

November/December 2025

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In this issue...



Launch of dyslexia-friendly book

Two pupils from King Edward VI Preparatory School (KES Prep), Hampshire, have played a key role in helping to write a new children's book titled 'Fur and Feathers Fight for the World' – a dyslexia-friendly book in both font and page colour, and one of the first of its kind to involve dyslexic children in its creation.

The official book launch took place at Waterstones in Romsey, where historian and broadcaster Dan Snow cut the ribbon to celebrate the publication.

Orla and Penelope, who both have dyslexia, contributed their ideas and writing to the project with the support of Nicola Collings, King Edward VI Preparatory School's visiting dyslexia tutor. The pupils developed each of the characters themselves and generated all the ideas for the story. Using AI technology, they shared and refined their ideas orally before editing them together to form a complete narrative.

As part of the publishing process, Penelope visited Indigo Printing in Southampton during the summer holidays, where she saw first-hand how the book would be produced and helped make creative decisions about its format – including paper choice, layout, and finish.

Orla and Penelope are also set to host a whole-school assembly where pupils will have the opportunity to listen to the story, learn how the book came to life, and to purchase their own copies.

To find out more about the book visit: <https://tinyurl.com/2a9pbnea>. All profits will be donated to the school's charity.

Pictured: Orla and Penelope with Dan Snow

Cover background

Remembering together

Find out more about the war memorials at Radley College, Oxfordshire, and the place they have in the school today, and get involved with a new initiative that has been launched by the Boarding Schools' Association (BSA). See pages 18–19.

Pictured: After a Remembrance service at Radley College in 2018. Photo credit: Clare Sargent

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Is your school mentioned?

Schools featured in this issue include:

Abbots Hill School; Bilton Grange Prep School; Bolton School; Bosworth Independent School; Bradford Grammar School; Bryanston School; Burgess Hill Girls; Eton College; Finborough School; Forbes Sandle Manor; Gordonstoun; Haberdashers' Monmouth School; Highfield and Brookham School; Hurstpierpoint College; Kimbolton; King Edward VI Preparatory School (KES); King's Hawford School; Kingswood School; Leicester High School for Girls; Lord Wandsworth College; New Hall School; Norwich High School for Girls; Mill Hill School; Milton Abbey School; Moreton Hall; Morrison's Academy; Polwhale House School; Radley College; St George's College, Weybridge; St. Helen's College, Hillingdon; St Helen's School, Northwood; Solihull School; Stephen Perse Foundation; Sutton High School; Teesside High School; The Unicorn School; Ursuline Prep School, Warley; Westbourne International; Westholme

Season's Greetings

As has become our tradition, this is a combined November/December issue. The next magazine will be out in January.

The team at ISM wish all readers, advertisers, and contributors a pleasant Christmas and a successful, peaceful 2026.



Independent schools: a resource for social mobility, not a problem to be taxed away

With recent headlines suggesting that “across a range of sectors, the UK’s most powerful and influential people are still 5 times more likely to have attended private schools than the general population¹,” Principal of Stephen Perse Foundation, Cambridgeshire, Richard Girvan, argues that instead of independent schools being seen as obstacles to social mobility, they should be recognised as a resource to be expanded to include the socially disadvantaged rather than shrunk to serve an even smaller group.



Richard Girvan

A recent Sutton Trust report² has rehearsed familiar tropes about Britain’s independent schools, focusing on the “problem of privilege”; defined as disproportionate access to elite universities, the reproduction of advantage, and the unfairness of wealth. Such critiques have substance, but they are only part of the picture.

Crucially, they offer little value to lead to meaningful outcomes for children growing up in poverty.

What these accounts fail to acknowledge is the evidence that when the privileges of independent education are extended to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the results are transformative.

I cannot help but observe the manifest inconsistency in some critiques. Few people argue that Oxford and Cambridge should be abolished because they are elite, privileged institutions. Instead, the expectation is that they should continue to exist, but admit and financially support more students from less wealthy backgrounds. I agree wholeheartedly. But the same logic should apply to independent schools.

To claim that their very existence is illegitimate while celebrating access to other bastions of privilege – whether elite universities or high-paying professions – is at best incoherent and at worst malevolent. Privilege in itself is not the problem; socially and economically exclusive privilege is. Privilege shared and made accessible, becomes the means by which aspiration and opportunity are extended to all, making for a more prosperous and culturally richer society.

My experience in state and independent schools leads me to urge those in government to stop seeing independent schools as a structural obstacle to social mobility and instead harness their power as part of a transformative solution.

Bursaries and partnerships that change lives

Independent schools are powerful agents of social mobility when they open their doors through fully funded bursaries for children from the least privileged backgrounds. Not just tuition fees waived, but the full cost of participation covered – uniform, technology, co-curricular activities, trips, pastoral mentoring, work experience, and access to assistive networks.

At Stephen Perse, Cambridge, we have grown our bursary provision over five years, supported by partnerships with local employers such as Costello Medical, supporting young people from low-income families, care leavers, carers, children with family in prison, or children who have suffered familial bereavement. We welcome young people from North Cambridge Academy (whose pupils finish at age 16), which serves one of the city’s most disadvantaged communities with around half of all students eligible for free school meals (double the national average), to enter our Sixth Form.

This initiative works precisely because it provides opportunities not generally available in mainstream state provision, and which would be impossible to replicate under current approaches to funding education. Rather than wait for an impoverished state to plug the gap, we have sought partners and funding, and begun addressing the challenge of social mobility in one of the UK’s most unequal cities.

The entry point at 16 ensures young people benefit from support when it can make an enormous difference to their sense of identity, direction, confidence, and purpose. However, we are not a wealthy foundation with a large endowment (unlike some of our independent school peers) – each place needs to be cross subsidised out of school fee income or fundraising. Even so, the results of just a two-year programme are remarkable and the success stories

strongly outweigh the times when, despite everyone’s best efforts, things did not work out.

Our partnership approach is place-based. We address local social and economic deprivation using existing structures, driven by an ambition and a willingness to do better for our city. But we are not the first or the only – there is compelling evidence that social mobility interventions succeed when they confer the structures of privilege on the under-privileged:

- **Royal National Children’s SpringBoard Foundation:** Britain’s largest bursary charity has enabled thousands of vulnerable children to attend leading independent schools, with striking outcomes: stronger exam results, higher university entry rates, and improved confidence.
- **IntoUniversity:** Supports disadvantaged young people with academic mentoring, university visits, and enrichment activities, exposing children early to the “cultural capital” that affluent families take for granted.
- **Sutton Trust Summer Schools:** By offering residential experiences in leading universities to pupils who would otherwise never imagine themselves in such places, they have transformed access to higher education.

These programmes succeed because they give children access to the privileges that money buys – excellent facilities, expert teaching, expansive networks, and continuous confidence-building experiences. These “privileges” are the very levers that unlock social mobility.

This is why imposing VAT on independent school fees entirely misses the mark. Taxing independent schools will not provide access to the costly privileges that drive social mobility; it will simply diminish the sector’s capacity to extend them.

Beyond bursaries, government policy could reshape educational

opportunity through a national voucher-style system where a substantial share of public funding allocated per pupil could be used by parents choosing independent schools. The remaining fee difference would be met by means-tested bursary, with parents contributing what they can afford.

Such a scheme would open access to independent schools, reduce state provision costs, increase parental choice, and channel more private economy investment into education. Eight US states now operate universal private school choice programmes, with thirty states plus Washington DC having some form of voucher scheme, proving this can be done fairly alongside a strong state sector.

A genuinely progressive government would not shun or tax independent schools as symbols of inequality, but would instead:

1. Expand bursary funding through public-private partnership.
2. Embed sustainable collaborations between state and independent schools.
3. Introduce voucher-style systems to empower parental choice.
4. Measure and publish outcomes for bursary students.
5. Reward schools committing significant fee income to widening access.

The evidence is clear: when children from the lowest-income families are given the same privileges as their wealthier peers, their life chances change dramatically. Independent schools are uniquely placed to provide those privileges – not as elitist enclaves, but as engines of opportunity.

The choice before us is clear: continue to frame independent schools as part of the problem, or recognise their potential as partners in building a more mobile, more equal society. At Stephen Perse, we know which side we stand on.

¹ <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/privately-educated-tighten-their-grip-on-britains-most-powerful-roles/>

² *Elitist Britain 2025*, The Sutton Trust, <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/elitist-britain-2025/>

Building a world class curriculum for all:

reflections on the Curriculum and Assessment Review

The conclusions and recommendations of the independent review of the curriculum, assessment, and qualifications system in England have recently been published. HMC CEO, Dr Simon Hyde, offers his thoughts.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) is well named as a review but let us be clear what it isn't. It isn't "building a world class curriculum for all."

From the outset, Professor Francis said the review would offer evolution, not revolution. The muted reception of CAR's interim report was an early indicator that the work was on track for this outcome; the always insightful Nick Hillman suggesting it was like something written by one of the better generative AI tools. The final report may have the proportions of a novel, but in truth it has the ambition of a footnote and sadly that is where it will remain in the pantheon of educational reform.

At CAR's heart is the view that England continues to show comparatively strong outcomes in international assessments (I wonder who is responsible for that?) and therefore that "the majority of the present framework arrangements and milestones for curriculum and assessment remain."

It is also probably not a surprise that most of the commentary on the final review has been framed in terms of battles of the past rather than debate over a vision for the future. Govians and Gibbites will lament the demise of the EBacc or the Government's decision not to accept buckets of EBacc subjects in Progress 8. Progressives will welcome lightening the burden of

assessment at GCSE. Critics note this was already in the purview of Ofqual and the Exam Boards, and remains there, or that reducing the GCSE exam burden by 2.5 hours will be scant relief for anxious children already taking an average of 31.5 hours of GCSE exams¹.

Perhaps in the hope of achieving the odd headline, the review does battle with "fake news" and seeks to establish a primary citizenship curriculum, even though most primary specialists I meet are aware of the challenges and have already adapted what and how they teach. If you believe that 16-year-olds will be better able to exercise their future civic responsibilities through a codified response at KS1 and 2, then I doubt you have spent much time in an infant and junior school.

The unions, of course, worry about funding, teacher recruitment and retention, and accountability measures (not unreasonably), but otherwise breathe a sigh of relief that CAR is unlikely actually to change anything. Most state sector colleagues I speak to at ASCL tell me that they already carry out diagnostic tests in English and Maths in Year 8, presumably something that Ofsted could recommend without the need for a review?

Admittedly as I get older, I must guard against grumpiness, but two trends worry me. The first is the frequency of the comment that the

review is evidence-led as if there is a world in which educational (and other) policy should not be led by evidence. Too often, the evidence referred to is opinion and there is always plenty of that. But when it comes to innovative approaches to the curriculum and to assessment methods, a wealth of evidence and best practice exists around the UK and elsewhere that the report ignores or overlooks.

My second bugbear is the opportunity cost.

Education is a multi-billion-pound industry. If it were a business, how many of those billions would be spent on research and development? I suspect rather a lot. Yet as those entrusted with our future generations, we spend very little on this vital investment. We have brilliant educationalists and thinkers, but we tinker and focus almost all our energy and treasure on the operational rather than the strategic.

I do not know what the Francis Review cost, but I do wonder whether it was worth the money. The spotlight on the curriculum and assessment are welcome, but it is hard to see the review as other than a lost opportunity.

FED (the Foundation for Education Development) has been calling for some time for a longer-term and bolder vision for education. Rethinking Assessment, the Times



Dr Simon Hyde

Commission and the national Next Generation Assessment Conferences suggest there is no lack of interest in our future. Others are keen to preserve excellent aspects of the status quo. But the cause of our paralysis is the prevailing belief, especially amongst those in government, that we must have uniformity and that the only equitable way to assess is through exams. Countries with lower stakes and lower accountability systems can innovate and we must be careful that we do not get left behind.

So, in all honesty I can't welcome the Francis Review. I don't think it will do much harm and it may do some good. The importance of enrichment, of inculcating a love of learning, of oracy and all the other ingredients of "mother and apple pie" are well meaning. I recognise that any curriculum change will have benefits and disbenefits as far as subjects and skills are concerned. But I have a nagging doubt (regardless of recent PISA results) that we are preparing our children well enough for the future they will inherit. Can an assessment system and a curriculum designed in the last century really cut the mustard? I wonder.

¹ ASCL calls for GCSE exams to be spread over two years, November 2024

STEAM Building opening

A new £3.5 million STEAM Building has officially opened at Forres Sandle Manor, Hampshire.

The STEAM Building offers science laboratories, and dedicated classrooms for art and technology, giving pupils the tools and environment they need to experiment and learn in new ways.

The official opening took place with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by pupils, staff, alumni,

former staff, and trustees. Guests enjoyed refreshments and had the opportunity to see first-hand the spaces where pupils will learn.

Head at Forres Sandle Manor, Mark Howe, said: "This was an incredibly exciting day for our school community. We are proud to share this space with the FSM community and can't wait to see the amazing projects our pupils will achieve here."



The new STEAM Building

Are women still anonymous in our history classrooms?

Following recent research from End Sexism in Schools which found that women are still consistently under-represented in school history lessons at KS3, GDST Consultant Teacher for Humanities and Head of History at Sutton High School, Surrey, Jake Unwin, discusses the importance of including more women in the history curriculum, and ways to go about it.



Jake Unwin

It is nearly a century since Virginia Woolf observed that “for most of history, anonymous was a woman.” Much has changed since the 1920s, both in society and in the richness of historical writing. Yet recent evidence suggests that in our history classrooms this anonymity often remains.

The 2025 report by End Sexism in Schools found that 59% of Key Stage 3 History lessons contained no women at all, and only 12% featured women as the main focus¹. These figures are sobering, particularly within the independent sector. Economic pressures have accelerated the move from single-sex to co-educational models, and the number of single-sex girls' schools has dropped from 374 in 2015 to only 151 in 2025. In this context, it is especially concerning if the curriculum in boys' or co-educational schools fails to represent the history of half the population.

The problem: anonymous, exceptional, silenced

First, anonymity remains. Analysis of the current national curriculum reveals that named historical figures overwhelmingly remain male, a pattern replicated in recent A Level exam board questions², see Figures 1a and 1b.

Second, when women are included, they are often portrayed only in exceptional or narrowly defined roles. Overwhelmingly, they will be monarchs like Elizabeth I or women cast primarily as victims or martyrs like Joan of Arc and the suffragettes.

Third, women are still silenced, both in primary and secondary source material. Discrepancies remain stark between the proportion of quoted historians in exam materials and the actual percentage of female historians currently working in Britain, see Figure 2.

This is not a matter of minority representation. We are speaking

of 50% of humanity, anonymised, acknowledged only when exceptional, and too often silenced.

At the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), we are acutely aware of this imbalance. Founded in 1872 to expand educational opportunities for women, the GDST continues to champion a curriculum that includes and celebrates the anonymised 50%. It matters deeply to our students that women are named; that they encounter a multiplicity of women's experiences, both exceptional and ordinary; and that women's voices are heard. To fail in this is not simply to present an inaccurate view of the past; it is to perpetuate the silencing of women's stories and voices.

A solution: named, (un) exceptional, heard

A practical first step is to review who is named in your curriculum and the balance between men and women. The End Sexism in Schools

questionnaire offers a useful framework for evaluating this. Go further by asking your students to complete this themselves. Ask them which women they can name and what they have learned about their lives and contributions. How does this compare with their knowledge of historical male figures?

However, this alone is far from enough. As one of my Sixth Form students remarked:

“I believe that [adding specific lessons focusing on women] would have the adverse effect of making women a sub-section of history. Would it not imply that ‘regular’ history is reserved for men? Women's experiences are not an isolated category; their stories influenced and were connected to every aspect of the past.”

Second, we must avoid only engaging with exceptionality. The proliferation of works titled ‘100 Women Who Changed the World

Figure 1a

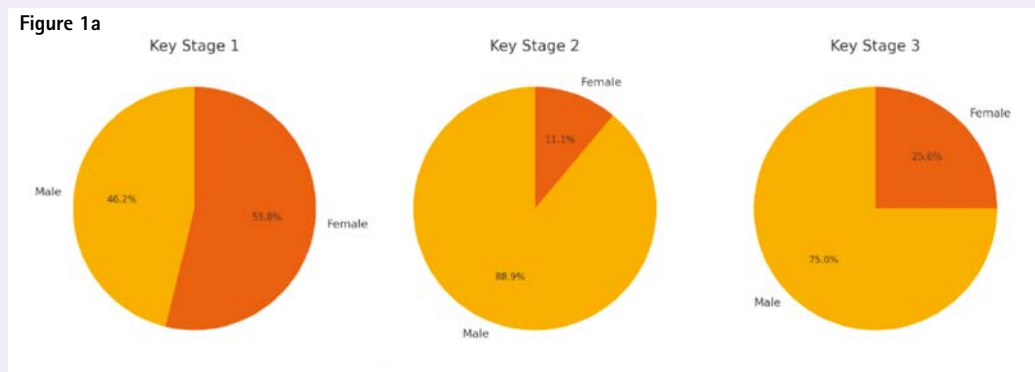


Figure 1b

Comparison of percentage of questions by exam level where students were directed to discuss women or men in their answers

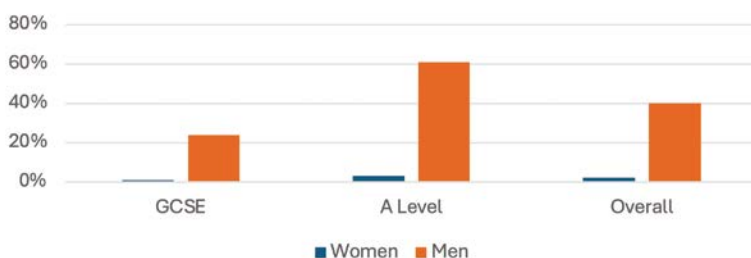
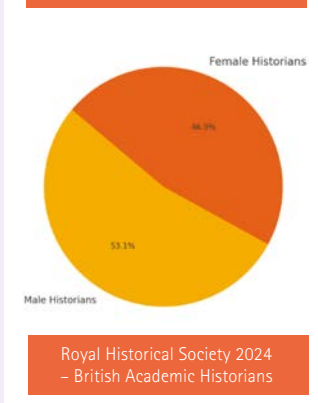


Figure 2



Quoted Historians in 2023
A Level exam questions



Royal Historical Society 2024
– British Academic Historians

¹ <https://endsexismschools.org.uk/campaign-projects/sexism-in-the-history-curriculum>

² <https://blog.royalhistosoc.org/2025/03/30/finding-womens-history-in-schools-challenges-for-the-curriculum-review>

³ See <https://teachingmedievalwomen.org/> for a repository of resources

'or 'Six of History's Most Inspirational Women' reflects an old and limited approach. See Bocaccio's 'On Concerning Famous Women', written in 1362! Consider instead the range of roles studied. Are your examples confined to Tudor monarchs and suffragettes? To transform students' understanding of the past, we must also champion the (un)exceptional women whose everyday lives experienced and influenced history. Historians like Kate Mosse and Philippa Gregory have sought to challenge this narrative; see Gregory's 'Normal Women' for numerous examples.

Finally, we must ensure women are heard. Many of us teach about the scold's bridle, an instrument used to silence outspoken women in early modern England, yet we rarely include the sole surviving first-hand account of wearing one (Dorothy Waugh's in 1655). Where written sources are male dominated, we must turn to alternative evidence, such as objects, art, and oral traditions, to access women's experiences. The British Library's recent 'Medieval Women: In Their Own Words' exhibition offered an exemplary model of how material culture can illuminate female perspectives³.

In the realm of secondary scholarship, too, there is little excuse for the absence of women's voices. With a growing number of female historians producing groundbreaking research across all periods and regions, our classroom resources should reflect this diversity and engage students in reading their work.

Ultimately, rebalancing the curriculum is not merely a necessary act of inclusion. It is an act of intellectual honesty and academic rigour. It will take hard work. When students encounter women of all kinds, they gain a more complex and fuller understanding of the past. They also learn to see themselves, and others, as active participants in shaping history.

Here is my call for our history classrooms: more named women, studying the (un)exceptional, and making female voices heard. Only then can we begin to move beyond Woolf's critique and ensure that "anonymous" is no longer a synonym for "woman" in our history classrooms.

Breaking the Victorian model: why education must evolve now

Vice Principal of Westbourne International, Ed Swanwick, examines why, despite decades of reform rhetoric, education systems still often reflect the priorities of the Industrial Age. Drawing on OECD, World Economic Forum, and McKinsey research, he argues that real transformation requires schools to rethink not just what they teach, but how and why – developing curiosity, creativity, and capability for a rapidly changing world.



Ed Swanwick

For years educationalists have lamented the fact that 19th-century schooling structures sit uneasily in a 21st-century world. The rows of desks, bell-driven timetables and uniform syllabuses designed for an industrial workforce are an anachronism we increasingly acknowledge. Add to this the age-graded year groups, subject silos, and high-stakes examinations that remain largely unchanged since Victorian times, and the picture is clear. Yet recognition has not translated into reform: what we see instead are incremental adjustments, not the structural change education now demands.

The uncomfortable truth is that most young people are still being educated for a world that at best, is rapidly becoming obsolete, and at worst, no longer exists. The OECD estimates that more than 60% of today's students will work in jobs that have not yet been created (OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030). The World Economic Forum predicts that by 2027, 44% of core skills required in employment will have changed (WEF Future of Jobs Report 2023). McKinsey projects that as many as 375 million workers may need to switch occupational categories by 2030 as automation and AI reshape the labour force (McKinsey Global Institute, Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained).

If schools remain rooted in the past, students may well still leave equipped with knowledge, but they will lack the adaptability, creativity, or global mindset that future leadership demands.

From problem to possibility

The key question, then, is not whether the Victorian model is outdated – that much is obvious. The question is: what should replace it? And how do we ensure

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that innovation in education is not cosmetic, but fundamental?

This is where the global education debate often stalls. Should schools double down on STEM? Should they prioritise character and well-being? Should they embrace AI or resist it? The reality is that the future demands all of these at once – but orchestrated in a way that is coherent, intentional, and future-ready.

Towards a new model of education

At Westbourne International, we believe the solution lies in designing a learning ecosystem with three distinct priorities:

- **Curiosity:** developing learners who ask questions, challenge assumptions, and seek out diverse perspectives.
- **Creativity:** nurturing innovators who can generate original ideas and adapt when circumstances shift.
- **Capability:** ensuring students have the resilience and confidence to apply knowledge in complex, real-world contexts.

These principles go beyond content or assessment frameworks. They inform how students learn (through tutorial-style teaching, hybrid models, global collaboration), what they learn (STEM, business, micro-credentials), and why they learn (to become leaders, not merely graduates).

The global dimension

One of the most significant shifts in education is the need to prepare students for borderless collaboration. UNESCO has called global competence "a necessity for life and work in a globalised 21st century" (UNESCO Global Competence Report). Yet too often, "global education" is reduced

to token international days or exchange trips.

Our approach is different: students in Cardiff, Sydney, Singapore – and soon Mumbai – connect live in shared lessons, collaborative projects, and even holographic teacher sessions. This is not a token gesture toward globalisation, but real practice in leading through it.

Teachers as architects of change

Another underexplored dimension of the debate is the role of the teacher. Conversations about the future of education often oscillate between fear of AI replacing teachers and nostalgia for chalk-and-talk traditions. Both miss the point.

The future of teaching is neither redundancy nor regression, but reinvention. At Westbourne, AI tutors handle repetitive marking and revision support, freeing teachers to do what only humans can: build relationships, mentor, and model intellectual curiosity. In this sense, teachers become architects of possibility, rather than merely transmitters of content.

From reform to transformation

Educational thinkers have long diagnosed the problem. What is needed now is not more critique, but models that demonstrate credible alternatives. The debate must move from why change is necessary to how it can be achieved at scale.

That is what Westbourne is attempting: an interconnected, innovation-driven, globally coherent model of schooling designed not for the past, but for the futures our students will create.

Because just as the Industrial Age shaped education in its image, so too must the Innovation Age.

Pastoral care in a post-truth world

Following on from her piece on 'Adolescence' (ISM Summer 2025), Deputy Head (Pastoral) at Lord Wandsworth College, Hampshire, Ali Cocksworth, takes a look at how, in an environment where society is moving at breakneck speed and consistently presenting new challenges, traditional pastoral support needs to evolve.

"No, no, no, seriously – the world is flat."

When the otherwise perfectly sensible, intelligent young woman in my care (we'll call her Lily) espoused this view, my first inclination was to laugh. It seemed impossible to me that someone so bright, in the midst of their A Levels, could really be telling me that the world is, in fact, level. I assumed she was joking, but it soon became apparent that clever, capable Lily had been pulled into a rabbit hole of conspiracy theories and YouTube videos, each claiming to offer irrefutable evidence that flat-earth theory was true. This conversation took place nearly ten years ago and Lily's friends kept up a stream of near-constant, good-natured challenges every time she mentioned the pancake qualities of the Earth and eventually ceased to identify as a flat-Earther.

Reflecting on this, what appeared to be a bizarre episode of sheer silliness at the time would, and should, be treated as a serious safeguarding concern now; so changed is the information environment in which our pupils are growing up and in which we all live.

The term "echo chamber" entered the vernacular in response to a number of political moments – Brexit and the first election of Donald Trump. We spoke about them as phenomena, preventing different sides of a debate from understanding the appeal and reach of the other. The "echo chamber" was a by-product of social media that reinforced a sense of "rightness" within factions.

That term now though, needs to be understood as a pastoral concern, as much as a political one.

The latest iteration of Keeping Children Safe in Education reflects the reality of this, recognising explicitly for the first time, misinformation, disinformation, and

conspiracy theories as safeguarding concerns. The challenge continues to grow exponentially with the increasing sophistication and availability of AI and its many, many tentacles.

It's easy to see how conspiracy theories appeal to young people in the current climate. There is potency in the idea that hidden systems control what can feel like an ever-more chaotic world. Couple this with natural adolescent scepticism of the adult perspective and it's clear how conspiracies might offer a sense of security and found community online. The teenage brain is hardwired to seek belonging within the social unit and so those teenagers who feel isolated or out of place are particularly vulnerable to these stories and spaces.

Although many conspiratorial ideas can seem wildly outlandish or simply bonkers, they are a short skip from such material lurking in darker corners of the internet. Quite apart from the risks of radicalisation, these theories trade on the distrust of mainstream news sources and teach disregard of expert opinion, serving only to destabilise a young person's view of the world.

Research in this area is bracing. According to Ofcom, 57% of 12–15-year-olds now get their news from social media (TikTok reach for news has grown 20% since 2020). The Internet Matters report, Informed or Overwhelmed, found that 63% worry about AI-generated content and 27% identified as having believed false stories, with a further 41% unsure as to whether they have or not. The urgent need for action is obvious, but it must not be cause for panic.

While young people are bombarded with all sorts of information (mis, dis and outright conspiracy), they are not blind to it. According to the same Internet Matters study, 84% of children who consume news have spoken to their parents about



how to verify what they are seeing. While the technology is moving on at a frantic pace, the tools to combat it in schools like LWC are not new: open conversation, meaningful connection and critical thinking.

An intentional approach to these issues is key: the initial instinct when a pupil shares a conspiracy theory or false news story is to correct them and it's all too easy for correction without connection to spill over into lecturing. This is more likely to trigger a double-down against established wisdom, rather than a re-engagement with the topic at hand. Instead of positioning themselves as real-time fact-checkers, teachers and pastoral staff should be prompting curiosity: How true is that? Why might people believe this to be true? Why are people seeking "alternative facts"? Embedding empathy and modelling openness are crucial to protecting children online and supporting them to ask the right questions when confronted with the reams and reams of false material purporting to be true online.

Concerning as these conversations can be, the goal can't be to shut down discussion; this only creates alienation, makes children feel unheard and at its worst, creates shame. My own little flat-Earther moved on from that belief, not because we repeatedly and loudly told her to be quiet, but because she trusted her peers and house staff enough to think aloud and be engaged in challenge, along with curiosity. Rather than being met with contempt, the psychological safety of her environment allowed her to change her mind and, bit by bit, return to a more rounded view of the world (no pun intended). Pastoral spaces in schools are critical to this work. The late-night conversations in-house, tutor time check-ins, or corridor catch-ups. These are not about policing thought or incessant fact-checking, but places for pupils to test ideas, experience challenge safely and know their value and worth regardless.

The information environment has changed beyond recognition; the fundamental tools of pastoral care have not.

British Citizen Youth Award

Sixth Former from Shrewsbury High School GDST, Keira Mayhew has been selected to receive The British Citizen Youth Award.

The award has been developed to recognise outstanding young individuals for their selfless acts of kindness and their positive impact on society allowing them to have a system of recognition and be held up as role models to their peers.

Keira was recognised for showing character, achievement and endeavour. She regularly volunteers for Rainbow Rescue



Telford and fundraises for Jelly Exotics, Hilbrae Dog Rescue, Creature Comforts Rescue Centre in Mid-Wales and Cuan Wildlife Rescue.

Pictured: Ali Cocksworth with student



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Celebrating partnerships

The ISC has published its annual report of cross-sector partnership work between independent and state schools.

Now in its tenth year, the Celebrating Partnerships booklet, features examples of some of the collaborative programmes taking place between the

View the report at: <https://publuu.com/flip-book/706698/2205912>

sectors, and includes in-depth articles on topics such as the 'Power of partnerships', 'Forming a partnership community', and 'Educational disadvantage'.

The release coincided with the start of the 2025 ISC Partnerships Week.



Community, service and partnership

Kingswood School, Somerset, has published its 2024/25 Social Impact Report, celebrating a year of community engagement, charitable giving and transformational partnerships, both locally and internationally.

Over the past year, the Kingswood community of current and former pupils, staff and families, raised more than £50,000 for charity, supporting causes at local, national and international levels. Students alone contributed over 10,000 hours of service activities through community and charity initiatives, including the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and community events. While the Social Justice Group built new partnerships with The Life Project and Southside, two local charities fostering inclusion and support for families in need. At the Prep School, pupils united around a Year 6 student's story to support the RNLI, turning personal inspiration into school-wide action.

A highlight of this year's report is Kingswood's growing partnership with Mentoring Plus, which has become a cornerstone of the school's community engagement.

Since 2021, 175 primary school pupils in Bath, including those at St Andrew's, St Stephen's and Kingswood Prep School, have benefited from one-to-one mentoring by Kingswood Sixth Formers. Each mentor received professional training in emotional intelligence, safeguarding, and communication, preparing them to build meaningful, supportive relationships. The connections made, built on trust and empathy, have had a lasting impact on both mentors and mentees.

Director of Partnerships and Community Engagement at the school, Garrod Musto, said: "At Kingswood, education is not just about academic achievement; it's about shaping young people who are compassionate, courageous, and committed to making a difference. This year's Social Impact Report celebrates that belief in action, from local mentoring and fundraising to international partnerships. Serving others is at the heart of who we are, and this report reflects the energy, empathy, and leadership our students demonstrate every day."

The full Kingswood Social Impact Report 2024/25 is available to read at: https://issuu.com/kingswoodschool/docs/kingswood_social_impact_report_2024_25



Pictured: Kingswood Pupils take part in a charity colour run
Photo credit: Kingswood School

Partnerships page launch

In celebration of the Independent Schools Council (ISC)'s Partnerships Week (10–14 November), Bolton School, Lancashire has launched a new web page focused on partnerships: <https://www.boltonschool.org/our-community/partnerships>.

The page brings together information about the range of work Bolton School undertakes to enrich educational opportunities for young people in Bolton and the surrounding area.

Bolton School's Head of Foundation, Philip Britton, said: "Partnerships are a vitally important part of what we do here at Bolton School, and more broadly across the independent education sector. We are able to offer our support and expertise to enrich educational opportunities for young people across our local area, creating mutually-beneficial connections, breaking down barriers, and raising aspirations. That work is central here at Bolton School, and we are proud to have a dedicated partnership team working to strengthen and expand those relationships for the

good of all young people in the community."

Foundation Director of Partnerships, Jon Hitchin, added: "The Partnerships programme here at Bolton School is really exciting and we are proud to have developed such a wide variety of different partnerships.

"This year, we have also expanded our provision of large-scale events for secondary school pupils, alongside hosting pupils from two schools who regularly attend A Level taster lessons in our partnership classrooms.

"In addition, our links with the University of Greater Manchester have grown in the areas of sports science, medicine and health, graphics and engineering. This year we held a healthcare careers event for the university, showcasing their different courses to secondary school pupils. Our projects with higher education providers like the University of Greater Manchester give young people in our community information and guidance for their future career pathways."

Pictured: A Classics partnerships with a primary school Photo credit: Bolton School

Classroom seating from Rosehill



At Rosehill, classroom seating is a core part of the furniture they supply into schools across the country. With this in mind, they're happy to have a new addition to the ranges they are offering. The Sutton is the newest model in their collection of one piece chairs.

This is a design-led chair, suitable for a broad range of areas in the school including classrooms, staff rooms, study zones, halls, and canteens. It's available in two sizes; EN5 for ages 11–13 (with a seat height of 430mm) and EN6 for 14+ and adult use (with a seat height of 460mm).

The Sutton chair has the strength, stability and durability of a one-piece product, with a nod to the aesthetics of a mid-century mixed material classroom chair. Sutton is available in five colours; classic Iron Grey, as well as Denim, Latte, Terracotta, and Lagoon. These colours were picked after consultation with global trend

experts, to offer customers a choice that will fit into modern education and community spaces.

Each chair is made from 30% recycled polypropylene content, and contains a blend of high-impact resistant glass filled polypropylene with gas-injection for outstanding strength and longevity. Sutton is lightweight, stain-resistant, anti-static, anti-rocking and easy to clean. Everything you would want from chairs that are built to last and be easily maintained.

Comfort has also been a big consideration with the design, with a waterfall edge on the seat and a curved backrest to maximise comfort and support. The one-piece design has no fittings, fixtures, or parts that can be tampered with. It stacks six high and can be moved on a trolley. For peace of mind, you get a 20 year structural warranty on the product, which is manufactured here in the UK.



School set to open doors to new nursery

Teesside High School, Durham, has announced the launch of its new nursery provision which is set to open its doors in spring 2026.

Construction began in October 2025 to transform part of the school's existing riverside site into an Early Years environment – Riverbank Nursery – designed specifically for babies and young children from 6 months to 3 years old.

Leaders at the school have been working in partnership with Stockton Borough Council to help meet demand for early years provision in the area. The new setting will offer provision for up to 40 children, in dedicated spaces for babies, toddlers, and pre-school aged children.

Riverbank Nursery will be housed within the school's existing Prep School building. Children will have direct access to the current Early Years playground and the school's Forest School.



Pictured: Visual of the Riverbank Nursery at Teesside High School

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The Sutton chair combines the strength and stability of a one-piece design with the charm of a mid-century classroom chair. Lightweight, stain-resistant, anti-rocking, and easy to clean.



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Skills-based learning: a gold standard for the future of education

Highfield and Brookham School, Hampshire, has recently been awarded a Skills Builder Gold Award from the Skills Builder Partnership in recognition of their Essential Skills Programme. But what is it and why is it important? Head, Suzannah Cryer, explains.

For almost 120 years, Highfield and Brookham has been known for providing an exceptional education in the heart of the South Downs. But while we are proud of our heritage, we have never been afraid to move with the times.

The world is changing faster than ever. New technologies are transforming how we live and work, and the skills we rely on today can quickly become outdated. Yet amid this uncertainty, one thing remains constant: the value of essential skills – the highly transferable abilities that allow us to adapt, collaborate, and thrive in any environment.

Preparing children for the future means reimagining what success looks like and helping them to grow into confident, curious, and compassionate young people who can make a difference. At Highfield and Brookham, we want to equip our pupils with skills for life. Developing these highly transferable abilities is every bit as important as the acquisition of knowledge.

In 2023, we adopted the Skills Builder Acceleration Programme – a structured initiative that helps schools systematically develop pupils' essential skills. There are eight essential skills: Listening, Speaking, Problem-Solving, Creativity, Staying Positive, Aiming High, Leadership and Teamwork. These are woven through every part of school life, connecting classroom learning with the real world, helping children structure problems, communicate ideas, and work effectively with others.

As part of the programme, our teachers have the tools and training to teach these skills explicitly and progressively. Each skill is broken down into steps – a clear, sequential series of capabilities that build from beginner to mastery. This gives teachers and pupils a common language for progress and helps children understand exactly how they're developing.

At Highfield and Brookham, this process of learning and mastery is celebrated every day. This year,

we were awarded the Skills Builder Gold Award, joining a select group of schools nationally recognised for their outstanding commitment to developing the essential skills children need to thrive, not just at school, but throughout life.

For everyone at Highfield and Brookham, this award is far more than a badge or certificate. It reflects our belief that education is about building the skills that help children grow into confident, capable, and compassionate individuals, ready for whatever the future brings.

In a world that's changing so quickly, academic success on its own simply isn't enough. Children need to be adaptable, resilient, and creative thinkers. They need to communicate confidently, solve problems, and work well with others. Those are the skills that will really help them flourish.

Building skills from the very start

Our belief is simple: the best time to start building lifelong skills is right from the beginning.

Even in Nursery, children are encouraged to listen carefully, share ideas and explore their creativity. Whether investigating nature in Forest School, collaborating on a class project, or performing in a play, every experience helps them develop vital skills. When children learn how to learn, to think critically, listen well, and express themselves, it changes everything. Those are the foundations of lifelong learning.

The Highfield and Brookham Keys Diploma

In order to fully integrate the programme throughout school life, it was important to allow children opportunities to self-evaluate and track their progress.

Nowhere is this more visible than in our Keys Diploma, an opportunity for pupils in Years 3–8 to gain recognition for achievements that can't be measured by exams alone.

The diploma celebrates the qualities that make children truly successful:



the ability to communicate clearly, solve problems creatively, lead with empathy, stay positive, and aim high. With guidance from teachers, pupils record evidence of when they've applied or developed one of the eight essential skills, tracking progress through their Keys Diploma Passports.

This reflective process helps children recognise their strengths, identify areas for growth, and understand how they learn. Their development is tracked across three Prep phases – Lower Prep (Years 3–4), Middle Prep (Years 5–6), and Upper Prep (Years 7–8). At the end of each phase, children can earn a Keys Diploma Award, celebrating progress, engagement, and commitment across the eight skills in four key areas: academics, creative arts, physical activity, and enrichment.

It's a system that gives every child pride and ownership, helping them see the connection between who they are and what they can achieve.

Guided by our values

Everything at Highfield and Brookham is grounded in three simple but powerful values: Be Kind, Be Courageous, Be You.

Kindness teaches empathy and respect – the heart of teamwork and leadership. Courage helps children face challenges, try new things, and keep going when it's tough. And being yourself gives them the confidence to aim high and express who they are.

Education here isn't just about what children know. It's about who they become. We want them to leave us

with strong character, compassion, and a belief in themselves.

Ahead of the curve

Education leaders are increasingly recognising the importance of skills-based learning – something we at Highfield and Brookham embraced long ago. The Department for Education's Curriculum and Assessment Review (2025) calls for a renewed focus on essential skills, while the National Foundation for Educational Research reports that 90% of future jobs will depend on strong interpersonal and problem-solving abilities.

Globally, the Skills Builder Partnership works with more than 950 organisations in 20 countries, supporting over 1.8 million individuals to build their essential skills in the past year alone. Highfield and Brookham is proud to be part of that network – showing how a small, forward-thinking school can lead the way in preparing children for an ever-changing world.

Skills for school, skills for life

Highfield and Brookham stands out for combining academic excellence with a values-driven focus on personal development. Our Gold Award embodies our belief that education should be both future-focused and heart-led, preparing pupils to understand their strengths, collaborate effectively, and thrive in life beyond school.

Our pupils will grow up in a world where success depends not only on what you know but on how you think, communicate and connect.



Creative arts

In a celebration of creativity, Bryanston School, Dorset, transformed the Royal Watercolour Society Gallery with an Art & Design showcase, RE-IMAGINE 2025.

The exhibition, which was on for a week, brought together work from across the Bryanston family, Old Bryanstonians (OBs), current pupils, and staff.

Visitors were able to move through a space of paintings, drawings, sculpture, prints, and design, while artists created new work live throughout the week. Bryanston staff Doug Knight, Helen Dean, Amanda Mitchard, and Tim Auty worked in situ, alongside Gary

Cedeira, who developed a landscape over the course of the exhibition. OB Sandy Ostroumoff also created live in the gallery, joined by pupils Alfie G and Jalila B-M.

Mid-week, a creative-networking lunch invited guests to pick up a brush and contribute to a collaborative artwork led by Helen Dean and Doug Knight. Later in the week, pupils from Bryanston and Bryanston Prep toured the exhibition, with prep pupils sketching their favourite works.

The week concluded with the London Music Concert at Holy Trinity, Sloane Square.

Pictured: RE-IMAGINE 2025

Hitting the catwalk

Pupils at Morrison's Academy, Perthshire and Kinross, took centre stage as the school hosted its annual Whole School Art Exhibition & Fashion Show.

The school welcomed parents, current and former pupils, staff, and members of the local community onto campus for a vibrant celebration of creativity. The event saw secondary pupils walk the catwalk, modelling garments designed and produced by former pupils, and visitors explore a showcase of artwork created by learners from Nursery through to S6.

Adding to the occasion, guests enjoyed refreshments prepared by a

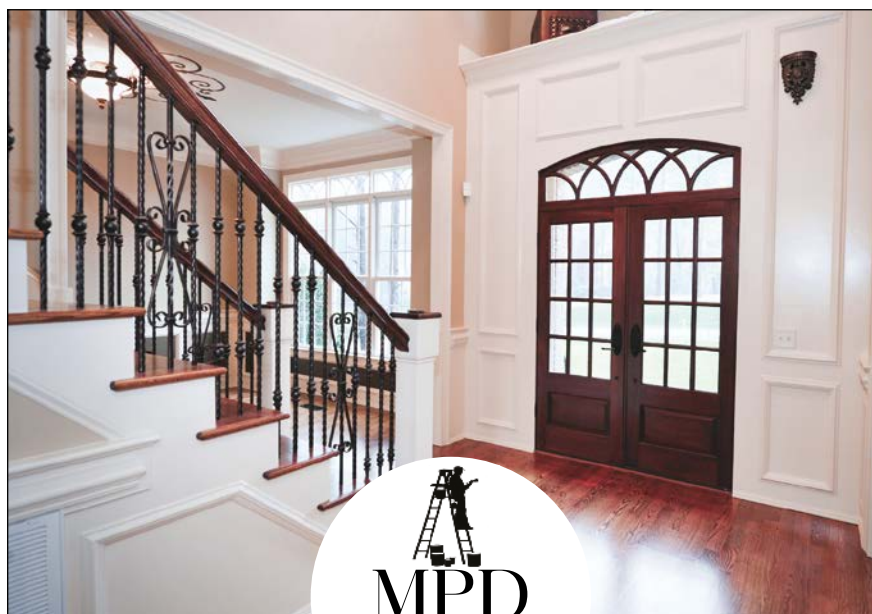
team of practical cookery pupils.

Head of Art & Design at Morrison's Academy, Paula O'Neill, said: "The whole school has been buzzing with creativity in preparation for this event. It's such a joy to see pupils from every year group contribute something special, from imaginative art to showstopping designs.

"The project has been months in the making with pupils dedicating time in and out of the class to perfect their designs and displays. For many senior pupils, the show also forms part of their coursework and portfolio preparation for future studies in art, design, and fashion."



Pictured: Morrison's Academy annual Fashion Show



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Ask the expert:

How can independent schools save money on energy?

Independent schools are facing a perfect storm of rising costs, pressure from shifting VAT regulations, and the everyday complexities of managing historic estates and boarding facilities. It's understandable that when it comes to smart energy management, many don't know where to start.

That's where Zenergi's specialist independent schools' team comes in. One of our dedicated partners, Billy Pryke, shares how Zenergi helps independent schools face their challenges head on and save money in the process.



Billy Pryke

Q: What are the biggest challenges independent schools face right now?

For many, the biggest pressure is cost compounded by the introduction of VAT on school fees. Now, with non-commodity charges on energy bills set to face a sharp rise, we're seeing further uncertainty and have already had schools asking us what these changes mean for them.

Historic school estates add another layer of complexity. Listed buildings mean upgrades aren't always straightforward or cost-effective. Facilities like swimming pools and boarding houses can cause unpredictable spikes in energy use – which can be hard to identify when meters cover larger areas.

Our role is to help schools get on top of costs and build a clear path forward.

Q: How can Zenergi help schools get costs under control?

One of the most valuable areas is our invoice validation and

query management support. Estates often have a vast number of meters – which means a lot more can go wrong with readings and bills. We proactively check every invoice, line by line, and liaise with suppliers to recover overcharges quickly – so schools don't have to. We can even recover up to six years of historical overpayments and recently helped save around £90,000 for one school. That's money directly back into the budget.

We also support budget planning. Energy costs are unpredictable, which makes it hard for schools to set budgets with confidence. We can offer one to three-year fixed contracts which allow them to know exactly what their costs will be, giving them certainty and the ability to prioritise resources more effectively.

Q: What about managing large or complex estates?

We often start with detailed audits and assessments. That

helps us identify the most cost-effective improvements for schools – even for listed buildings – from small, behavioural changes to site infrastructure. We also offer options like Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) that have no up-front cost.

Then there's metering. Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) meters provide half-hourly data, showing when energy is being used across the estate and reduces the hassle and errors of manual meter readings. We also recommend installing sub-meters so schools can track usage building by building. That level of insight can flag hidden issues or energy waste and help schools be more efficient.

Our Portal brings this all together, showing a heat map of energy use, so schools can easily spot patterns and anomalies. One client identified regular usage at 2am which turned out to be timers set incorrectly. Once corrected, it delivered immediate savings.

With industry changes like Market-wide Half Hourly Settlement underway, we can help schools by upgrading their meters. They can start to optimise their consumption and take advantage of the energy saving opportunities faster – without the wait on external suppliers.

Q: If you had to sum it up, what's Zenergi's biggest value to independent schools?

It's that we remove the stress of managing a complex estate by offering a comprehensive energy solution. Procurement is just the beginning. From identifying energy savings and validating bills, to ensuring they remain compliant and providing the technical delivery they need – all through one partner.

About the expert

Billy Pryke is Zenergi's Client Partner, part of a specialist independent schools team working to create tailored energy strategies. To speak to the team about your independent school's energy needs: billy.pryke@zenergi.co.uk.

Zenergi supports more than 300 independent schools across their energy journeys – offering everything from procurement and surveys to regulatory compliance and renewable solutions. Learn more at zenergi.co.uk.

Learn more about how Zenergi supports independent schools to overcome their challenges:



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Navigating the VAT era: reflections on the last year

It has been nearly a year since the introduction of VAT on independent school fees. Head of Bosworth Independent School, Northampton, Tony Oulton, reflects on the realities of the VAT era, how Bosworth has adapted and evolved to meet those challenges and outlines his vision for a more inclusive and forward-looking independent sector in the face of such change.



Tony Oulton

At Bosworth, we made a fairly bold move when VAT came in. With the backing of our Group, CATS Global Schools we decided to absorb the VAT cost entirely on behalf of parents. It wasn't an easy decision, but it was the right one for us. I wanted to send a clear message to families that we understood the pressures they were under, and that we were committed to accessibility and affordability.

This wasn't just a financial strategy, it was a philosophical stance. Through meaningful bursary and scholarship programmes, Bosworth is working to ensure that talent, ambition, and character, not income or social background, determine who can benefit from our education.

Adapting to change: a challenge and an opportunity

When VAT was first proposed, I, like many heads across the sector spoke out strongly against it. It felt like a politically motivated decision rooted in outdated assumptions – that independent schools are elite institutions, and every independent school parent could simply absorb a 20% increase in fees. That's far from the truth.

Many of Bosworth's families represent the modern face of independent education – hardworking parents, often from second-generation immigrant backgrounds, making extraordinary sacrifices to prioritise their children's education. The notion that this tax would somehow fund thousands of new teachers in the state sector was unrealistic from the start. Even if it had raised anywhere near the revenue for the treasury it was purported by supporters of the policy to do, it was naïve at best to imagine that this would automatically transpose into new teachers for struggling state schools.

Rather than lament the policy, we chose to respond decisively, and our approach was simple but

bold. We are proudly part of CATS Global Schools which made the strategic decision to absorb the VAT on behalf of parents a possibility. We recognised that our families – both local and international needed clarity and support, it was about accessibility, growth, and sustainability and it was a clear signal to the market that we are grateful for the trust and confidence they have placed in us by choosing Bosworth. We are unwavering in our commitment to offer the highest quality education at an affordable price, and that commercial discipline has helped us thrive and resulted in a 30% growth in the last twelve months.

Bursaries, scholarships, and real inclusion

Of course, accessibility isn't just about VAT and Bosworth has long been committed to ensuring that financial constraints do not block opportunity. We offer 100% bursaries for day students in local postcodes, which include not just tuition but also uniform, trips, and additional costs. We've also minimised branded items and covered the full cost of participation, because access isn't real if students can't afford to take part.

We don't do this as an act of charity; as a for-profit organisation we don't have to justify charitable status; we do it because it's a moral imperative. Independent schools can and should be vehicles for mobility and change. It's lamentable that as a result of government policy, many independent schools have had to cull the number of bursaries they offer. We're incredibly fortunate to not have to have made that decision.

Bosworth's bursaries sit alongside partnerships designed to bridge the gap between the independent and state sectors and we're establishing collaborations with local primary schools, offering free modern foreign language and music support. Our Language Leaders programme brings

international students into local schools to share their culture and language, helping younger children see education as something global and enriching.

Looking forward: collaboration, community, and growth

Looking toward 2026, our focus is on deepening community engagement and building partnerships that go beyond the school gates. We're launching initiatives with the NHS and local businesses, including a gala dinner to thank current partners and build new relationships. Education doesn't happen in isolation; it's about community strength. At their best, independent schools – even ours with 70% of students from overseas – make positive, meaningful contributions to the community on their doorstep.

I'm also realistic about the wider picture. For many smaller schools, absorbing VAT isn't feasible, margins are already tight, and the era of extravagance is long gone. But schools need to look beyond survival. We have to redefine value, build resilience, and collaborate.

Redefining the model

Reflecting on the past year, I am ever more certain about the benefits of independent schools joining well-run, values-driven Groups like CATS Global Schools.

There's a misconception that being part of a for-profit organisation means compromising, or ethically "selling-out". The opposite is true. It's enabled us to do more good, not less.

Yes, we have financial targets, but the business acumen required to meet those targets make possible our bursaries, partnerships, and our inclusive ethos. Being in a financially sustainable environment facilitates the very impact we want to have.

Parents are still choosing independent education, and internationally, the UK's reputation

as the gold standard of education remains strong and that tells me we're doing something right.

Robert Niu, CEO of CATS Global Schools, explains: "The decision to absorb VAT fees at Bosworth was both a bold and deliberate investment in accessibility and the school's long-term growth. As a group, we recognise that the introduction of VAT has been a shock to the sector, but we see it as a one-time adjustment rather than a permanent deterrent. By absorbing the cost, we're helping families navigate this transition while showing our financial strength and commitment to maintaining inclusivity within independent education. For Bosworth, that approach has already paid off and the school has grown to 95% capacity in just a year, proving that accessibility and sustainability go hand in hand.

"We've always wanted Bosworth to be an affordable school within our Group and a place that offers real value for both domestic and international families. This move reflects our wider strategy: to invest in our schools, support our communities, and continue building a strong, globally connected network that upholds British values and delivers exceptional education despite changing economic conditions".

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that courage and creativity are the best responses to uncertainty and in absorbing VAT, expanding access, and deepening community partnerships we are proving that independent education can adapt and thrive without losing its moral compass.

For me, the mission is clear: education is the most important function society has. Our job is to make sure every child, whatever their background, has the chance to benefit from it and be transformed by it.



Admissions testing multilingual learners: are independent schools measuring what matters?

Dr Helen Wood interviews Dr Eowyn Crisfield, founder and Director of the Oxford Collaborative for Multilingualism in Education.

With shifting demographics reshaping student bodies in schools across the UK, admissions testing practices are under increasing scrutiny in terms of fairness and inclusion. For multilingual learners (otherwise known as learners with English as an additional language), the stakes are particularly high. Yet Dr Eowyn Crisfield, believes many schools rely on measures that fail to reflect the true potential of these applicants.

The limits of monolingual metrics

Schools tend to default to using cognitive ability tests normed for monolingual English speakers. “These tests don’t take into account that English language learners are taking the test in their second language,” Crisfield explains. “They are naturally disadvantaged – and cultural bias makes that worse.”

Attempts to “fix” the problem by extracting non-verbal reasoning scores are, she cautions, only partially effective. “The question is, if we know the data is not a true reflection of these learners’ ability, how can we interpret it to inform good decision-making?”

Selection pressure and shifting standards

Crisfield notes that the problem is two-fold. “Selective schools risk overlooking talented learners at earlier stages of English, or admitting stronger English users with lower academic aptitude, simply by misreading what their tests measure,” she says.

On the other hand, market realities are adding pressure, with less selective schools lowering their minimum English thresholds. “If you do that, without adapting your



Pictured: Dr Eowyn Crisfield leading a Password CPD day on multilingual learner success

assessments and putting the right support in place, you are setting students up for an inequitable experience from day one,” she warns.

The learner's perspective: stress, bias and self-esteem

The human impact of misaligned testing is significant. “If I’m forced to sit an ability test in a language other than my own, I know I’ll do poorly,” Crisfield says. “That knowledge creates stress, which further undermines performance.”

Cultural bias compounds the problem. “Unfamiliar expectations make tasks harder – especially under time pressure,” she explains. “It’s a direct hit to learners’ confidence, motivation and sense of belonging.”

Her position is unequivocal: “If you feel you must use such tests for admissions, fine – but once the

student is in your school, there is no justification for using culturally and linguistically inappropriate measures. Better tools exist.”

Towards fairer, more meaningful assessment

Crisfield is realistic about the complexity. “There is no quick fix. EAL learners are highly individual, and any assessment strategy has to reflect that.”

Her recommendation: ensure decision-makers understand how admissions data for EAL learners differs from that of monolingual speakers of English, and pair that with an accurate measure of academic English language proficiency. “Not a general EFL test – but one specifically designed to assess curriculum-access language – which is good news for Password,” she adds with a laugh, “because that is exactly what you do.”

“With reliable language proficiency data, alongside your other measures, schools can make fair, informed admissions decisions and start from a clear baseline.”

Find out how Password supports schools with fairer admissions decisions for multilingual learners:

www.englishlanguagetesting.co.uk
contact@englishlanguagetesting.co.uk



Dr Helen Wood

About the author: Dr Helen Wood is Head of School Partnerships at Password English Language Testing

Remembering together: the place for war memorials in schools in 2025

As we paused to mark Remembrance Day, Archivist at Radley College, Oxfordshire, Clare Sargent, reflects on the continuing relevance of war memorials and their place in schools today.

Nearly every independent school gathers at its war memorial to lay a wreath and keep the two-minute silence on Remembrance Sunday or 11 November, often led by cadet corps and chaplains. Many, like Radley College, mark both dates. Today, however, such ceremonies can seem slightly militaristic and out of step with a multi-cultural, multi-faith society. The challenge is to ensure relevance, especially when the First World War may not be taught beyond KS4.

Tension around remembrance is not new. The 1960s' satirical mood – epitomised by 'Oh, What a Lovely War' – led some schools to remove memorials seen as triumphalist. In the 2020s, public attention shifted to the "forgotten" troops from former colonies who are only now receiving recognition. GCSE History has long emphasised the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust more than the military campaigns of the Second World War. National commemorations – the WWI centenary projects, the D-Day anniversaries, and the 80th anniversaries of VE and VJ Days – have generated educational material but often feel disconnected from students' experience.

This tension goes back to the creation of school memorials themselves. In 1927, C. F. Kernot surveyed memorials of 156 public schools in Britain and 17 overseas. Even nine years after the Armistice, some schools had yet to complete theirs. National monuments such as

the Menin Gate and Thiepval were also delayed by the scale of loss. Kernot's book aimed to counter "some who desire to forget the War." Public schools had been devastated: for many, the number of alumni killed was almost equivalent to the school's average daily roll. At Radley, of roughly 250 boys in 1909–10, 84 were killed – one in three. With so many dead, often with no grave, families and schools turned to memorials to express grief, even while many longed simply to forget.

Most of the memorials Kernot recorded were "visible." At Radley, debate focused on whether – beyond the "invisible" memorial of financial support for survivors – there should also be a permanent, physical monument. Three difficult questions arose.

Firstly, what timescale should the memorial cover? Britain entered the war on 4 August 1914, yet the first British casualty was likely an Old Cheltonian shot on a train in Germany days earlier. Should he be included? And when did the war end? Troops remained in France in 1919, and deaths from gas or infection continued for years. Should there be a cut-off date?

Secondly, whom is a memorial for? Is it a record of the dead, a place for families to grieve, or a source of inspiration for future generations? Radley's debate accepted all three purposes, though they were hard to balance.

Thirdly, who pays? Who owns the memorial, and who maintains it? Does financial contribution confer the right to determine its form?

Tensions also arose between group memorials and families funding individual ones. At Radley, two chapel windows commemorate three men, one memorialising a "perfect boyhood friendship." After the Second World War individual plaques were added, and more recent memorials honour Old Radleians killed from the 1950s to Afghanistan in 2010. Recent Remembrance services often highlight one story

from any conflict, giving pupils a personal narrative to engage with.

Repatriation was banned after 1915, leaving most families without graves to visit. Many early donors to Radley's memorial fund were themselves serving soldiers; one, Utterson, is named on the memorial. In effect, they paid for their own commemoration, a pattern echoed elsewhere, such as at the Doiran Memorial.

Radley's War Memorial Committee began work in 1917. Its chairman was Arthur Adams, whose son died on the Somme in 1916, representing the families. Masters who had taught the fallen and the headmaster, concerned for current pupils, were also involved. The committee's first priority was not the dead but the living: the wounded, widows, and children. Most funds were assigned to scholarships for the next generation. One boy already at Radley had just lost his father in Mesopotamia; many others were still infants or unborn. The scheme required long-term planning and investment. The wider school community unanimously supported this "invisible memorial."

The scholarship fund established in 1917 was renewed in 1943. Since then, over 700 pupils have benefited through fee remission, bursaries, or grants. The Armed Forces Fund, founded after the deaths of Lt-Col Rupert Thorneloe and Lt Douglas Dalzell in Afghanistan, continues this work. At a 2025 event bringing donors and recipients together, families spoke of the stability and opportunity such support provides to children of service personnel. This is a living memorial.

The "visible" memorial, however, proved far more contentious. A 1919 Royal Academy exhibition offered models for local memorials, reflecting national debate. The War Graves Commission's strict regulations on headstones pushed communities towards collective, egalitarian memorials. As architect



Herbert Baker wrote, they should express "the equality of sacrifice."

Everyone agreed the memorial should be beautiful. The Warden and boys argued for a utilitarian structure – a hall or gymnasium – believing a symbolic monument was "waste." Senior Prefect George Mallaby wrote that a useful improvement to the school would evoke memories more powerfully than "an expensive cross." Grieving parents disagreed, fearing a functional building might lose its commemorative purpose over time.

After years of debate, and erosion of funds by inflation, the school chose Sir Thomas Graham Jackson's design for a ceremonial archway.

How did the next generation respond? Few boys in 1922 had known the fallen personally, though some were younger relatives. By the late 1920s many sons read the names of fathers they never knew. Yet culturally, Britain was turning away from narratives of "The Glorious Dead." Memoirs by Graves, Remarque, and Manning stripped away heroic myths. Kernot's 1927 book directly challenged this, insisting memorials be "a stimulant against post-war apathy." What makes a war memorial endure: a fund, an inscription, a tribute, a memory.



Pictured: Top right – The Freeman & Whittet window, showing Gilbert Whittet with King Alfred Photo credit: Clare Sargent
Bottom left – The Henderson window. Charles Henderson, MC, who died on the Somme Photo credit: Roger Shaw

Honouring the courage and sacrifice of the global boarding school community

A website commemorating the courage, sacrifice and service of students, staff, and volunteers from boarding schools across the world has been launched.

The BSA (Boarding Schools' Association) Boarding School Book of Remembrance (BOBOR) brings together powerful and moving stories, such as that of Major Edward Gooch of the Berkshire Yeomanry, who boarded at Eagle House School, Berkshire, and Winchester College, Hampshire, before being mortally wounded while leading a charge during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915. Or that of Mary Cornish, a music teacher from Luckley House School, Berkshire, who escorted evacuees onboard the SS City of Benares and almost single-handedly kept six boys alive after the ship was torpedoed during the Second World War.

While their stories are unique, they are connected through boarding and courage.

BOBOR is the first global digital archive for the boarding community and has been developed by BSA in

collaboration with digital archive specialists SDS Group.

The website is free and open to everyone, and it is hoped will grow and evolve over the coming years.

BOBOR director Robin Fletcher explains that the initial intention was to "record students who lost their lives in two world wars", but that the project "rightly" broadened in scope to include staff and volunteers, as well as those who served or contributed in other ways and in different conflicts – on all sides. "We wanted to make BOBOR as inclusive as possible," he says.

More than 130 schools from Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, the UK, and the USA have signed up, with 50 already sharing records – and more than 10,000 names honoured.

Users can browse by school or name, as well as view eminent students who attended boarding school and

contributed during conflict, such as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and James Bond creator Ian Fleming. There is also the option to view those who died this day.

BOBOR is supported by an honorary panel that includes General Sir Tim Radford (former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe), Air Vice-Marshal Suraya Marshall, and former US General Walt Lord, all of whom attended boarding school.

They are joined by an advisory panel featuring Sarah Wearne, author of 'To Our Brothers: Memorials to a Lost Generation in British Schools', and historian and former headmaster Sir Anthony Seldon, author of 'The Path of Peace'.

Seldon shared his motivation for supporting the project, commenting: "One of the most powerful features of boarding schools is their continuity through generations. Remembering those former pupils



who lived and breathed in the same rooms as today's young people is a duty and an honour. We are all better people for remembering and celebrating the past."

The project also enjoys the backing of organisations including The Royal British Legion, the Western Front Association, and the Australian Boarding Schools' Association.

While BOBOR can never make up for the heroism or sacrifice of those whose names appear in it, it can and will exist as a tribute to those whose common links are conflict and boarding schools, for the first time, for eternity.

By accessing and joining BOBOR, schools can preserve and share their history, honour those who served, and connect their students and alumni to a global legacy.

Pictured: Robin Fletcher, Director of the Boarding School Book of Remembrance (BOBOR), welcomed Brigadier Caroline Woodbridge-Lewin MBE, Commandant of the Defence College of Technical Training, earlier this year as a BOBOR Honorary Patron. Brigadier Woodbridge-Lewin is a former boarding student and current boarding parent

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Preparing for crisis communications

Crises can happen at any time. But how can you stay in control and support your team when something happens? Reputation Management Consultant, Jody Cooksley, offers some advice.



Jody Cooksley

Schools today face an unprecedented array of potential crises, from security threats and natural disasters to online misconduct, financial failings, or reputational risks from staff, alumni and other stakeholders. Independent schools in the UK are currently coping with ongoing challenges to the wider education environment that can lead to particular scrutiny. The daily news media is especially interested and can be unforgiving at times of pressure. But, while the stakes have never been higher for getting communication right, many schools will struggle with the triple pressures of small and inexperienced teams, the 24/7 news cycle, and the instant amplification of social media misinformation.

When a crisis hits, the speed of response is important and for Heads and other senior leaders it is easy to want to step in and take charge. After all, doesn't that come with the job? The all-encompassing nature of the role and the close-knit communities of independent schools can make it incredibly difficult for SLT to pause when incidents happen. However, although a response should be timely it should also be considered, which is why it is essential to be prepared with a crisis communications plan. Far from escalating incidents, good communications at difficult times can engage stakeholders and strengthen reputations, regardless of what has happened. Conversely, bad communications can seriously affect reputation, even if the original incident was out of the school's control. While it's always useful to gain an external perspective from experts at difficult times, there is much that schools can do to prepare for the worst.

Jody Cooksley is Senior Consultant at Chelgate Communications, an agency that provides operational and strategic communications support to the Education sector: <https://chelgateeducation.co.uk>

What is a crisis?

A crisis can be defined as any event or development which has the potential to cause damage to the school, its reputation or any of its key relationships. Not just external accidents or criminal acts but potentially also claims from parents that a school's culture is changing or its academics declining. Independent schools have a broad range of stakeholders from prospective parents and feeder schools through to alumni and donors with a huge range of organisational and community partners. Crisis communications plans form detailed approaches to managing the narrative around an incident across all of these groups, not only taking each into account but also ensuring that the plan covers the disparate channels they will be reading.

Audit your school's profile

Every school is unique in its geography, its proximity and relation to the local community, whether it is residential or has footpaths through the grounds, and so on, which means that each school has a slightly different risk profile. For example, a boarding school with an equestrian centre could face a fatality sustained from a horse-riding accident, risk that may not appear in planning for a town-centred day school. So, the first step in preparing a crisis communication plan is to audit the campus, assess the chains of command, ensure relevant policies are current and robust, and document all stakeholders along with the channels generally used to communicate with them. An external perspective is often useful at this stage, enabling a macro view of a community.

Agree the chain of command

During the audit process, it's important to decide who will be the spokesperson and ensure that they are media trained by a trusted advisor. Journalists are adept at gaining information from the unsuspecting and good media training will ensure that your spokespeople stay one step ahead, stick to the prepared statements, and remain professional. The rest of the chain of command should also be outlined and, if necessary, upskilled to respond to critical situations. Some schools are lucky enough to have large, professional communications teams, others may need to plan for adding ad hoc external crises comms specialists to their existing staff in the event of an incident. Either way, it is important to streamline the approvals process at critical times as key communications cannot wait for several rounds of approval.

Establish communication protocols

The SLT and communications team should then establish clear crisis communication protocols which outline how information will be shared both internally and externally. Internal communication protocols should take into account the methods for notifying students, parents, and staff, providing regular updates on the situation, and offering resources to help. For example, if a non-recent allegation comes to light, it will be important to alert alumni to anonymous reporting and offer resources for support. External communications protocols should address best practice for media management, including materials, preparedness statements, managing journalists and allocating a space on site to house them in the event of a major incident. Social media should be

used effectively with pinned posts for instructions and also continually monitored for sentiment and amplification.

Establish guidelines

There are trusted guidelines for managing communications messaging when crisis strikes and one of the clearest is the five Cs method.

Concern: empathise and show that the situation matters to you.

Commitment: commit to action that works towards understanding and resolving the situation.

Competency: show that your SLT is in control of the situation and that also means accuracy with the facts.

Clarity: communicate with clear and succinct messages.

Confidence: own the issue and use the communications around it to showcase the strength of your school. Along with this guidance, it may help to agree a set of preparedness statements to cover some potential events.

Create a handbook

A good crisis communications plan should be a unique, tailored handbook that can prepare senior staff to be able to act quickly with a communications cascade that covers any unforeseen incident. It should accompany the overall operational crisis planning and have clearly outlined responsibilities for implementation so that the steps can be put into action immediately. It is recommended that everyone in the chain of command keeps a hard copy of this handbook in case the crisis involves loss of digital assets.

Following the steps outlined above will enable senior decision-makers to move from a damage-control mindset to a proactive strategy designed to protect and enhance reputation.



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Strength and power in young people

How can young people be supported to develop into more resilient adults who are also compassionate and tolerant listeners? Head of Abbots Hill School, Hertfordshire, Sharon Schanschieff, looks at the topic of building powerful physical and mental strength in young people and how that translates day-to-day in the classroom.

Understanding what it means to be strong and powerful in today's digital world can be interpreted in many different ways. For young people, such terms are often associated with dominance or having a physical strength or power. There is also heavy emphasis placed on the visual aspect of looking "strong" or fit. Social media has also given rise to the more visual and misogynistic behaviours around what it means to be strong. Yet strength and power is about so much more. It is about embracing resilience and self-awareness in a world filled with complex challenges and distractions. Having strength involves having the courage to stand up for one's beliefs and others and recognising the value of kindness and empathy.

Strength is not solely about physical ability but also about emotional intelligence and a willingness to learn from failures. Surely the most powerful individuals are those who use their voice to inspire change and contribute positively to their community? With that in mind, it is vital that schools nurture young people to recognise that true power comes from collaboration and support, rather than from dominance.

The cold hard truth

In the classroom, having power is about the ability to influence your peers positively, to share opinions confidently and to stand up for one's values in a tolerant and respectful way if challenged. Strength, however, is more about building resilience than muscle; it's about being able to adapt to change, deal with criticism, manage peer disagreements or conflicts, and perhaps most importantly, to do it with compassion. Ironically, resilience has been a buzzword in schools for the last ten years, yet most schools

and future employers are finding that young people are not resilient. Many fear failure. They struggle with their mental health, and most do not understand the cold hard truth of what it means to be truly resilient.

This trend is also reflected in the way we have taught children over the years. Today we are used to the constant wellbeing check-ins and regular reassurance that simply didn't happen in schools 20 years ago. Right now, schools are working hard to build a more tolerant, kind, and empathetic generation as opposed to many of the toxic workplace traits that emerged in the early 90s. Today, young people have been conditioned to reject that kind of environment, they will push back on issues such as work life balance and flexibility – while years ago it was par for the course.

Fearing failure is also a big issue for young people today. It is something that we as a school, have delivered assemblies on time and again to ensure we reinforce the importance of learning from mistakes. Today we teach young people that failure is a good thing, making a mistake fuels learning. It is also important that we show young people that power and strength means accepting that it is okay not to be okay.

Modelling positive behaviours

Life is challenging for teenagers today and that hasn't been helped by the immediacy of our digital-driven world and the mixed messages around what is real and what is fake that often stem from social media. As such, there is great pressure and even an expectation from young people to succeed in many aspects of life. For instance, a student might struggle to accept the news that they were not selected for a school production – perhaps they

auditioned for a principal role and were only selected for the ensemble. Where this can become complicated is the way in which they respond to this news. A negative response would be refusal to participate in the production altogether. A positive response that demonstrates both mental resilience and inner-core strength would be to congratulate their successful peers and channel any disappointment into not giving up at the first hurdle and trying again next year.

Building that resilience and accepting that sometimes things don't go the way you had hoped is an important skill to master for young people and one that can be supported at home by parents. It is important that parents also model the right behaviours at home and encourage their children to keep going, to accept that although things didn't work out this time, it doesn't mean they won't in the future. Hard work and perseverance is the name of the game. On the same token, some schools are considering axing speech days or prize giving ceremonies in favour of reducing the pressure on young people to compete – yet boycotting or removing traditions that recognise individual effort and talent doesn't teach true resilience. It's important to recognise that speech days also teach empathy, nurture camaraderie, and team spirit, and they give children a platform to celebrate success and each other.

We need to ensure that messaging between school and home is consistent. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram do little to support young people by creating feelings of self-doubt around achievement, appearance, and strength. Often these platforms exacerbate feelings of inadequacy. For young people, strength can be interpreted



Sharon Schanschieff

or visualised as being about "hardness", physical power and control. They don't teach children about healthy relationships or about what it means to have true strength and power because what they see on social media is taken at face value. If we can teach young people to understand that being powerful is about developing a strong, healthy body, and mind and about how you behave as a person, we can help them to feel safe and supported.

Strength of character

It is vital that we are teaching young people about moral fibre and what that means in the real world. There is no such thing as perfection. Instead, we need to be listening to others, being more empathetic, working as a cohesive team – that is where true power stems from. It is our role as schools to facilitate those discussions and to ensure our students feel safe in their own skin. Strength and power isn't about who has the loudest voice, the highest grades, or the most followers. It is compassion, kindness and empathy that will always win true.

If young people can learn to appreciate the views and experiences of others while developing a quiet strength of character, this is what will ultimately make them stronger. Having that essence of great sportsmanship, being able to lift someone up when they are down and developing a mindset that understands that strength cannot always be seen from a physical standpoint – is where the real power comes from.



Inspiring global action

Pupils from Haberdashers' Monmouth School and Monmouth Comprehensive have joined Indigenous leaders live from Brazil at COP30, spotlighting Welsh leadership in sustainability and youth-driven action to end deforestation.

Broadcasting from Monmouth, the young changemakers joined a global audience to share how the students, supported by their schools, Size of Wales and the Welsh government – are helping to build a deforestation-free future.

The event, 'From Forest Roots to Global Action: Grassroots and Youth

Alliances for a Deforestation-Free Future,' brought together Indigenous Forest guardians from the Amazon and Atlantic Forest with pupils from across Monmouthshire, and the political leaders that they have moved to action.

The pupils' presentation received applause across the UK Pavilion at COP30 venues and online, earning recognition from UK and Welsh officials. Moments later, news arrived that Katie White OBE MP, the UK Climate Change Minister, attending COP30 in Brazil, had invited the Monmouth students to present their work at the UK Parliament.

Pictured: Haberdashers' Monmouth and Monmouth Comprehensive students at COP30

Plastic pollution

The Sixth Form at Kimbolton, Cambridgeshire, has welcomed, Professor Jamie Woodward, Professor of Physical Geography at the University of Manchester, and one of the earliest academics to raise awareness about untreated sewage discharge into UK rivers and waterways, to deliver a lecture on the challenge of plastics in our rivers.

Speaking to Sixth Form students, Professor Woodward explored the pressing environmental issue of plastic pollution in rivers, outlining its causes, consequences, and

the urgent need for action. His talk highlighted the scale of the problem and inspired students to think critically about sustainability, responsibility, and their own potential to drive change. The talk was followed by a Q&A session with students.

The lecture formed part of Kimbolton's ongoing programme of visiting speakers, which aims to broaden students' perspectives, spark intellectual curiosity, and encourage engagement with global issues beyond the classroom.



Pictured: Professor Jamie Woodward at Kimbolton School

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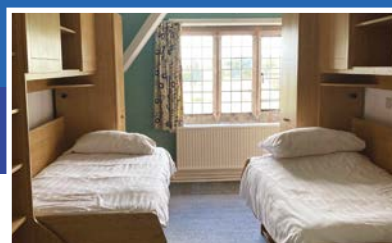
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Profile

In conversation with Alison Woodworth-Sturla

Born: 1974 – Blackburn, Lancashire

Married: 2001 to James

Children: Patrick (20) Harry (17)

Schools and Universities attended:

The Warriner School & Leeds
Beckett University (formerly Leeds
Metropolitan)

First Job: Football Coach in America

**First job in independent
education:** Prep School PE teacher
at St John's Priory

Appointed to the current job:
April 2025

Favourite piece of music: Anything
with a chilled Ibiza vibe!

Favourite food: That's a tough one
and I love all foods in general but
I'd say you can't beat a roast dinner
with lashings of gravy!

Favourite drink: That would depend
on the occasion! In school a good
coffee gets me through a busy day.
Out of school – wine of any colour
to accompany a roast dinner!

Favourite holiday destination:
Summer – beach – definitely Turkey
where the locals are friendly and
the sea is beautiful. Winter – skiing
in Austria – once again for the
beautiful scenery and friendly locals.

Favourite leisure pastime: Being
active outdoors or relaxing with a
good book.

**Favourite TV or radio programme/
series:** I love watching
documentaries, mainly those linked
to education – sad I know! I loved
the recent series of 'Educating
Yorkshire' as it shows the real-life
struggles and success stories in
schools.

Suggested epitaph: A life well lived.
She looked out for others – she had
no regrets!

Q The Unicorn School is described as a "specialist school" that "supports pupils with dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and related learning differences." There is an increasing number of pupils with such needs. Is this simply a function of improved diagnosis or are there other societal causes you can identify?

A I would say it's a bit of both! When The Unicorn School first opened in 1991 with five pupils, society and educationalists did not really believe dyslexia was "a thing" – or dyspraxia or dyscalculia for that matter. These diagnoses weren't widely recognised, and it took some bold, forward-thinking individuals to think differently and look at how to support a diverse way of learning.

Over time this has improved, but education as a whole has a long way to go. This is why The Unicorn School has a very strong outreach programme where we work with local schools and teacher training providers to help build confidence and understanding around specific learning differences. We also run our own assessment centre supporting families who are just beginning their journey and helping them find the right path forward.

Q Special education as a whole faces both capacity and funding challenges. What would you say is the biggest sector-wide concern at the moment?

A I would say it starts with a lack of understanding of how best to support young people with additional needs – and that starts in mainstream education. Despite their best efforts, many teachers simply haven't had the training or access to resources needed to provide the level of support required for many learners. And if that foundation isn't strong, it's no surprise that the ripple effect reaches all the way up to government decision makers.

You only have to look at the recent SEND White Paper review to see how few voices from the "coal face" are being heard – the educators, specialists, and families who live and breathe this every day. These are the people constantly adapting, innovating, and finding new ways to tackle long-standing challenges. They absolutely need to be part of the conversation when it comes to shaping policy and funding.

The recently announced delay in the SEND White Paper looking at overhauling the EHCP system, demonstrates that the answer is not a straightforward one. I hope that this leads to a wider collective of key professionals being consulted.

Q You have worked in both mainstream and special education settings over your career. Which has given you the greatest sense of satisfaction?

A I would say that one set me on the path to the other! I started as a PE teacher in a mainstream secondary school, which I loved. I quickly became a Head of Year, and that role gave me the chance to work with pupils who found school challenging for all sorts of reasons. Helping them find a different way to succeed was incredibly rewarding and gave me a great sense of satisfaction.

This led to a role in a special school where I was able to combine my love of sport with SEND. As a Director of Specialism, I had the opportunity to use sport and physical activity as a tool to help engage and support pupils with additional needs.

Now at The Unicorn School, I feel very privileged to be in a specialist setting surrounded by skilled, compassionate staff who are all focused on helping every child who walks through our doors to feel seen, heard and supported in their learning journey. My heart will always be with those pupils who need us to think differently – whether that's in a mainstream or specialist setting.

Q There is considerable variety of provision within the special education sector. Your approach has been described as "teaching differently, but in a way that no one is made to feel different." Can you explain how this is achieved?

A It's quite hard to describe exactly what we do that is different because our starting point is to welcome a child into the school and help them to feel they belong. Many of our pupils arrive having felt a huge sense of failure in a mainstream setting. They often feel "different" but don't yet

Alison Woodworth-Sturla is Headteacher at The Unicorn School, a specialist school in Oxfordshire. She was previously Deputy Head at Alfriston School, Buckinghamshire.



understand why. So that's where we begin: by helping them to understand their additional needs and showing them there is a way forward – one that works for them.

Of course, there are practical things I could list – every child has access to assistive technology through their own laptop, we have specialist-trained teachers in dyslexia and dyscalculia, and our integrated therapeutic approach brings speech and language therapists as well as occupational therapists right into the classroom. But really, it's the magic mix of all these elements – combined with a deep culture of care and understanding – that makes us "different..." in a good way!

Q Fees at The Unicorn are over £11,000 a term. Do you offer any bursaries or other support for families who cannot afford such an outgoing?

A Yes, we have a comprehensive bursary scheme that is subsidised by our not-for-profit charitable status and alumni donations. We also work closely with families and local authorities to support with EHCP applications so that the fees can be covered where appropriate.

Q The Unicorn is currently undergoing a programme of expansion with development of a second site – a former hotel and restaurant – which will allow the school to offer post-16 life skills provision. What was the drive for this and what have you got planned?

A This is a very exciting development for The Unicorn School. The new site will allow us to expand our provision to support those pupils who are not quite ready to move on to mainstream colleges and Sixth Forms at 16. Our aim is to offer a blend of life skills development and vocational qualifications that prepare students for the next stage of their journey – whether that's further study, employment, or greater independence.

I saw this work really well at my previous school, where we partnered with local colleges to offer link courses at Level 1 and Level 2. We will be doing the same here at The Unicorn,

alongside work experience placements and practical training in independent living skills.

This is quite a timely development with the recent White Paper on Post-16 Education & Skills, which calls for a broader range of opportunities across the sector – especially for SEND learners. It highlights the need for rigorous, high-quality pathways at Level 1 and 2, and introduces new vocational qualifications like "V Levels" to sit alongside A Levels and T Levels.

Exciting times ahead for those brave enough to approach post 16 education with an important shift in focus.

Q As part of its mental health provision the school has a school therapy dog, Briggs. What impact has he had since he's been in post? Should all schools have a canine on the staff?

A Briggs is a proud member of our PAWS (pastoral and wellbeing support) team. His job is to greet pupils in the morning and offer a calming presence to anyone who might be feeling anxious or overwhelmed. Often, all it takes is a quick cuddle or a walk around the grounds with Briggs for even the most anxious pupil to feel ready to face the day.

I believe there are huge benefits to having a therapy dog in schools. That said, not everyone is a dog lover, and Briggs is very respectful of that. He only works with pupils who want his support.

In fact, I used to be someone who wasn't particularly keen on dogs myself, but Briggs with his calm nature and gentle ways has completely won me over. So much so that my family is now getting our own dog!

Q Was teaching always what you wanted to do? Who or what inspired you to take up the profession?

A I actually always wanted to run my own hotel (I watched a lot of Fawlty Towers as a child and I was quite bossy!) but I also loved sport and when I got the opportunity to go to university and study

Sport & Exercise Science I jumped at the chance. I loved being at university in Leeds, combining studies and playing sport so I decided to stay and do a PGCE and become a PE teacher. The rest is history...!

Q You started your career as a PE teacher, and have also worked for the charity Youth Sport Trust, so sport must be close to your heart. Do you still get to teach the subject?

A I do! But only for one afternoon a week with Year 10 and Year 8. It is a great opportunity to see the pupils thrive in a different learning environment. Many of our pupils have co-occurring diagnosis, such as ADHD, so getting outside the classroom and into movement-based activities is a very important part of their day.

I am also a huge advocate of physical activity in all its forms to support physical and mental wellbeing. We are not looking to develop the next international sports stars, but we are looking to use the power of sport to nurture our pupils' wellbeing, teamwork, and leadership skills in a very practical way.

That philosophy was also at the heart of my time with Youth Sport Trust – a wonderful charity working to improve the lives of young people in and through sport and physical activity.

Q And after a busy day at school what do you like to do to relax?

A Well, the sport and activity theme doesn't stop when I leave the school gates! I am still a keen sports participant – hockey and football are my main sports but I also just love being in the outdoors – whatever the weather. A good walk in the countryside cannot really be beaten after a long day in school.

I also enjoy spending time watching sport. Whether that is watching my boys playing rugby or following my favourite football team around the country – Blackburn Rovers. Although the latter is definitely not very relaxing as they seem to lose more than they win currently!

Promoting diversity: developing a Post-Colonial Conference

St Helen's School, Northwood, London, has hosted its second annual Post-Colonial Conference, where Year 12 students explored post-colonial themes in literature, history, and politics. The event, which was developed by English teachers Suraya Ahmed and Tina Courtenay-Thompson, aims to deepen students' understanding of the effect empire and colonialism still have on society, as Head Librarian from the school, Katie de Cruz, explains.

A school dining room isn't the first place that comes to mind when you think of post-colonialism, but for English teachers Suraya Ahmed and Tina Courtenay-Thompson at St Helen's School, Northwood, it was amidst the din and clatter of the lunchtime service that the idea of the Year 12 Post-Colonial Conference first took shape. "We were sat down at lunch talking about the GCSE specifications and bemoaning the lack of diversity," said Suraya. "We can't do anything about the GCSE curriculum, we thought, but why don't we do something else to promote diversity? And we were struck with inspiration, raced up to the staff room, took out a sheet of A3 and a marker pen and started to map out our idea." Fast forward two years and Tina and Suraya have just hosted their second Year 12 Post-Colonial Conference in March 2025, led by poet Daljit Nagra.

The aim of the conference is to explore and celebrate the contributions made by diverse figures in history, society, and literature, and to examine them in a global context. As Head of St Helen's, Bridget Ward, says: "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) matters in our school not just because it creates an inclusive environment, but because it empowers every student to reach their full potential. When diversity

is embraced, equity is pursued, inclusion is practised, and belonging is fostered; we transform our classrooms into vibrant spaces where all voices are heard, all identities are celebrated, and every learner can thrive."

Tina and Suraya's goal was also to foster Year 12's critical thinking skills in preparation for higher education. "We wanted to pitch it at Sixth Form level for the intellectual debates. We also felt the UK's A Level system is particularly narrow and lacks breadth whereas the post-colonialism debate has a lot of scope to cover many topics."

Tina and Suraya were adamant that all Year 12 students should be involved, regardless of the A Level subjects they were studying. "The cross-curricular aspect was key for us for students to broaden their perspectives and understand how society has changed since the end of empire," said Suraya. "And this was reflected in our discussions with pupils afterwards, who enjoyed the opportunity to have a day devoted to subjects different to their current ones. Subjects aren't standalone in the real world, they're interdisciplinary and we wanted to create that sense of traversing different boundaries and borders in our conference."

Tina and Suraya assembled a team to deliver a day of workshops

hosted by the Senior School Library, followed by a lunchtime "meet and greet" with the author, culminating in an afternoon of activities to create artistic and literary responses to what they had learnt. The Senior School Library was the perfect backdrop for students to sit amongst the many stories of those who have recounted their post-colonial experience, such as Zadie Smith's 'White Teeth' and Andrea Levy's 'Small Island'.

The inaugural conference was held in March 2024, led by author and journalist Shrabani Basu who ran a script writing workshop – 'Seeing Yourself: Representation on Screen and Literature'. After a morning of workshops, that included 'The Effects of Colonialism on Africa and the Middle East' with Head of Politics Phil Whalley, and 'The History of Migration' with Head of History Yasmin Kenssous, students were invited to create a response to what they had learnt during the day in the form of a poem, a design for the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, an opinion piece, or a migration timeline for a fictional family.

The success of the first conference persuaded the team to hold a second one in March 2025, joined by poet Daljit Nagra and a group of Year 12s from a local state school, and new to the team – history teacher Helen Sinclair. Daljit invited students to be as "culturally specific as possible" and come up with a list of "things that don't suck" for inspiration for a parody of his own poem with the same title and were encouraged to explore themes of their own identity while doing so. Daljit's poetry draws on his heritage as a child of Indian immigrants, and he was the first poet of colour to have a debut published by Faber & Faber. He offered a unique insight into his own postcolonial experience, which he shared with a reading of 'In a White Town' and 'Parka'.

Judging by student feedback, it seems the conference has achieved Tina and Suraya's goal of exploring the contributions made by diverse figures to society in Britain and abroad. Speaking to Year 12 students afterwards, it was clear that it had enriched their knowledge and encouraged them to think critically: "It helped me understand the historical context behind global issues," said Nicola. "And it shifted my perspective from a scientific point of view to a more social and political lens."

For Nicola and the other Year 12s, this was a constructive day, as Senior Deputy Head Academic and Co-Curricular, Nick Dennis, explains: "A cross-curricular postcolonialism day offers Year 12 students frameworks for analysing power, identity, and representation through documented historical evidence of empire and its measurable contemporary effects. Students explore how colonial legacies continue to shape society, literature, history, and politics. In a world saturated with data and algorithmic bias, discernment, intellectual independence, and ethical awareness are essential for scholarship, engaged citizenship, and authentic human understanding; values that define an education at our institution."

So, how does the team at St Helen's School see their Post-Colonial Conference moving forward in the future? Suraya is emphatic: "It's important to do something like this if we want to look ahead towards building a world that's more inclusive and where inequality's not part of the fabric of society. And we need to understand the nuances of global history and contribute to the effort to dismantle oppressive systems. Next year we'd like to expand participation and include even more state schools so that we can share this experience. We want St Helen's to be the hub of educational discourse on post-colonialism."



Pictured (l to r): Tina Courtenay-Thompson, Suraya Ahmed, Helen Sinclair, Katie de Cruz – part of the Post-Colonial Conference team

CHANGING FACES... CHANGING PLACES...



Polwhele House School, Cornwall, has announced the appointment of Mark Clutsom as its new Head of School.

Mr Clutsom brings over 20 years of experience in school leadership, including roles as Executive Head across multiple schools, with a strong focus on school improvement in challenging contexts.

Already known to the Polwhele community, Mr Clutsom has been working with pupils in Years 3 to 9 across History, Humanities, and IT, and led clubs in football and woodwork for the past year. Most recently, he has served as IT Lead, where he developed and implemented a new digital strategy for the school.



Mr Henry Warner has been appointed as the next Head of St George's College Weybridge, Surrey. He will succeed current head, Mrs Rachel Owens, in September 2026. Mrs Owens is leaving to take up the position of CEO at Effingham Schools Trust.

Currently serving as Deputy Head Academic, Henry brings extensive experience across a range of educational settings, including previous leadership roles at St Catherine's School, Twickenham and Wetherby Senior School, London. A History graduate of Durham University, he is passionate about holistic education and the development of character alongside academic excellence.



Forfar Education has appointed Ms Sophie Green as the new Head of St. Helen's College, Hillingdon, Middlesex. Ms Green joined St. Helen's College as interim Head in September 2025 and will become the permanent Head on 1 January 2026.

Ms Green was previously Head at Herries School in Cookham Dean, Berkshire, before joining Godstowe, Buckinghamshire. After leaving Godstowe in 2022, Sophie joined her husband, Will, when he took up the Headship at Cheam School in Berkshire. Most recently, she has taken a sabbatical year to spend time with her blended family of five children. She is also a trained and experienced ISI Inspector.



Leicester High School for Girls has announced the appointment of John Partridge as Head of School.

Mr Partridge has been at Leicester High for the past four years. During this time, he has served as Deputy Head and, more recently, as Acting Head.

Following a thorough process by the Governing Body, he has now been appointed as Head of School with immediate effect.

Have a new head you would like mentioned?

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Changes in minibus guidance and legislation in 2025

The laws surrounding minibus operations for schools can be complex and confusing to say the least. There are grey areas where the guidance, and how it is interpreted, can be conflicting.

There have been several major changes this year that schools operating under a Section 19 Permit should be aware of, some beneficial and some not so much.

Fee-charging schools must be VAT registered

This change in legislation does not directly affect minibus operations for independent schools unless they decide to drop their charity status.

Transitioning from charity to a commercial operation will impact on minibus operations and require significant changes, namely moving from operating under a Section 19 Permit to a Public Service Vehicle (PSV) Operator's Licence. This switch involves legal and operational changes that must be carefully managed, and budgeted for, to ensure legal compliance and the continued safe transport of students.

The financial considerations of transitioning from a Section 19 Permit to a PSV Operator's Licence are considerable, including the required reserved funding, full D1 and CPC trained drivers, tachographs, and a qualified transport manager.

There may be some schools and organisations for whom the transition will not have too much of an impact, depending on how many of their drivers already have a full D1 licence. But, the impact of the change, and the time it will take, should not be underestimated.

Brake performance assessments (BPA) required with safety inspections

Brake performance assessments are tests to measure a vehicle's braking effectiveness, focusing on factors like braking force, efficiency, and

balance, to ensure road safety and compliance. From April 2025, a BPA must be included with every minibus safety inspection.

Minibus safety inspections are considered, by Traffic Commissioners and the DVSA, a vital part of maintaining a roadworthy vehicle. These inspections need to be completed by a qualified engineer at least every ten weeks for minibuses under 12 years old and every six weeks for minibuses over 12 years old.

Safety inspections and brake performance assessments are not optional. You need to ensure whoever completes your safety inspections includes a sufficient BPA and that your minibuses are accessible so they can be driven to speeds of about 20mph.

As with all your maintenance, service and MOT paperwork you will need to keep your inspection report and the brake test printout for your records. These need to be filed and kept for at least 15 months so, if requested, they can be made available for inspection.

Electric Minibuses can now be driven with B1 licences

On 10 June 2025 the UK government changed the driving licence regulations for zero emission vehicles (ZEVs). Previously, electric minibuses could only be driven with D1 entitlement, because anything above the 9-seaters had a GVW over 3500kg. The change in regulations means drivers with B1 car licences can now drive

the heavier 12–16 seat electric minibuses, under a Section 19 Permit (other conditions apply).

The changes mean holders of a Category B licence, a car licence, can drive ZEV (zero emission vehicles) with a GVW of up to 4,250kg. This change is in acknowledgment of the additional weight of the battery in an electric vehicle.

This change in regulations removes the D1 barrier for schools, with Section 19 Permits, who want to adopt an electric fleet but have younger drivers with no inherited D1.

As with diesel minibuses, there is an additional allowance of 750kg for vehicles with wheelchair access for disabled passengers, bringing the allowable GVW for ZEVs up to 5,000kg.

How to stay up to date with minibus requirements?

Rivervale have introduced two ways to help schools remain compliant and up to date with all the changes occurring with minibus legislation.

Free, no obligation minibus audit

Our free minibus audit will help you understand what you need to be doing to run legally compliant and best practice transport operations, as well as calculate where you could be saving money and developing a more efficient fleet.

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John Peterson

minibus safety inspections? What would that look like financially? And how could it be achieved? We can show you.

Rivervale Minibus are in the unique position of being able to offer leasing, rentals, used-sales, driver training, onsite safety inspections, education, and other online support services.

This audit has no strings attached. If you choose to stay as you are, then we hope we will have helped you identify ways you can improve your minibus operations or reassured you that you have everything covered.

Rivervale's Advanced Minibus Management Course

Minibus compliance is not only an operational concern it is also a health and safety as well as a legal issue. This is why Rivervale Minibus has relaunched the face-to-face Advanced Minibus Management Course.

Written with the input of a specialist transport solicitor and health and safety auditor the course covers everything you need to run safer vehicles, have safer drivers, and plan for safer journeys. Spend the day with your peers discussing your unique challenges and minibus concerns while getting insight on best practice, the view of the law, and what a health and safety audit would be looking for.

You will leave inspired and empowered to make any changes you need.

If you have questions about anything minibus related including arranging a free audit or booking a space on the next Advanced Minibus Course, contact Rivervale Minibus on 01869 253744 or email: minibus@rivervale.co.uk

John Peterson, Director of Minibus Services, Rivervale Minibus

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Music, Drama, & Dance

‘SIX the Musical’



“After too many years lost in his-story, we’re free to take our crowning glory.”

These final lyrics from ‘SIX the Musical’ echoed through the Patrick Troughton Theatre at Mill Hill School, London, closing a production that ran over four sold-out nights.

‘SIX’ transformed the stories of Henry VIII’s six wives into a celebration of HER-story: a punchy, unapologetic reimagining that gave voice to women long defined by the men around them. With the 50-year anniversary of Mill Hill welcoming its first female pupils on the horizon, the production

Pictured: ‘Six the Musical’ at Mill Hill School

was especially powerful and timely.

Directed by Director of Theatrical Performance, Alex Gatherer, the production was conceived as a bespoke opportunity for Year 11 and Year 13 pupils who, due to exam commitments, will be unable to participate in the full-scale summer musical. Rather than allowing these students to miss out, Mr Gatherer created an opportunity that quickly became a headline act in its own right.

The production has since been nominated for Best Musical at the 2026 National School Theatre Awards, with the entire cast also shortlisted for Best Ensemble.

‘Splash! The Musical’

Years 5 and 6 pupils from Hurstpierpoint College, West Sussex, have taken to the stage with ‘Splash! The Musical’, a vibrant and hilarious retelling of the Noah’s Ark story – told from the animals’ point of view.

Written by children’s playwright Craig Hawes, ‘Splash!’ transformed the biblical tale into a musical comedy packed with colour, chaos, and charm. Leading the charge was Preston Parrot, a feathered hero on a mission to save his fellow creatures from

the greatest flood in history. But when his warnings fell on deaf ears, Preston hatched a clever plan: a luxury cruise aboard “The Ark.”

The show featured a cast of quirky characters including ballroom-dancing giraffes, a gang of pirate rats, and a hopelessly romantic French cat. With unexpected twists like rock and roll parties, daring rescues, and stormy showdowns, ‘Splash!’ proved to be a theatrical voyage that kept audiences laughing and cheering from start to finish.



Organist accreditation

New Hall School, Essex, has been formally accredited by the Royal College of Organists (RCO), becoming the first Catholic independent school in the UK to receive this recognition.

The RCO accreditation recognises schools that demonstrate the highest standards of organ tuition, performance opportunities, and support for students aspiring to pursue organ studies at advanced levels.

Director of Music, Mr Jonathan Turner, commented: “Our organ and choral traditions lie at the heart of New Hall School and our historic Tudor Chapel. This endorsement celebrates our ongoing commitment to nurturing young organists, providing them with opportunities to develop and perform within supportive yet

Pictured: Student playing the organ in the school chapel

inspirational surroundings.”

Founded in 1642, New Hall’s music provision is centred on its historic Chapel and Music Department, where students benefit from access to three organs for practice. The school offers organ awards in addition to music scholarships, expert tuition, and regular opportunities for students to perform in concerts, services, and assemblies, as well as international music tours.

As an RCO Accredited Institution, New Hall students now have access to an extended range of professional opportunities and national networks, including specialist training, masterclasses, and mentoring schemes through the Royal College of Organists.

Music and Drama Education Awards



The Drama department from Moreton Hall, Shropshire, has been shortlisted for the Music and Drama Education Awards 2026 in the Outstanding School Drama category.

Head of Drama, Michael Jenkins, said: “We are incredibly proud that our team’s hard work and passion have been recognised in this way.”

Each term, the department delivers large-scale productions such as ‘Made in Dagenham’, ‘Moana’, ‘Annie’, ‘Grease’, ‘The Lion King’

Pictured: Drama at Moreton Hall

and ‘Sister Act’, giving pupils a true taste of professional theatre and welcoming the community to share in their success.

The department’s influence also reaches beyond the school through its community-based Performance Academy, Face2Face, which is now in its ninth year.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony in London on Thursday 5 March 2026 celebrating the best in music and drama education nationwide.

The return of standardised testing: why schools must reassess US admissions support

After years of "test-optional" policies, the SAT is once again a firm requirement at many top US universities, including Yale, Dartmouth, and MIT. For applicants, this marks a decisive shift. For schools, it signals a renewed duty to ensure that the test preparation they endorse genuinely delivers top-decile results; the level now expected for entry to elite colleges, where the median admit score often exceeds 1,500.

As the testing landscape evolves, so must the tools schools trust. Courses designed for the pre-digital SAT or for average improvement

benchmarks will no longer suffice. The reformed online SAT demands advanced reasoning, adaptive logic, and fluency with the digital testing interface, skills developed only through modern, data-driven instruction.

Crimson Education's 1,500+ SAT Bootcamp for Schools aligns with the new realities of digital assessment and the growing need to deliver top-tier outcomes in an increasingly competitive environment. The six-week online programme is built



around adaptive digital testing, real-time analytics shared with teachers and parents, and instruction by 99th-percentile scorers who retake the official SAT every two years. The result is preparation explicitly calibrated to the standards of the world's top colleges.

As US universities raise their expectations, independent schools that prioritise high-performance preparation will not only enhance their students' prospects but also reinforce their own reputation for academic excellence.


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"Perseverantia" in practice: adding value to every learner

Solihull School, West Midlands, has recently been recognised with an ALPS (A Level Performance System) Diamond Award marking pupil progress and value-added performance. But what does adding value to every learner look like? And how does the school motto "Perseverantia" support this in practice? Senior School Deputy Head (Academic), Mrs Katherine Robinson, takes a look.



Katherine Robinson

At Solihull School, "Perseverantia," the spirit of perseverance that defines both our motto and our school song, runs through everything we do. We are proud that our pupils' recent examination results placed us within the top 1% of schools nationally for value-added at GCSE and within the top 10% for A Level, as measured by the ALPS performance thermometer. The real story, though, isn't about percentages or charts; it is about how our staff and pupils work together, thinking carefully about learning with a shared commitment to helping

every pupil make the best possible progress.

Since adopting the ALPS platform in 2023 for A Level, and extending it to GCSE from 2024, we've found its real value lies in shaping performance rather than simply measuring it. ALPS gives us a shared language for discussing progress and helps us identify both departmental strengths and areas where focused strategies can make the greatest impact.

Each September, Heads of Department meet with members of the Senior Leadership Team to

review results and discuss next steps. These meetings have evolved from comparing grade percentages to now including a focus on value-added progress; a fairer and more meaningful measure of pupil development and teaching impact. The ALPS platform also enables close analysis of different pupil groups, allowing teachers, Heads of Section, and our Head of Learning Support to identify trends and tailor support accordingly. However, we are also careful to apply a critical eye to the numbers, recognising, for instance, that smaller teaching sets or classes affected by pastoral or wellbeing issues can produce outliers. Data should inform our decisions, not define them, and it must always be interpreted with professional insight.

At Solihull, data prompts reflection, but people drive improvement. ALPS insights lead departments to collaborate, share ideas, and refine assessment practice. Teachers engage with exam board training, and in some subjects, have adjusted specifications to balance stretch and accessibility. This continual cycle of review and refinement is now part of our professional culture.

Our approach to value-added also places pupils at the centre of the process. In sectional assemblies, we focus on helping pupils see themselves as being on their own learning journey; one defined by personal progress rather than comparison with others. Alongside this, we place increasing emphasis on developing effective learning habits, including retrieval practice and metacognitive reflection,

so that pupils understand how they learn best. This has been an important way of promoting confidence, resilience, and a healthy sense of academic self-worth.

Minimum Expected Grades (MEGs), based on MidYIS, CAT4, and ALIS assessments, provide the foundation for setting aspirational Challenge Grades. Teachers adjust these targets in light of their professional insight, creating aspirational yet realistic goals tailored to each pupil. This balance between data and personal understanding ensures that targets remain both meaningful and motivating. To complement this, every pupil has one-to-one tutorials with their form tutor, during which they discuss progress, goals, and next steps. This model, inspired by mentoring systems seen in boarding schools, has been successfully adapted to our day school setting. These conversations ensure that each pupil feels known and supported, not only academically but also personally. The extra level of pastoral oversight is particularly valuable when pupils fall short of their targets. These conversations turn setbacks into opportunities for reflection and growth.

What underpins our value-added success is a culture of shared responsibility, where every member of the community plays a part in pupil progress. Our professional development programmes reaffirm a simple truth: improvement in the classroom begins with reflection and a willingness to grow; qualities that embody "Perseverantia" in its truest sense.



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Honouring Founders: preserving traditions while embracing the future

Eton College, Berkshire, was founded in 1440 by Henry VI as "Kynge's College of Our Ladye of Eton besyde Windesore." But how does a 586-year-old school keep its Founder's vision alive while continuing to evolve with the times?

At Eton College, honouring Founder, King Henry VI, means more than simply preserving history. It means reinventing his ideals for each new generation. Celebrating heritage connects us to the past, but a willingness to adapt ensures that Henry's purpose remains a living force in the life of the school today.

Let's begin with a short introduction to the Founder: Henry VI is the youngest King England has ever had, ruling from 1422 to 1461 and again in 1470 for a year. Inspired by his patron saint, St Nicholas the guardian of children, 18-year-old Henry founded Eton College in 1440.

Setting out his vision in the Foundation Charter, he initially made provision for 25 boys – increased to 70 in 1452 – known as King's Scholars, to be housed and educated at Eton free of charge. Henry's interest in the advancement of education is the charity's primary purpose today, with 247 boys receiving fee reductions in 2023/24, and 99 of these boys paying no fees at all.

Although it's been over half a millennium since Henry VI was personally able to make any key decisions regarding the direction of the school, his wooden statuette residing in Election Chamber no doubt inspires the Provost and Fellows to remember the past while planning for the future.

At Eton, it is believed that preserving traditions and celebrating the school's heritage is crucial. This manifests in the commitment to bursaries and financial aid which helps make an Eton education accessible to talented boys. For Etonians, it is woven into the school day – from regularly attending Chapel to uphold the school's Christian roots, to the enduring popularity

of Eton sports like the Wall Game and Fives.

Henry and his values are also physically built into the school. A window in College Hall depicts Henry VI during a lesson, and numerous portraits of the Founder can be found all over the College, from the Provost's Lodge to the Boarding House Evans's prayer room.

Over centuries, the traditions and ways of giving thanks to the King have evolved but never waned. Most of the celebrations take place on Founder's Day, which has been held since at least 1819, either on Henry VI's birthday (6 December) or the foundation of Eton College (11 October).

Since the 1780s, an annual feast has been held and attended by Old Etonians to mark the event. The Old Etonian Association, founded in 1897, still honours the tradition of toasting Henry VI at their dinners today.

In 1927, it was suggested to the Governing Body that a flag bearing Henry VI's arms should be raised on key dates across the calendar, including St George's Day, the King and Queen's birthdays, and Founder's Day. After gaining consent from the King, the tradition was born.

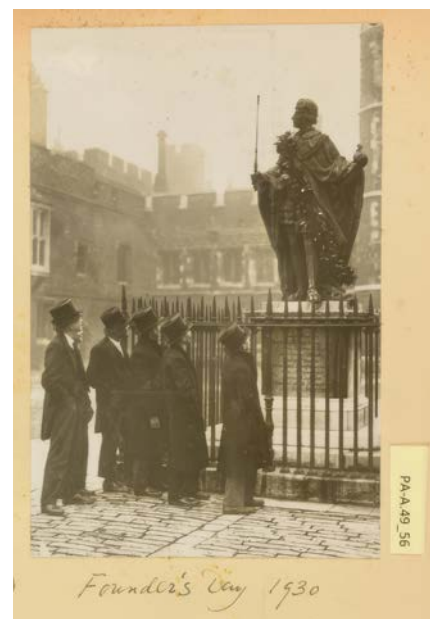
For his annual commemoration, it's only appropriate that the Founder dons his celebratory garb, so Francis Bird's 1719 statue of the King is crowned with a wreath. Located in School Yard, the heart and historic hub of the college, it's customary that when passing by the statue, you should always keep your heart towards the Founder; a ritual that will prompt every devoted Etonian to dart past the correct side, even when running late to his next div (lesson).

The boys also sing Henry VI's prayer in the Chapel, which was written by the King in Latin and set to music by Precentor Henry Ley (Head of Music, 1926–1945). The lyrics are: "Domine, Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum; tu scis quid de me facere vis; fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen."

"Lord Jesus Christ, who did create me, redeem me and has brought me to that which I now am; you know what you want me to be; deal with me according to your will and show me your mercy. Amen."

Even a global pandemic couldn't stand in the way of Founder festivities, though the revelries were conducted in the virtual world. 2020's Founder's Day celebrations consisted of a podcast episode featuring Provost Lord Waldegrave reading John Blackman's account of Henry's life, and an interview with Eleanor Hoare, Eton's Deputy Director Collections.

There was also a mince pie competition, in which Lady Waldegrave judged pastries baked by the boys, and even a magic show performed by two PPE-clad Etonians from the Magic



Pictured: Founder's Day 1930

Society. Sent out to all Etonians, current and old, this virtual commemoration proved that the trick to keeping long-standing traditions alive, is to adapt them to suit the modern day.

For such a devoted Founder, archives even show the King specifying the exact size, shape and decoration of the college buildings. It is only fitting that Eton continues to plan for the future with his vision close to its heart. In 2026, the college remains true to his founding purpose, preserving cherished traditions while embracing the changes that allow them to endure. In doing so, Eton ensures that Henry VI's legacy is not just remembered, but continually renewed.



Pictured: Founder's Day 2022

Education outside the classroom

With a recent report by The Commission of School reform suggesting that there is a growing behavioural problem in Scottish Schools, and highlighting the negative impact Covid has had not just on pupils' attitudes to education but parents' too, Head of Gordonstoun, Moray, Simon Cane-Hardy, examines the importance of education in the round. In particular how spending more time learning outside of the classroom and away from screen-time can foster a positive learning culture.



Simon Cane-Hardy

“Plus Est En Vous” – “There is more in you.”

More than 90 years since Gordonstoun was founded, our motto remains a guiding light at the heart of school life. It is our responsibility to challenge and support students to become their best selves. Education must prepare young people for life.

Key to this approach is education outside of the classroom – an integral part of the wider package offered to students at Gordonstoun.

We are only now beginning to see the psychological impact of the Covid pandemic on our children, resulting from the amount of time spent indoors.

A recent report by the Commission on School Reform¹ highlighted a growing behavioural problem in Scottish schools. One of the key recommendations was for the Scottish government to issue guidance which “recognises the need for sanctions in maintaining a good learning environment in schools.”

Significantly, the report concluded that parents were also impacted during Covid, with a lasting and

negative impact on attitudes towards schooling. The question is, how we turn that around?

While schools must have a range of options to deal with persistent and serious behaviour, it is important that we look at how education is delivered in the round.

At Gordonstoun, we aim not just to teach students but to prepare them for life beyond school, recognising that some of the most valuable education cannot be cultivated through classroom learning alone.

Since 1934, outdoor learning has been central to Gordonstoun's educational philosophy, driven by the ethos and principles set out by our founder Kurt Hahn, offering adventure and putting students in challenging situations.

This channels youthful energy in productive ways rather than in conflict. Students learn that it's ok to fail and try again, along with key life skills such as resilience, co-operation and self-discipline.

This outdoor approach has never been more relevant than today, as we deal with the increasing

challenge of how much “screen access” we should give our children.

In 2017, Gordonstoun restricted student use of mobile phones amid concerns that devices were having a detrimental impact on their wellbeing, behaviour, and ability to fully focus on lessons.

They were a constant distraction and since we have taken mobile phones out of the classroom, every area of school life has been transformed at Gordonstoun. We know from our own experience that supporting teachers on limiting the use of mobiles improves pupils' behaviour and contributes towards improved academic performance.

When our mobile phone policy was introduced eight years ago, the school became noisier, and children spoke to each other rather than scrolling through their phone. Academic focus is much better and since 2017, we've seen a marked improvement in our academic results, which is partially attributable to our mobile phone policy.

However, education must do more than prepare young people for examinations. It is important to offer them experiences which cultivate resilience, independence, and a deeper understanding of themselves. Qualities not easily nurtured in the classroom alone.

Physical challenges have been central to a philosophy that sees character development as no less important than academic achievement. That ethos remains alive today, with more opportunities for students to engage in activities such as climbing, canoeing, and mountain navigation.

We recently established a partnership with Rothiemurchus Lodge in the Cairngorms, both

to extend our own outdoor programme and to offer these experiences to pupils from other schools and youth groups. Additionally, as part of student adventures at the Gordonstoun Adventure Campus, students will also be required to carry out basic maintenance in the lodges and participate in activities to improve the environment.

Gordonstoun has a challenging sail training programme, encouraging our young people to step outside their comfort zone, develop resilience, and experience the wider world and new cultures.

Navigating, reading the weather or maintaining the vessel all bring science, maths, and geography to life. These are real-world lessons that link academic learning to practical experience, the kind of integrated education that young people remember for life.

Service to others is also weaved into the daily cycle of school life and every senior student takes part in one of the school's eight community and rescue services.

At Gordonstoun, a “Hahnian” education develops an underlying culture of respect. Our students and alumni exemplify the benefits of an educational path conducted not only within four walls, but sometimes far beyond them.

Encouraging empathy, self-control, mutual respect and a sense of shared responsibility, not only creates well rounded individuals but creates a positive learning culture.

This cultural change is more sustainable in the long-term than traditionally punitive measures.”

Beatrice Goode Award

To mark its 120th anniversary in 2026, Burgess Hill Girls has announced it is launching the Beatrice Goode Award, a new bursary which celebrates the legacy of school founder, Beatrice Goode.

The new award is open to academically able girls joining Years 3, 4, and 5 in September 2026 and are currently at a maintained (state) school.

Head, Heather Cavanagh commented: “Beatrice Goode founded Burgess Hill Girls with

the bold ambition of creating a school where girls could flourish in every aspect of their lives.

120 years later, that vision feels more relevant than ever. The Beatrice Goode Award honours her legacy by opening doors for girls new to independent education and reflects our belief that confidence, curiosity, and leadership should be nurtured and developed early; where every girl's idea, voice, and dreams truly matter.”

¹ Commission on School Reform: Behaviour in Schools, September 2025, <https://www.enlighten.scot/publication/commission-on-school-reform-behaviour-in-schools>



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The future of prep boarding: a reflection on boldness, belonging and belief

Bilton Grange Prep School, Warwickshire, has recently opened its new prep boarding house. Known as Earle House, it has been designed to offer a "home-from-home" experience. Head, Gareth Jones, shares more about the project and how it was shaped by rethinking what prep boarding could and should offer in today's world.

Three and-a-half years ago, when we first began imagining Earle House, we weren't just planning a new boarding house. We were asking a deeper question – what does boarding mean for children and families today?

Throughout its 150-year history, Bilton Grange has retained the heartbeat of a boarding school and has adapted to the changes in society with flair. As part of the Rugby School Group since 2020, the heartbeat is as loud as ever, so while recognising that prep boarding, overall, was in decline, we took the view that those schools which do it well will always have demand. This opportunity gave us the chance to rethink what boarding could and should offer in a modern age. Because if schools want boarding to thrive, we cannot sit on the fence; we have to be in it, fully and fearlessly.

Reimagining a tradition

The starting point for us was honesty. Family life has changed, and with it, the expectations parents have of schools. Today's families value flexibility, quality, and reassurance. If they are going to invest, and entrust their children to a boarding environment, it has to be exceptional in every way.



We asked ourselves:

- What does "home" look like for 8 to 13-year-olds in 2025?
- How can boarding enhance and support, rather than compete with, family life?
- And how might boarding provide balance in a world that, so often, seems unbalanced?

These questions were our compass throughout the design process.

Designing for children, not adults

When we went to tender, we challenged our shortlisted architects to think from the child's point of view and not just reproduce the main school's aesthetic. We felt TSH Architects immediately understood the brief. Their design placed children at the heart by providing a space where pupils could leave school to "go home" while simultaneously feeling part of a cohesive community.

Earle House is deliberately distinct from our main Pugin mansion: it feels modern, light, and playful, but with a tangible link to heritage and belonging.

Equally transformative was our collaboration with Stepnell, a local construction firm whose educational ethos resonated strongly. The build became a living classroom, from DT pupils observing ceiling panels being fabricated in a local workshop to our Early Years provision winning a national award for a project inspired by the build.

It was a powerful reminder that when schools open themselves to authentic partnerships, construction can become education in itself.

Resilience and reward

Of course, no major project is without its moments of challenge. We unearthed asbestos, discovered a forgotten underground chamber and endured the relentless rain of 2024, a year that seemed determined to test our patience along with our waterproofs.

Yet with each obstacle there were unexpected positives. A local farmer's co-operation gave us an alternative site access, removing heavy traffic from our main grounds. The shared effort of teachers, contractors, and pupils fostered a collective ownership that no design brief could ever have prescribed.

Sometimes, resilience is built not through strategy but through shared endeavour.

A home, not just a building

What emerged is a boarding environment that feels genuinely home-like, not institutional, not an add-on, but a place with its own warmth and personality.

Earle House has a palpable sense of joy and calm. The spaces are open and bright. The slides (our most talked-about feature) remind everyone that fun and learning make a happy marriage.

Every design decision promotes independence and connection:

- Co-educational living that reflects modern family life.
- En-suite bedrooms to encourage responsibility and privacy.
- Proximity with separation, allowing boarders to feel 'off duty' yet still part of the school community.

Most importantly, the culture has flourished – and almost immediately. Our House Parents are not just professional, but compassionate and empathetic too. They understand boarding is as much about relationships as it is about routines. Their warmth has helped create a family feel that has completely exceeded our expectations.

Beyond boarding: a strategic ripple effect

Earle House is also having a transformative effect on the wider school. The relocation of boarding will allow us to repurpose those old spaces into new classrooms, communal areas and an expanded



Gareth Jones

Learning Development department. The flow of school life already feels more dynamic and connected; there is energy where there was once quiet but, paradoxically, there is calmness where once there was a noisy rush.

This project has reaffirmed a broader truth: well-conceived capital projects are not just physical investments, but strategic ones. They can re-shape the rhythm and culture of a school.

Protecting childhood in a digital world

Perhaps most thought-provoking has been seeing how boarding responds to the pressures of the digital age. In an era where technology pervades every hour of a child's day, boarding offers something rare – a pause. It gives children time to be present, to form friendships face-to-face and to rediscover the simple joys of play and shared responsibility.

For many families, this balance is increasingly valuable. Boarding, when done well, can complement family life by providing a safe, structured environment where children can thrive socially and emotionally, and their childhoods can be protected.

Looking forward

Earle House began as an architectural project but has become something more profound – a statement of belief in the continuing relevance of boarding and in the transformative power of environment, culture and care.

The lesson I take from this journey is that the future of prep boarding lies not in nostalgia but in courageous reinvention. We must continue to challenge perceptions, to align and be flexible with the rhythms of modern family life, and to hold fast to the values that make boarding special: community, responsibility, and joy.

If we do that, if we remain bold and wholehearted, boarding will not just survive, it will thrive once again.

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How to successfully raise capital from property and land

With continuing pressure on the independent schools sector, property expert, Helen Jude, takes a look at how schools can best make use of property audits and valuations to ensure all opportunities can be maximised.

“The current financial struggles of independent schools are well-documented but some schools are turning to their estates in search of solutions.

With inflation, energy costs, national insurance hikes, and, now, the extra tax burden, conditions have rarely been so challenging since the pandemic.

While schools consider options for saving costs or generating more income, there are some institutions that have taken a different approach.

For many, property and land represent significant and sometimes overlooked, reserves of value. They can provide the funds needed to stabilise finances, reduce liabilities, and safeguard a school's immediate future.

Unlocking that value, however, requires a structured approach.

The first step is to develop a clear picture of what is owned, what is core to the school's mission and what might be considered surplus.

A thorough audit of assets can identify buildings, equipment, or sites that are underused, loss-making, or no longer strategic. Independent schools often find themselves asset rich but cash

poor. A valuation not only provides an accurate figure but also the evidence needed for governors and bursars to make confident decisions.

Sometimes a sale is not the only or best option. Modest improvements can significantly increase market value. Securing planning consent for development, for instance, can transform a plot of land from an ancillary holding into a major asset. Even relatively straightforward changes, such as preparing a building for alternative use, can help command stronger bids when it comes to market. Knowing where to invest – and where not to – is crucial.

When the decision to sell is taken, timing and presentation are important considerations. A disposal carried out under pressure, or without a well-planned strategy, risks leaving money on the table. By contrast, a carefully managed process with a clear marketing plan can generate competitive interest and secure a premium price.

This might involve positioning a site for residential development, highlighting its potential for specialist uses or bringing it to the attention of buyers outside the education sector.

It is also essential to understand the wider market environment. Lenders have become notably more cautious. Deals take longer to complete, valuations are subjected to increased scrutiny and expected yields are often challenged. Schools can no longer assume that finance will be readily available or that disposals will move quickly.

Transparency and precision in valuations give buyers and lenders greater confidence, helping to prevent delays and avoid failed transactions.

Selling land or property is not without risk: lease obligations, debt structures, and planning restrictions can complicate transactions. Without specialist guidance, schools may find themselves exposed to liabilities long after a sale has completed. Advisors experienced in managing complex disposals can anticipate such issues and structure deals to minimise the risk of disputes or unexpected costs.

Their expertise spans not only valuation but also improvement strategies, market positioning, and risk management. By engaging with advisors early, schools can act proactively rather than waiting until financial pressures force rushed decisions.



Helen Jude

Property and land are not just static holdings but vital assets that, if managed carefully, can give schools the means to withstand today's challenges. For governors and bursars, acknowledging the value of these assets and working with professionals to realise it may prove decisive. In many cases, it is not the scale of resources that matters most but how effectively they are applied.

Strategic disposals, improvements, and valuations can unlock funds, strengthen balance sheets, and allow schools to focus on their core purpose of education.

In difficult times, clarity and planning provide the best foundation for stability. By approaching property and land with a strategic eye, schools can not only navigate today's pressures but also put themselves on a firmer footing for the future.”

Helen Jude is Property Partner at Landwood Group, chartered surveyors, asset managers, and auctioneers: www.landwoodgroup.com



The EdTech Study Tour

EdTech Study Tour

RGS Worcester, has hosted a National EdTech Study Tour, welcoming education leaders from across the UK.

Eighteen visiting teachers, school leaders, and sector specialists took part in the tour, led by Director of Innovation & RGSW International, John Jones, and Head of Computing and Digital Learning at RGS The Grange, Worcestershire, Matt Warne. The event highlighted how technology is embedded meaningfully across subjects, with pupils confidently applying digital tools and AI to enhance creativity, collaboration, and independence in learning.

Guests began the day with an introduction to the school's Digital Learning and AI Programme before joining classroom visits to observe technology in action. Delegates also got the chance to speak directly with pupils and teachers.

A roundtable discussion invited reflection on the future of AI in schools, followed by presentations from sector figures. The day concluded with further conversation with staff and pupils, including RGS Worcester's Digital Geniuses, a pupil leadership group who support peers and teachers and play a key role in the school's digital culture.



TG Escapes projects for independent schools recognised at the 2025 Education Estates Awards

TG Escapes has been named Education Modular Provider of the Year at the prestigious 2025 Education Estates Awards. This significant accolade is a testament to their team's unwavering commitment to creating innovative, sustainable, and inspiring learning environments for schools and colleges across the UK.

A trusted partner for the independent sector

This award celebrates TG Escapes hugely successful partnerships with independent schools facing the unique challenge of enhancing their historic and often protected estates with modern facilities that reflect their high standards. TG Escapes has proven success in delivering everything from state-of-the-art Sixth Form centres and multi-classroom blocks to specialist drama, art, and music studios.

The bespoke, panelised modular system allows them to create architecturally distinct buildings that complement, rather than detract from, a school's existing aesthetic. These are not "off-the-shelf" prefabs; they are high-quality,

permanent structures designed to inspire. By using lightweight foundations, TG Escapes can install stunning new buildings on sensitive sites with minimal disruption to the school community and the natural landscape.

More than just a classroom

The feedback received from independent and state schools alike echoes what the judges recognised: these buildings change how a space feels. Biophilic design prioritising natural light, exposed timber, and a seamless connection to the outdoors, creates environments that encourage calm and enhance focus.

Headteachers and bursars consistently report that these spaces have a positive effect on both



students and staff reflected in a Feefo rating of 4.9 out of 5 based on 198 reviews. They are sanctuaries for learning, supporting pupil wellbeing and fostering a positive, aspirational culture.

Designed net-zero in operation as standard, these buildings also provide a powerful, tangible lesson in sustainability for the next generation, while also helping schools deliver on their own carbon reduction goals.

Accelerated expansion without disruption

Independent schools often face the challenge of expanding facilities to accommodate growing student numbers or evolving curriculum needs. One of the most significant

advantages of modular construction is its speed. TG Escapes' modular buildings are manufactured offsite in a controlled factory environment. This drastically reduces onsite construction time compared to traditional methods, minimising disruption to the school's daily operations, a crucial factor for maintaining a consistent learning environment.

Karl Stokes, MD at TG Escapes said: "I am incredibly proud of this achievement and grateful to our entire team, supply chain, and, most importantly, the schools who partner with us. This award proves that modern construction can deliver spaces that are beautiful, sustainable, and truly nurturing for all students."



For more information call: 0800 917 7726, email: info@tgescapes.co.uk, or visit: www.tgescapes.co.uk

Duncan Ross rejuvenates Broughton High School sports field after eight year closure

Broughton High School is ecstatic that the school field, which has been closed for eight years due to a large hole appearing, has finally seen extensive works carried out by Duncan Ross Ltd, bringing it back to life and with it, extending the fantastic sporting facilities on offer.

Over the course of the last year, Lancashire County Council brought in drainage specialists Duncan Ross Ltd who were able to suggest a lasting solution and action the change over the summer holiday period.

Based in Burscough, Lancashire, Duncan Ross has built a reputation as one of the UK's

leading sports turf contractors, with decades of experience in natural turf construction, drainage, and renovation. The company is regularly commissioned by schools, councils, and sports clubs to deliver robust, long-term solutions that combine technical expertise with an understanding of how

facilities are actually used on a day-to-day basis.

"Concerns were raised by the school, to the Local Authority, about the safety of the field," recalls Mark Hodges, Contracts Manager at the Council. "We got a range of other contractors in, and drainage specialists, and they came up with some proposed solutions, but we didn't fully understand what the issue was."

The school began using a small section of the field two years ago. However, in bad weather, it quickly became unplayable, underscoring the need to identify the underlying issue. To do that, Mark approached Duncan Ross.

Duncan Ross initiated a thorough investigation, utilising site knowledge and aerial imagery to pinpoint the fault. The team traced the issue to a broken main drain, which was likely damaged

years earlier when heavy vehicles became bogged down on the pitch. Since then, the old network of drains beneath the surface had silted up beyond repair. The clear choice was to replace the entire system.

"It was cheaper to install new drainage," Mark explains. "So again, we got Duncan to design the system."

The company specified a comprehensive scheme, installing carrier, main, and lateral drains at five-metre centres. Inspection chambers, junctions, and outfalls were included for ease of future maintenance. Once installed, the field received a full programme of post-drainage operations including decompaction to relieve construction compaction, sand topdressing to improve infiltration and surface regularity, overseeding for density, and



targeted fertiliser applications to drive establishment. Final as-built drawings provided the council with a clear record for future stewardship.

After a journey spanning Mark's five years at Lancashire County Council, experiencing the way Duncan Ross operated brought confidence that the project would be a success. "It was reassuring, to be honest, working with somebody who understands the needs of the school, understands what we're trying to achieve, and coming up with a solution." That confidence was rewarded as the project moved from design to delivery.

With the core works complete, the next phase is about consolidation. "All the drainage works are complete," Hodges says. "We're waiting for the weather to improve so we can do the next phase, which is top dressing and overseeding. The field will see limited use this term, with full availability expected by next spring once the surface has bedded in."

"That bedding-in period will be carefully managed. I've got to work with the school to be able to manage the pitch and make sure they don't overplay it in wet weather and damage the surface."

Speaking about the project, Headteacher David Botes added: "I've been extremely happy with the work carried out by Duncan Ross. Throughout the project, the company were professional, amenable, polite, on task, and approachable. The work on the field is to an excellent standard, and we are extremely pleased.

"Duncan and his team are, as one, very easy to work with and we would not hesitate in recommending them to others or using them ourselves for future projects."

For Broughton High School, the project marks the end of years of uncertainty and the beginning of a reliable new chapter in sport, while for Lancashire County Council, it represents a demonstration of evidence-led planning and investment.



For more information call: 01257 255321, email: enquiries@duncanrossltd.co.uk, or visit: www.duncanrossltd.co.uk

Rugby selection

Charlie G, a Fourth Form student from Milton Abbey School, Dorset, has been selected to join the Bath Rugby Under-15 Foundation Phase Programme following a series of intensive trials and training sessions.

Charlie will now train weekly under Bath Rugby Club coaches and compete against other development squads until May, when he hopes to secure selection for the Bath Rugby Under-16 squad.



Pictured: Charlie G

Football signing

Harrison Rothwell, a Year 10 student from Westholme, Lancashire, has landed a two-year deal with Port Vale Football Academy after impressing coaches over the summer with his pre-season performances.

Initially set to complete an eight-week trial with Port Vale Academy at the start of the season, Harrison showcased his ability in games against Manchester United and other top opponents and was subsequently offered an immediate contract.

Harrison's talents at school will be supported by Westholme's new football coach, Charlie Jackson who

Pictured: Harrison signing his deal with Port Vale Academy



has previously coached the likes of Crystal Palace's Adam Wharton and Ballon d'Or nominee Scott McTominay.



National netball competition

The girl's netball squad from Finborough School, Suffolk, have won their first round in an England Netball National Schools Competition.

The competition brought together eight schools from across Suffolk, each fielding a team in the U19 category. Finborough's squad, which comprised players from Years

Pictured: The U19 netball team from Finborough School

10, 11, 12, and 13, won all of their matches, securing their place as category champions.

The team now advances to the regional round of the competition, where they will represent Suffolk and compete against other county champions from the east of England early next year.

District football champions



Two girls' teams from Ursuline Prep School, Warley, Essex, have taken part in a District U9s and U11s football tournament.

The children who played in the U9s tournament won five matches and drew one, earning themselves the title of joint District Winners.

Pictured: The U9s and U11s teams

The U11s won all their matches and were consequently crowned District Champions. As a result, the girls now go through to the County Finals.

Call up for Cricket

Student, Venus Weerappuli, from Bradford Grammar School, West Yorkshire, has been selected for the England Women's Under-19 Preparation Phase winter training squad. The 16-year-old Lancashire and Thunder Academy leg-spinner, has had a remarkable season, taking 124 wickets across academy and club cricket – including 33 in the academy phase alone, making her the highest wicket-taker in the country at her level.

Her selection came just days after being presented with the Charlotte Edwards Award for Outstanding Under-16 Schoolgirl Cricketer. The award is presented annually by The Cricket Society to the most outstanding Under-16 schoolgirl cricketer in England, and is named in honour of former England captain Charlotte Edwards.

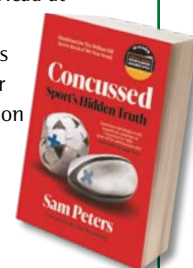


Pictured: Venus Weerappuli

And the winner is...

We are pleased to announce that Tom Butt, Head at King's Hawford, Worcestershire, is the lucky winner of the competition to receive a copy of Sam Peters' book 'Concussed!'

Congratulations.





Cooking up solutions: Tackling the independent school catering staff crisis

Rupert Weber, General Manager of apetito's Education Division explores how the labour crisis in independent school kitchens can be tackled.



Rupert Weber

Anyone working in a school knows that kitchens are facing unprecedented challenges. Continued labour shortages, tightening budgets, inflation, and rising food costs are making it increasingly hard for schools to ensure they are offering high-quality, nutritious meals that help give pupils the fuel they need to learn.

We know from speaking to headteachers and school leaders that when it comes to catering, many schools are facing a staff crisis in the kitchen, which is causing significant headaches.

Our State of the Nation Report, launched earlier this year in partnership with ISA, revealed a critical staffing crisis in independent school catering. A striking 70% of schools identified labour shortages as one of their top three challenges. The post-pandemic landscape has seen a significant decline in the

number of chefs returning to the workforce, leaving school kitchens severely understaffed and struggling to deliver quality school meals.

The research also found that half of the schools that rely on contract catering services also feel impacted by labour shortages, demonstrating how outsourcing services doesn't necessarily protect school kitchens from understaffing.

Furthermore, the impact of these shortages on meal preparation and service was felt by almost 40% of respondents who either strongly agreed or agreed that staffing shortages has affected their catering operations. Many schools report that they fail to receive applications from staff with the required skills to produce meals that suit pupils' dietary requirements and preferences.

Here at apetito, we're on a mission to revolutionise school catering and we're proud to be different.

As the UK's first and only premium pre-prepared meals system, we offer unrivalled food quality and benefits to schools, which can't be achieved in traditional in-house or contracted kitchen.

With apetito, not only are schools able to guarantee consistent quality meals but our service also creates real efficiencies in the kitchen. Unlike traditional kitchen setups that demand a team of skilled chefs and kitchen staff to source ingredients and prepare meals from scratch for pupils with increasingly diverse dietary requirements, our catering system eliminates much of this labour-intensive work. In fact, our pre-prepared service requires 50% less staff to deliver high-quality, nutritious meals that pupils love. It also completely removes the requirement for skilled cooks and chefs, which in turn protects schools from the volatile labour market.

This is because at apetito, we do the heavy lifting for you. Our team of chefs, dietitians, and nutritionists have developed a huge range of delicious and nutritious pre-prepared meals that school kitchen staff simply need cook and serve apetito's meals.

By reducing the reliance on skilled culinary professionals, schools can mitigate the impact of the ongoing labour crisis and ensure consistent meal service without compromising quality. Staff can cook all our meals easily from frozen, so the complexities of managing kitchen teams are reduced significantly – and this means a notable reduction in cost and stress.

We are really proud of our service because we know it is making a real difference to schools – helping schools to give them full control of catering and great quality meals, all whilst reducing cost and creating efficiencies.

Transform your school's catering

Reach out to apetito's Education team and discover how apetito can transform your school's catering with a focus on quality, ease, and significant cost savings by visiting: <https://apetito.link/ISM2025> or contacting: 0117 463 3563

Made by girls

Norwich High School for Girls recently hosted a student organised EmpowerHer event – a day dedicated to inspiring the next generation of female leaders. Deputy Head Pastoral and Co-Curricular and GDST Pastoral Consultant, Helen Dolding, shares how that with the right support and trust, students are more than capable of delivering big events like these.



As a member of staff supporting our students in projects of this scale, I could not be prouder of what our Sixth Formers achieved with EmpowerHer. From the very first idea to the final moment of the event, they led with vision, commitment, and resilience.

Organised by Year 13 students, Saskia and Izzy, from the Head Girl team and leaders of the school's FemSoc, the programme featured three speakers – Laura Bates, author and founder of the Everyday Sexism Project; Phae Pritchard, QHSE Director at energy company, Ørsted, who shared her journey in the sector; and Harriet Green OBE, who led sessions on personal branding and a networking session where students could share their lived experiences.

Saskia and Izzy shaped every detail, not only to empower their peers here at Norwich High School for Girls, but also to reach beyond our own community and collaborate with girls from local state and independent schools.

The process demanded leadership, organisation, and problem-solving, and the girls rose to every challenge with determination. On the day itself, it was wonderful to see them take ownership, host visiting schools,

and create such a dynamic and inclusive atmosphere.

As Deputy Head of Pastoral Care and Co-Curricular, I am continually inspired by how our students use their passions to shape meaningful initiatives. EmpowerHer is a shining example of what can be achieved when young women are given the space, trust, and encouragement to lead – and I am confident that the skills they have honed here will stay with them for years to come.

My role as a member of staff was to provide the scaffolding and practical support to enable their vision to come to life. This meant connecting the students with our wider school team – from media and communications, to catering and hospitality, site organisation and IT – so they could learn how to collaborate effectively across different areas of expertise. In past years, such events would have been largely driven and delivered by staff, but it is inspiring to see how our young people are increasingly motivated to step up and take ownership.

We met regularly over a number of months, and each meeting became an opportunity for the girls to refine their plans and grow in confidence. They reached out independently to

potential sponsors, securing vital funding for transport so that local state schools could attend, as well as support for refreshments on the day. They also liaised directly with presenters, meeting them online in advance to help shape sessions that would resonate with the audience.

Of course, as staff I was there to guide, support, and step in when needed, but the majority of the creativity and drive came from the students themselves. From producing high-quality posters and advertising materials to co-ordinating logistics, they demonstrated skills that will not only serve them in education but also in future careers. It is proof that, with

the right support and trust, they are more than capable of delivering events of real professionalism, bearing, and heart.

The spirit of EmpowerHer also beautifully echoes the themes of 'Designing the Future of Girls' Education: A GDST Insights Report and Framework'. At the Girls' Day School Trust, we believe that education should not only prepare girls for the future but empower them to design it.

EmpowerHer stands as a living embodiment of this vision: girls creating opportunities, challenging norms, and inspiring others, work that is made by girls, for girls, and of lasting impact.



Pictured: Organisers, Year 13 students, Saskia and Izzy

A promotional graphic for Outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk. It features the organization's logo at the top left, which includes stylized figures of children playing. The main text reads: "Our mission: Every child should have an amazing playtime every day – no exceptions". Below this is a photograph of children playing outdoors, with one child in a stroller and others running. At the bottom, it says "Outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk" and "Winner of the best active schools programme in Europe award".



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