's College, Edinburgh, as the next Chair of HMC, taking up the role for the 2027/2028 academic year. She will succeed Dr Anne Cotton, Head of King's College School Wimbledon, London.

Lisa has been an active contributor to HMC's work, as both Secretary and Chair of the Scottish Division and as an HMC Board member since March 2023. She brings leadership and governance experience from her roles as Principal of George Watson's College, Governor then Principal of Gordonstoun School, Moray, and RGS Newcastle



where she serves on the Board of Governors.

Lisa Kerr said: "It is an honour to be appointed as the next Chair of HMC. I look forward to working with colleagues across the association to ensure HMC continues to be a strong voice for our schools and for the vital role they play within the wider educational landscape."

## ISBA Chief Executive

The Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA) has announced the appointment of Catherine Spencer as its new Chief Executive. She will take up the role on 1 May 2026.

Catherine has a track record of executive leadership across the charitable and membership sectors. Most recently, she served as Chief Executive Officer of The Cochrane Collaboration, a global membership organisation known for advancing evidence-based healthcare.

Catherine Spencer OBE, on her appointment, said: "Independent schools make a profound contribution to this country and I am honoured to join ISBA at

such an important time in its history. As the sector navigates significant external pressures, its membership organisations play an increasingly important role in amplifying schools' voices, sharing expertise, and championing excellence. I look forward to working with members, partners, and colleagues to build on the organisation's strong foundations and advance its mission, recognising and supporting the outstanding work bursars and senior business leaders deliver in schools every day."

Catherine will succeed David Woodgate, who announced his retirement at the end of last year.



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## The Independent Schools Magazine

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The Independent Schools Magazine is read by decision-makers – Governors, Heads, Bursars, Departmental Managers – and reflects news, ideas, influences, and opinions in the independent education sector. A personal printed copy is mailed to heads and other key personnel in fee-paying independent schools plus opinion formers in government, political parties and educational associations. It is also available as a free eMagazine and online.

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#### Advertising Sales & Accounts:

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

#### Editor & Publisher, Distribution:

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

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

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

#### Consultant:

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

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

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A photograph of two young women standing on a balcony with a metal railing, laughing and looking towards the right. The woman on the left is wearing a dark blue sweater over a white collared shirt and dark blue trousers. The woman on the right is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with a red collar and a dark blue skirt with a red grid pattern. The background shows a clear blue sky and green trees.

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