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The Independent Schools Magazine



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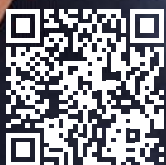
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In this issue...



LeadHERship conference

A LeadHERship conference has been hosted for girls from six of Reading Borough's secondary schools. Organised by Leighton Park School, Berkshire, and London-based charity, The Female Lead, the event provided opportunities for young women to gain insight and understanding of tackling everyday sexism and gain confidence in managing their own advocacy.

Keynote speaker, author and activist Laura Bates, shared her own experiences of day-to-day misogyny which motivated her to launch the Everyday Sexism Project in 2012, gathering the stories of thousands of women into the largest single dataset of its kind on this issue.

Laura's premise was to educate the girls, building their confidence and enabling them to speak out, developing their understanding of their rights, and giving them the language and skills that they can use to challenge inappropriate treatment. Partnering with Laura was Holly Francis, educator and ambassador for The Female Lead, who explained to the conference how they could launch a Female Lead Society within their own schools.

Senior Assistant Head: Partnerships at the school, Tash Coccia, explained: "By putting together a conference like today, we're really giving our young girls the opportunity to collaborate, to be heard and listen to each other and our speaker. It shows them that their voice matters because they're going to be the changemakers for a more equal and fair society."

Pictured: (l to r) Senior Assistant Head: Partnerships at Leighton Park School, Tash Coccia; educator and ambassador for The Female Lead, Holly Francis; author, Laura Bates; and Head of Leighton Park, Luke Walters

Cover background

Sustainability education

Why does sustainability education matter now more than ever? To find out more about this and some of the work already being done in schools, see the feature on pages 10-11.

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

Please email:

editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

04 The digital dilemma

Supporting young people in the digital present and preparing them for the future

05 Managing workloads

Five ways to help with a better work-life balance

06 Teachers as learners

Empowering teachers and instilling a love of learning in pupils

07 Year 9 focus

Teaching a knowledge-rich curriculum

08 GDPR compliance

A guide to safeguarding data protection

15 Early education

Blending tech fluency with timeless skills

24 Profile

In conversation with Sharon Schanschieff

30 Finding their voice

Bringing a role model into the music classroom

34 Academic excellence and degree apprenticeships

Bridging the gap

40 Leading the debate

Rugby safety in schools

Plus

10 Sustainability education feature

18 KCSIE – what's changed in the last year?

22 Building confidence and self-belief in children

27 Taking a 'Valued And Treasured' approach

30 Music, Drama & Dance feature

36 The contradictions of for-profit education in the UK

40 Sport feature

46 Changing faces... Changing Places

Contact us; Editorial Advisory Board – page 47

Is your school mentioned?

Schools featured in this issue include:

Abbot's Hill School; Bede's Prep; Bede's Senior; Bloxham School; Bolton School; Bromsgrove School; Burgess Hill Girls; Canford School; Churcher's College; Clayesmore School; The Croft Prep School; Downside School; Dumpton School; Durham High School; Ellesmere College; GEMS School of Research and Innovation; Giggleswick School; Glenalmond College; Gordonstoun; Haberdashers' Monmouth School; Hampton School; Ibstock Place School; Kimbolton School; King's College School, Cambridge; King's College School, Wimbledon; Leighton Park School; Leweston School; Lord Wandsworth College; Morrison's Academy; Oundle School; RGS Guildford; St Alban's School; St Columba's College; St Francis' College, Hertfordshire; St Gerard's School; St. Helen's College Prep School, Hillingdon; St Hilary's Prep; St Paul's School, London; Tonbridge School; Tring Park School for the Performing Arts; Ursuline Prep School, Warley; Windlesham House School; Winterfold School; Woodbridge School; Worksop College; Wrekin College; Wycliffe College; Wycliffe College Prep

The digital dilemma

How can concerns around the amount of screen time for children be heeded while also fulfilling the need to support young people in inhabiting a digital present and prepare them for a digital future? Deputy Head (Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing) & DSL at King's College School, Wimbledon, Richard Amlot, puts forward five suggestions.



Richard Amlot

One of the most urgent challenges of our times hinges around how to guide young people's use of digital devices and smartphones. This is a challenge that must be met by educationalists, politicians and parents alike, ideally in tandem.

On the one hand, it is incumbent upon us to help prepare our young people for the digital future that they will inhabit. The vast majority of industries are being transformed by technology, and digital expertise is increasingly essential across all job sectors, from healthcare through to the arts. Digital literacy facilitates creativity, problem-solving and innovation, helping young people to shape their own futures and contribute meaningfully to society. And in the here and now, our students need to be helped to understand how to navigate, critically evaluate and in some instances create digital content to set them up for success, both in education and in their everyday lives.

On the other hand, the online world and the vast amount of screen time that young people typically engage in has resulted in well-documented problems. Social psychologist and author Jonathan Haidt highlights the horrifying nature of these problems in his text 'The Anxious Generation'. Following overall steady progress in global educational outcomes from the 1970s onwards, this positive trend began to reverse in 2012 and has been in steady decline since. More worryingly still, young people across the world have – since 2012 – become significantly more anxious, more depressed and lonelier.

While not without his critics, Haidt's arguments are compelling and based on strong statistical evidence. And the reason for such a downturn for young people in educational and wellbeing terms since 2012? Simple – the rise of the smartphone. In 2010, the 'brick' phone was in widespread use. By 2015, the smartphone, with a front-facing camera, high speed internet, unlimited data and interruptions, was in widespread circulation. In the blink of an eye, technology

had changed in a way that had the potential to harm children's minds.

And we should not be fooled into thinking that smartphones are the full extent of the problem. Screens and educational technology, designed with the best of educational intentions, and initially spurred on by a sense of altruism (for example, the motivation for all students, regardless of background, to have access to laptops during Covid lockdowns was a noble one) can have a harmful impact on both learning and mental health. Online distractions are omnipresent. And it stands to reason that if we gamify a proportion of a child's school day with screen-based rewards that the dopamine neurons will habituate, thereby becoming less responsive, the non-screen parts of the day will seem painfully boring. And it is clinically proven that reading books and writing by hand are a calmer and deeper way to learn and think than via screens.

So, we have the dilemma. How do we take heed of Haidt's deeply existential warning, while also fulfilling our duties to support our young people in inhabiting a digital present and preparing well for a digital future? The tension within this dilemma confirms that this must be a nuanced debate, and perhaps not as black-and-white as Haidt suggests. But wherein lies the solution? What should we do in schools? In my view, five things:

1. Harmonise philosophies – across schools, government and parents, we need to find a common ground in our approach to all things digital, and this needs to be rooted in what will be in the best interests of our young people, undiluted by other commercial or political motivations. As educationalists, we need to encourage our parents and our politicians to prioritise the urgent need to safeguard the wellbeing of our children against the dangers of the online and digital world, while helping them to learn the digital expertise that will stand them in good stead in a tech-driven future in which generative AI will be a central feature. And a key part of this philosophy needs to be that,

while education in this area can be powerful, it will often not be enough. Addiction is more powerful than education: therefore tighter controls are needed.

2. Strengthen our stance on mobile phones – while we are some way away from a world in which young people are not glued to their phones and screens, society is moving in the right direction here. Initiatives such as Smartphone Free Childhood demonstrate the widespread realisation of the harms that screens can present, as well as the corresponding absence of benefits of time in the real world that are therefore missed out on. We must build on this momentum, working with parents to restrict phone use as far as we dare both in and out of school, and lobbying the government to do more to make the online world safer. Sweden and Australia lead the way; let's get together to lobby Keir and co.

3. Guide parents – our parents are crying out for a steer from schools about how to approach digital matters. As educators, we should be guiding parents in how to set boundaries, in how to use parental controls, in how to encourage open communication and model healthy digital relationships. The digital and online lives of children are areas around which we can strengthen our partnership with parents. A great example of this is the 'Wait Mate' initiative that has recently been set up in Australia, where parents who are 'waiting' until their children are a certain age (say, 14) before giving them a smartphone are connected with other parents at the same school who have elected the same age, thereby forming a mutual support group. Every school will have its own context-specific methods of supporting parents; it takes dialogue with parents to find these methods. Carving out time and space for such dialogue will be worth its weight in gold.

4. Adopt a nuanced approach to digital education and ed tech – despite the thrust of my argument being something of a cautionary tale, schools need to ensure that there is good coverage throughout

the curriculum of digital skills. A balanced approach will enable our students to prepare for using devices at university and in careers, while also ringfencing time to read and write by hand. Educational technology should be used judiciously and with a clear purpose, or to respond to a clearly defined need, and never simply for its own sake. And we need to be explicit in teaching our students how to engage with AI; if we fail to do this, we are leaving it to chance as to whether they will teach themselves effectively and do much more than engage in superficial usage. They will use AI with or without us – so let it be with us.

5. Give children more independence and responsibility in the real world – a discussion of the exponential increase in young people's online and screen time in recent years is incomplete without some consideration of what has fallen by the wayside in its wake. It is a depressing thought that, as a rule, children these days spend far less time playing outside with friends in the flesh than they used to. Even when they are with friends these days, they are so often doing so online. I strongly endorse Haidt's central thesis that we overprotect children in the real world and underprotect them online. We need to simultaneously find ways to reduce risk online, while increasing our appetite for risk in the real world.

This last point merits emphasis. As a society, we need to recalibrate our approach to risk. As parents, we need to allow a little more independence and free play for our children in the outside world. And as educationalists, we need to enable more risk in the real world – in playtimes, on trips. We need to share this philosophy with our parents. We can still write a risk assessment, but we need to build in a greater tolerance for risk. Accidents will happen but the greater good is served. The positive impact on the emotional wellbeing of our young people of playing outside with other children cannot be underestimated.

Mission impossible: four habits for a healthier work-life balance

With increased pressures facing the independent sector in turn placing more demands on teachers, Acting Head and Deputy Head (Academic) at Wrekin College, Shropshire, Ben Smith, puts forward some strategies to aid managing workloads that can help create a better work-life balance.

“Never has the workload crisis facing the teaching profession been more acute. Research undertaken by the Department for Education last year reported that over half of classroom teachers routinely work in excess of 50 hours a week, while a quarter devote over 60 hours to their roles. The correlation between these working patterns and stress, anxiety and other mental health issues among teachers is well-documented with one major teaching union reporting that over 80% of its members believed that their job had adversely affected their mental wellbeing. The increased costs faced by independent schools since January have made them particularly susceptible to criticism in relation to teacher workload as all resources (human and otherwise) are inevitably stretched in a challenging financial climate. Daniel Kebede, the General Secretary of the National Education Union, has attributed the increasing, often ‘excessive’ workload of independent school teachers to ‘cost-cutting measures’ introduced in response to the increased cost of VAT and National Insurance. There is little doubt that independent schools are under more financial pressure than ever with one in five independent school teachers witnessing redundancies at their schools in the last 12 months. If we accept that current constraints are unlikely to be relaxed in the short to medium-term and that the substantial demands made of teachers as a result of these pressures will continue, perhaps the salient

question is what can the teacher at the chalkface actually do to mitigate a frequently overwhelming workload? What strategies can they adopt both to reduce their ‘excessive’ working hours and refocus their energies on the delivery of impactful teaching that facilitates pupil progress? Here I attempt to set out four approaches designed to create a healthier work-life balance for teachers. What I offer is far from a panacea, but rather a series of working habits teachers can cultivate in order to function more efficiently and to carve out at least some semblance of a life beyond the classroom.

1. Design a ‘marking menu’

The assessment and marking of pupils’ work is often cited as one of the most laborious and time-consuming aspects of classroom teaching. Avoid spending hours writing bespoke feedback by creating a bank of age-appropriate, pre-written comments addressing the most common strengths and areas for improvement in your subject. These can be issued to each group at the beginning of the year in order to encourage self-assessment. Assigning a simple code to each comment or target that can be used in the annotation of pupils’ work will both save an inordinate amount of time as well as giving the individual student greater ownership over the interpretation of their own feedback. A more advanced version of this approach would involve pupils in coming up with their own ‘marking menu’

based on the assessment objectives of the programme of study they are being taught.

2. Apply the ‘two-minute rule’

A frequent frustration of working in schools is the number of fairly straightforward, routine tasks that arise on a daily basis which, if not completed, can accumulate into a time-consuming backlog by the time you’ve finished teaching for the day. From responding to a brief parental email at breaktime, issuing a detention or uploading a set of pupil data, if a task takes less than two minutes discipline yourself to tackle it immediately.

3. Use the Eisenhower Matrix

Developed by the 34th US President, this highly-effective time-management tool, like all genuinely good ideas, is deceptively simple. Get into the habit of sorting each of your tasks into the following four categories, which will help you to determine how to respond to them: ‘urgent and important’ (to be actioned as soon as possible), ‘important but not urgent’ (these can be scheduled to be dealt with later), ‘urgent but not important’ (these can often be delegated to others) or ‘neither’ (which can be dealt with in the longer term). This approach will prove invaluable in helping you to prioritise your time over the working day.

4. Avoid the ‘perfectionism trap’

Some of the most conscientious and well-intentioned colleagues with whom I’ve taught have fallen



into what I call the ‘perfectionism trap’. In an attempt to make every lesson, teaching resource or unit of work ‘perfect’ they find themselves devoting excessive amounts of time and energy to tasks that simply don’t warrant this level of attention. In the process, they become unable to manage their workload and the inevitable burnout eventually ensues. Remember: not every worksheet needs to be beautifully formatted. ‘Good enough’ is preferable to ‘outstanding’ if ‘good enough’ takes a quarter of the time. Not every lesson is a showpiece. Set yourself a strict time limit for each task you complete and adhere to it. A lesson planned in 30 minutes will usually be just as effective as one you’ve slaved over for 3 hours.

Above all, it’s vital to remember that you, the teacher, are the most vital resource in the classroom and the principal agent in students’ progress. Preserving your own wellbeing by maintaining a healthy work-life balance is the single most important thing you can do to support pupils’ learning. No worksheet, no matter how brilliantly designed, can compensate for an exhausted teacher who has stayed up into the small hours designing it.

Boys welcomed back

The first boys in a generation (since 1993) have been welcomed back to the Pre-Prep and Prep departments at Durham High School (DHS).

The school announced it was accepting boys into the Pre-Prep and Prep Schools in April, with

Pictured: New starters at Durham High School

the Senior School becoming co-educational from September 2026.

DHS is owned and operated by Durham Education Limited, part of the Galaxy Global Education Group (GGEG). Headmistress at Durham High School, Michelle

Hill, said: “It’s been wonderful to see the excitement on all our new pupils’ faces, and we’re particularly delighted to see the boys settling into their new classrooms as we move towards becoming fully co-educational.”



Teachers as learners: how teachers inspire pupils and explore new horizons

By fostering a culture of continuous learning, schools can not only empower their teachers but also instil a love of studying in their pupils. At Morrison's Academy, Perthshire and Kinross, the belief that teachers are lifelong learners is at the heart of its educational philosophy. French and Spanish teacher at the school, Nicole Bukaty, shares her insights on how an energetic and supportive Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is nurturing this mindset among staff.

There can come a point as a classroom teacher where we stagnate by simply settling into a comfortable routine of prep, deliver, mark, feedback and repeat. If the exam results are great, then perhaps for some this is enough.

Yet, a comfort zone often leads to just getting on with a job rather than thriving and truly getting the most out of it, both for the pupils and their educators. I have been teaching for over ten years and refuse to accept that "This is all it's about and that'll do." Teaching can be much more thrilling, and, after all, our goals are to inspire our pupils to be curious learners now and into their adult lives.

This year, defying national trends, Morrison's Academy is experiencing a revival – it has one of its most-populated Spanish Higher classes to date, with many high-achievers with straight As at National 5s having opted for Spanish from a wide range of subject options. They are keen to connect to the world and feel a veritable need for their Spanish. Most of their questions to me

over the past four years have been about exploring, and not just about grammar, vocabulary and how to ace the exams.

As a lifelong learner of languages and cultures, it is extremely important to get out there and see the places where the languages are spoken. I trek on long-distance routes, mainly on pilgrimage trails, taking in less-populated landscapes, the smallest villages and farmsteads, and bustling towns, cities and paths, all often off the beaten track. My own adventures have given me opportunities like never before: I am now a published hiking guidebook author with books about Spain, Italy, and Scotland. Currently I am writing about Norway, having spent the summer of 2025 walking 900km there.

While I hike and research, I learn, and it is this learning that I convey directly to my pupils: the language is made 'real', its beauty and significance become tremendously valuable, and a thirst for exploration ignites within them. My anecdotal eye-opening stories

about the authentic uses and purposes of studying languages wake my pupils' imaginations in taking on remarkable adventures for themselves, and they know that they will need to make efforts in their use of language to achieve this. The lessons immediately become meaningful, and not just for a good grade. They understand that languages can lead everywhere and anywhere, to destinations unknown, and even to publishing books!

To generate a culture of Teachers as Learners, a strong Senior Leadership Team must light up a room with their energy. SLT at Morrison's Academy sets the bar high: they excel at supporting staff projects, and passionately contribute themselves.

Our ever-dynamic Depute Rector, Emma McCormick, has launched Learning Walks where teachers informally yet informatively observe each other – a fruitful experience to learn from one another, crowned by the charming custom of the observer writing a caring postcard to the observed. Likewise, she has initiated the school's Teaching and Learning toolkit; its aim: investigate all avenues for exceptional teaching practices founded on extensive research, and this is done by teachers across the school, from Nursery through to Secondary. It is entirely shaped by teachers after they have delved into experiments of high-quality teaching practices. Staff Conference Days organised by SLT are filled with engrossing activities that strengthen Teaching and Learning, and teachers grasp these opportunities.

SLT gets involved with all the tasks that teaching staff take on, and successfully fosters this dedication with admirable outcomes. At



Morrison's Academy the Pioneer Group, led by Head of Geography and T&L Co-ordinator, Alex Wylie, and with attendance from SLT, delves into reading and discussing one or two books a year to grow professionally and initiate evidence-based teaching and learning practices. Similarly, our online Teaching and Learning hub is bursting not only with reading materials, but videos of teachers at Morrison's Academy explaining and demonstrating their finds from their learning journeys.

Although my exploits bring true-life scenarios into the Language classroom, this year my voyage as an educator takes me even further. For the annual Professional Development Review, I am undertaking an enquiry into building speaking confidence and spontaneity in the foreign language classroom. Beckoning on my desk is a wide array of fascinating literature, and ahead of me are exciting creative lesson plans. I am enlivened at the prospects ahead where my own studies will enhance pupils' opportunities and direct them too onto their paths of lifelong language learning with a real purpose.



Nicole's series of publications can be found at www.cicerone.co.uk/authors/nicole-bukaty

Year 9 focus – teaching students a knowledge-rich curriculum

Year 9 is a turning point for students, with many pathways to choose from. In a rapidly changing information and disinformation era, Woodbridge School, Suffolk, has introduced a new course designed to help students learn about how the past can inform understanding of the world and how it threads through into the modern day. Deputy Head Academic at the school, Karl Hayward-Bradley, explains.



Karl Hayward-Bradley

As students progress through Year 9, thoughts turn to options choices and future pathways for GCSE examinations. The relevance of these subjects has never been under greater scrutiny than it is now.

Parents and students ask very valid questions about the subjects on offer. Do we need to take languages any more, when headphones can now translate in real time? Are STEM subjects still important, as AI is rapidly replacing jobs in these fields? Will the humanities ever be useful, given that generative AI can write, summarise and information-gather more quickly and efficiently than many office juniors? And is there still a future in music and art, when content is mercilessly sampled, synthesised and regurgitated by AI, for minimal cost?

I take a firm stand against this pessimism, arguing that there has never been a more important time to teach students a knowledge-rich curriculum.

Step back from generative AI spoon-feeding

First and foremost, students need to build a mental schema: a construct in their mind that allows for a structured understanding of the world. A schema can start off very basic (a map of the world, knowledge of the key dates in British and World history, the names of the Olympian Gods) and then be continually augmented as more information is presented. Without this structure, very little can be effectively learnt, and the child remains cognitively dependent.

Adults have generally established decent enough schemata in key areas, and can therefore critically

interpret the output from AI. It must never be assumed that children have this framework, and it is vital, therefore, that they take a step back from generative AI spoon-feeding, lest they be unwittingly fed intellectual 'slop'.

Teaching past, present and future

In Year 9 we run a novel course called 'Tripos'; this breaks into three strands, called Past, Present and Future. This is an excellent opportunity for students to build and structure their knowledge about ancient cultures, modern day politics and the law, and considerations of the world in the coming years. The schema that they build leaves them well-placed to further their knowledge in the areas studied. The course is unflinchingly intellectual in nature, filling gaps not served by the national curriculum.

The 'Past' strand includes Palaeolithic cave art, ancient Egypt, the Assyrians, Mycenaeans, through art and literature, trade and travel, through to local hoards and Roman Britain, and how this has shaped our history.

'Present' brings us to elections, voting and political theory; governments and accountability; the 'Social Contract'; Utilitarianism; the UN, Human Rights and International Law; Tax, Finance and Spending; and Market Economics versus Command Economics.

And without drawing breath, students in the 'Future' strand consider AI and the reshaping of careers, workplaces, and skills; global challenges, the future of society and population changes; emerging technologies, media and innovation; and the future of the planet and sustainability.

Contemplating the future of the curriculum

The learning landscape has changed significantly in recent years, and it is right that we review the future of the curriculum. Reports of the death of knowledge are greatly exaggerated. Indeed, a framework for critical thinking is more vital than it ever has been.

At Woodbridge, we are proudly laying the foundations for intellectual agency in our students: they must now boldly lead the resistance movement

against the onslaught of misinformation, from both AI and social media. They must be the thinkers that push back against the tide of political fear and coercion. It is only through well-constructed, knowledge-rich curriculums that we imbue young people with the skills to achieve this.



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From GDPR compliance to accountability – a school's guide to safeguarding data protection

In the first of a series on strengthening governance, risk and culture in data protection, privacy specialist, Simon Hall, explains why schools' focus on 'GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) compliance' leaves them exposed – and how switching to an accountability-based approach not only boosts resilience but also eases workload, reduces stress and builds a culture where accidental breaches – and catastrophic ransomware attacks – are less likely to happen.

1. The threat

It's always the big data breaches that make the headlines – Jaguar Land Rover, M&S, Boots, British Airways – but these are only the tip of the iceberg and don't reflect the harm and even danger breaches can cause.

Cyberattacks in education are rising faster than in business. A particular concern is ransomware, where criminals encrypt school data and demand a ransom, sometimes stealing a copy as well to sell on the dark web.

Independent schools are especially vulnerable. They rely heavily on reputation, they are perceived as having deep pockets, and the wealth or prominence of some parents can further enhance both the value of the stolen data and the opportunities for extortion.

Yet most breaches are caused, not by hackers, but by preventable mistakes: mis-sent emails, unlocked devices, spreadsheets uploaded in error, or staff being tricked into disclosing information. And the harm to individuals can be very real, as shown when an email to all parents was sent 'Cc' instead of 'Bcc', revealing a mother's email address to her estranged and abusive husband.

So why are independent schools so vulnerable, and what can be done?

2. The current approach: GDPR compliance

'GDPR compliance' quickly became the dominant focus of data protection activity post-2018. Policies were drafted, spreadsheets filled with records of processing, privacy notices published, training slides delivered, then... nothing. These activities were necessary,

but they were only supposed to be the starting point – not an end in themselves – ticking boxes and filing them away.

As I found from a series of small-group discussions with school governors over the summer, this approach fails in three key areas:

- **Governance** – Most governors are unaware they are legally accountable for data protection in their schools. Few receive reports, and GDPR is rarely on the agenda. Responsibility is often pushed onto the bursar, who lacks visibility of processing activities and authority to influence processing decisions, so is plainly unsuitable.
- **Risk** – Information risks are rarely assessed. New apps and AI tools are adopted without checks, and even safeguarding – one of the most sensitive areas – often proceeds without a (legally mandated) Data Protection Impact Assessment.
- **Culture** – GDPR is widely viewed as a bureaucratic burden, the training is deeply unpopular, incident reporting inconsistent, and staff disengaged.

This was never the legislators' intention. The GDPR was designed to protect us, our personal information and our rights; the principle of accountability was

introduced precisely to counter this tick-box mentality.

3. Why accountability works

Accountability means that those who decide what information to collect and what they will do with it should also be responsible for ensuring it is handled properly and securely. Privacy and security responsibilities should sit alongside operational responsibilities, not be shifted elsewhere.

For example, the Designated Safeguarding Lead is accountable to leadership for running the safeguarding processes, collecting and managing safeguarding information, keeping records and for deciding how all this will be done. Why would they not also be made responsible for ensuring that it is all done in ways that comply with the six data protection principles? And are they not best placed to keep the records and provide the reports with the assurance and evidence that the governors need?

This alignment works because it is both logical and practical: it saves time, it ensures accuracy. With a little training and simple record-keeping, managers can demonstrate compliance without adding unnecessary complexity. Governors,



Simon Hall

in turn, gain the visibility they need through structured, evidence-based reporting to meet their legal obligation – to ensure and be able to demonstrate compliance with the privacy principles.

By aligning data protection with operational responsibilities, schools can replace vague, burdensome 'GDPR compliance' with an 'accountability framework' that is both logical and effective.

4. The way forward

Independent schools cannot afford to keep their focus on GDPR compliance. The risks are too great. Having policies and spreadsheets on SharePoint doesn't provide protection to children whose information is being analysed by the plethora of AI technologies in the classroom, and it doesn't prevent attacks that are becoming more sophisticated as their impacts become more severe.

The evidence from governors' groups is clear: without accountability, breaches will continue to happen more often than they should.

The journey from compliance to accountability gives schools a framework that not only meets legal requirements but strengthens safeguarding, reduces workload and anxiety, and provides real protection for your pupils, parents and staff.

Simon Hall became the UK's first Data Privacy Officer at IBM. He later co-founded KPMG's global privacy advisory practice and has designed privacy programmes for multinational corporations including AstraZeneca and Walmart. More recently, he has served as Data Protection Officer to CPOMS. He is now Data Protection Thought Leader on School Business Manager (UK)'s Honorary Thought Leadership Panel, working with schools and trusts to adopt practical, proportionate approaches to data protection and, more widely, information governance.



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Empowering students for a complex future:

Why sustainability education matters now more than ever

In light of recent DfE Sustainability requirements, many independent schools are starting to implement their own climate action plans, if they haven't done so already. Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) Consultant Teacher for Sustainability, Kath Lovett, offers some suggestions for integrating sustainability education into schools, and how instead of being a chore, it can not only be a draw for value-led parents but also empower students to shape the future.

Sustainability education is more important now than ever. In an increasingly uncertain and volatile world, parents are seeking schools that will equip their children to thrive with courage, agency and purpose. They want to know that their child's education will prepare them not just for exams, but for the challenges and opportunities of a complex global future. Students are also worried. In a recent UCL (University College London) survey, 87% of secondary-aged children expressed concern about what the world will be like in the future because of climate change¹. Faced with statistics like these, as educators we should not just provide students with the knowledge and information about climate change but also equip them with skills to change the future, while taking action now. At the heart of this evolving educational context is a desire to empower students to become change-makers: educating young people to have the courage to lead, the capacity to think critically, and the compassion to act responsibly. For today's girls, in particular, that journey is inseparable from two major issues: mental health and the environment.

The Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) is a family of twenty-four independent schools and two academies across the UK. Our Girls' Futures Report (2022) provides a compelling insight into the mindset of young women. The top concerns for girls are clear: mental health ranked first, followed by environmental issues. Crucially, when asked what issues they believe

they can impact, the order shifted: environmental issues came first, followed closely by sustainability. This shift is powerful. It suggests that girls see sustainability and environmental action as areas where they can make a tangible difference, not just for themselves, but for the wider world. This is also reflected in the UCL report, with 80% of girls expressing a desire to learn more about climate change and sustainability. Sadly, when asked if adults were doing enough to look after the environment, only 16% agreed.

The Department for Education set out the ambitious aim for the UK to be a world leader in sustainability and climate education by 2030, putting in place a Climate Action Plan by the end of 2025. This is an opportune moment to demonstrate to our school communities that climate action is a genuine priority. This October, schools from across the GDST are coming together for a student led 'We Are One: Diversity and Global Wisdom for a Sustainable Future' symposium, an event that will explore the intersectionality between diversity and sustainability. Student involvement is central to a successful approach to sustainability. Eco-committees work closely with the teacher Sustainability Lead to identify priorities for change within the school, allowing students to see how their ideas can drive real systemic improvement. Sustainability can empower students to advocate for change: thoughtfully, constructively, and with a strong sense of purpose.

School climate action plans could explore a range of initiatives, from decarbonising school operations and creating climate-resilient buildings to enhancing onsite biodiversity, even in limited outdoor spaces. Bringing together committed stakeholders such as business managers, SLT, sustainability leads and eco-committees ensures decisions can be made efficiently, and meaningful links can be made between operational issues, such as food waste, and curriculum content, such as land use in Geography. The result is a more deeply embedded and holistic approach to sustainability.

Alongside these practical changes, it's essential to prioritise climate education and raise awareness of the growing opportunities in green careers. Green jobs have increased by 35% over the past decade, and by 2030, the low-carbon and renewable energy sector is expected to employ up to 694,000 people in the UK, rising to over 1.18 million by 2050. While STEM subjects will play a critical role in preparing students for these roles, the expansion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) frameworks means that green careers are becoming relevant across virtually every sector.

Sustainability education is about far more than recycling or reducing carbon footprints. When embedded meaningfully into school culture and curriculum, it offers students opportunities to lead projects, solve real-world



Kath Lovett

problems, and connect their learning to broader societal impact. These experiences build critical skills – collaboration, innovation and resilience – that are essential for navigating the future. This commitment extends across everything we do, leading to a greener curriculum and a greener estate with inspiring and sustainable spaces. As Trust Consultant Teacher for Sustainability, I work across our family of schools and have seen first-hand that for girls in particular, sustainability initiatives provide a platform to take bold action, shape their communities, and lead with purpose. It allows them to move from anxiety about the future to agency in shaping it. In other words, sustainability empowers our students. From reducing energy costs, waste disposal and water costs, to engaging prospective parents with a clear ethical vision, sustainability is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do. Ultimately, the most compelling reason to invest in sustainability education is that our students care deeply about it. They are telling us, with clarity and conviction, that they want to be part of the solution. They don't just want to inherit the future; we must give them the tools and confidence to shape it.

¹ Climate Change and Sustainability Education: A survey of students in England, July 2024, UCL, <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10195286/1/UCL%20Student%20Survey%20Report.pdf>

Sustainability challenge

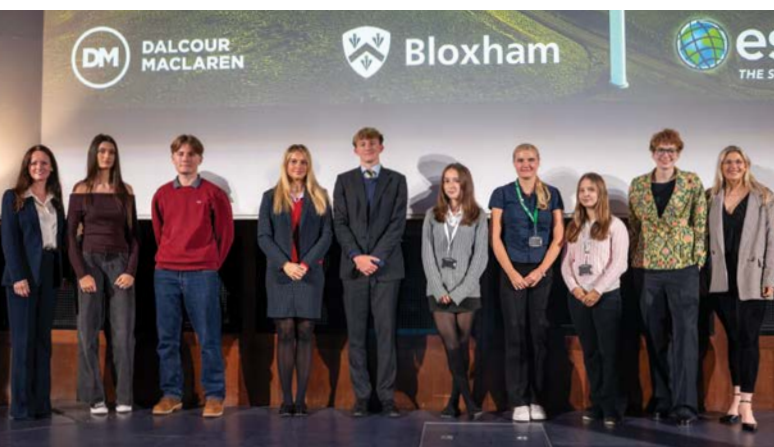
The latest Bloxham Sustainability Challenge (BSC) has been officially announced at the Royal Geographical Society, at an event that saw leading voices in education and climate policy come together.

Launched in 2023 by Bloxham School, Oxfordshire, the BSC brings together schools, environmental consultants and geospatial technology experts to help young people explore career opportunities in sustainability, using real-world challenges to inspire practical thinking.

Working in partnership with land consultancy Dalcour Maclaren and supported by GIS specialist ESRI UK, the initiative has been embraced by schools across the country, such as Rochdale Sixth Form College, Maidstone Grammar School for Girls, and Robert Gordon's College. By providing live

briefs that mirror the complexities of professional sustainability planning, the challenge equips Year 12 students with the tools, mentorship, and confidence to tackle environmental challenges that require real-world solutions.

Speaking at the launch event, Claire Evans, Head of Geography at Bloxham School and the co-creator of the Bloxham Sustainability Challenge, said: "This initiative is all about creating meaningful educational experiences that prepare students for future employment once they complete their studies. Most young people are unaware of the career paths they could be pursuing in sustainability and green jobs of the future, so the BSC helps address this by providing opportunities for highly engaging, student-led learning experiences with a real-world focus."



Pictured: Launching the BSC

Green Flag Award



Bede's Prep School, East Sussex, has been awarded the Eco-Schools Green Flag Award with Distinction for the fourth consecutive year. This achievement recognises the school's commitment to environmental education and sustainability.

The feedback from Eco-Schools highlighted the school's greatest success: fostering a positive environmental culture. The judges were particularly impressed by the pupils' passion, stating that when children are excited about sustainability, the message is "embraced" and not just taught. The annual Eco Stall that raised money for WWF at the Christmas Fair was celebrated as a prime example of the entire school community's engagement.

The judging team also praised the school's hands-on and varied approach to sustainability – Bede's Prep celebrated Eco Week, which featured an Eco quiz, Black

Out Day and recycled model competitions. Bede's Prep has also installed a new vegetable patch for Nursery pupils, and set up community litter-picking equipment available for families to hire on weekends and holidays, which the judges specifically highlighted as making learning more meaningful.

The judges were also impressed by how environmental issues are woven into many subjects, helping pupils see the real-world connection between their education and the environment. This is complemented by a range of educational trips, including visits to Lewes Wildlife Reserve and the Knepp Rewilding Project. Other initiatives, such as the school's 'bring and buy' book sale for the Marine Conservation Society, a new Gardening Club, and regular litter picks and beach cleans, were all commended.

Pictured: Bede's Eco-Schools flag

Photo credit: Bede's Prep School

Championing sustainability

Haberdashers' Monmouth School has been named the national winner of the Muddy Stilettos Best School Award 2025 for Championing Sustainability. Chosen from over 500 entries across the UK, the school was praised for its innovative, student-led approach to environmental action and its commitment to embedding sustainability across the curriculum, campus operations and community outreach.

"Schools have a unique opportunity not only to reduce their own environmental impact, but also to inspire the next generation with the knowledge, values and practical skills needed to build a greener and more

sustainable world," said Nicola James, Head of Sustainability at Haberdashers' Monmouth School. "It's been inspiring to see so many colleagues and students working together to put sustainability centre stage. A real team effort and something we can all be proud of."

This recognition also coincides with the school bidding farewell to Year 13 student Dylan Allman, a Youth Ambassador for The Mammal Society and recipient of a WWF Cymru grant. Dylan has been a driving force in many initiatives and leaves behind a lasting legacy of student-led environmental leadership.



Pictured: Beekeeping students at Haberdashers' Monmouth School

Photo credit: Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools

Ask the expert:

How can we learn from the £100,000 in savings discovered in one independent school's energy bill?

Energy is one of the biggest overheads for independent schools after staffing. With fluctuating markets, complex contracts and tricky VAT rules, it's easy to overspend without realising. But with the right strategy and support, your savings can be substantial.

Zenergi's Strategic Customer Success Manager, Billy Pryke, shares how we helped one school recover more than £100,000 and how other schools can achieve similar results.



Billy Pryke

Q: Why is energy procurement such a critical issue for independent schools?

With markets moving daily, the difference between a well-timed decision and a missed opportunity can amount to tens of thousands of pounds each year.

Independent schools often face nuanced challenges such as VAT considerations that are easily missed. For instance, schools with boarding students are typically entitled to a reduced VAT rate of 5% on their energy bills versus the standard 20%. If applied incorrectly, they can end up overpaying significantly, something our Bill Validation service quickly picks up and corrects.

Procurement isn't just about securing a contract; it's about protecting your financial health and giving leaders confidence in their budgets. A clear strategy

backed by expert insight like ours makes all the difference.

Q: So, schools can really make big savings on their energy bills?

Yes, we have the figures to prove it.

We worked with a boarding school that had been billed incorrectly for an entire year. At first glance, nothing looked unusual. But when our team dug deeper, we discovered a serious error. The invoices weren't matching with the agreed contract rates.

We challenged the supplier, carried out a full historic analysis and built a detailed case showing the school had been overcharged. After weeks of persistence, the supplier accepted our findings and issued a full refund of £107,000.

That money went straight back into the school's budget, allowing them to reinvest in teaching, facilities and sustainability projects. Just as importantly, it gave the bursar peace of mind that future bills would be monitored closely, preventing the same issue from happening again.

It was a turning point, not just about the refund itself, but about knowing they had the right support in place to safeguard their finances long into the future.

Q: It's clear mistakes can cost schools thousands. How can Zenergi help?

Energy bills are full of moving parts and it only takes one error for costs to spiral.

Our team checks every invoice line by line, making sure VAT rates are applied correctly and every

charge is accurate. This safeguard protects budgets and, as the £107,000 case study shows, can deliver transformative savings.

We also make energy data easy to understand. Through our forecasting, we help schools plan ahead. For example, the added benefit of our Portal gives leaders real-time visibility of their usage, spend and billing status. This level of insight allows schools to take control, budget with certainty and focus on delivering the best education for their students.

With our deep understanding of the education sector and long-standing supplier relationships, we give schools the assurance that someone is looking out for them, every step of the way. To find out more about how our Bill Validation service put more back in this independent school's budget, scan the QR code below.

About the expert

Billy Pryke supports schools to get maximum value from our products and services and the right long-term strategy.

To speak to Billy about your independent school's energy strategy, contact hello@zenergi.co.uk.

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

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Launch of new scholarships

St Albans School, Hertfordshire, has announced an enhancement of its scholarships programme, which is set to include Academic, Music, Choral, Sport, Drama and a brand-new range of Creative and Technical subjects from September 2026. The Creative and Technical Scholarship (which is new for 2026) will accept applicants from students at 11+ and 13+ who can choose from Art, Creative Writing, Computer Science or Design & Technology.

Designed to identify and recognise pupils who demonstrate outstanding academic, musical, creative and/or sporting talent, the scholarships programme has undergone a major revamp as part of the school's commitment

Pictured: Design Technology at the school

to widening educational opportunities for all.

Headmaster at St Albans School, Joe Silvester, explained, "We are thrilled to be widening our scholarship offering from the next academic year, and to include a much greater variety of specialisms. As I've said before, we are a school that never stands still, and this is simply one in a whole host of progressive and exciting enhancements that we are making. Scholarships are there to enrich our students' personal experience, but they also enrich the life of the school as a whole, so I look forward to welcoming the next generation of budding scholars into our vibrant school community."

Bursary and scholarship expansion

Wycliffe College, Gloucestershire, is expanding its bursaries and scholarships programme, with the introduction of 10 new awards for pupils living within a 30-mile radius of the school.

The new Wycliffe Futures Awards will be available to pupils wishing to join the Sixth Form, and offer up to 50% fee remissions for those who meet the criteria.

The programme is designed to open doors for young people who currently attend a state sector secondary school, who demonstrate outstanding academic potential and all-round ability, and who want to make the most of every opportunity and, in doing so, have a positive impact on those around them.

The new awards are:

- Sibly Award for Academic Excellence: open to 16+ A Level studies (four awards available)
- Wycliffian Award for All-Round Ability: for pupils joining Sixth Form demonstrating exceptional all-round ability (four awards available)

Pictured: Head, Mr Christian San José



- The San José (Headmaster's) Transformational Award: Headmaster's award for candidates considered to be 'intellectually curious', engaging, creative and resilient, and for whom a Wycliffe Sixth Form education would be transformational (two awards available)

All awards are means-tested and are open exclusively to new pupils who are not currently attending an independent school wishing to join Sixth Form.

The move follows Wycliffe's decision earlier this year to freeze its fees for families, introduce a 5% discount for siblings of existing pupils, and reduce the termly fee and boarding fee for Year 6 pupils.

The proof is in the pudding – and it's called CAT4

A partnership between one of the UK's most widely used assessments and a powerful data analysis tool now allows independent schools to demonstrate that they are really adding value.

Independent schools face a persistent challenge: how do they show the real impact they are making on student progress when raw attainment data doesn't always tell the whole story?

From May this year, that task got a whole lot easier. GL Assessment has joined forces with Alps Education to bring CAT4 data into the Alps Connect platform – and for schools looking to demonstrate real, measurable value-added progress, that is a game-changer.

Find out more <https://info1.renaissance.com/ism-cat4.html>

Why baselines matter

Final grades are important, but they can't show the value added by schools. So, proof of progress data – which inspectors expect to see under the updated ISI framework – is crucial.

That's where CAT4 comes in. By assessing core reasoning skills – verbal, non-verbal, quantitative and spatial – CAT4 provides a trusted baseline of student potential. And because it's standardised on a large nationally representative

sample – 25,000 students – and validated regularly with data from over 250,000 learners, it's a stable assessment that is both robust and reliable.

Integrating CAT4 with Alps

The visual dashboards on Alps Connect already help schools track performance and spot trends. Now, with CAT4 on board, they can:

- see if students are making the progress expected
- assess if groups such as EAL,

SEND and high prior attainers are improving equally well

- identify areas of real strength or barriers to progress.

Holistic views of every student

With CAT4 data on Alps Connect, schools can form a richer, more holistic view of every student. And in a sector where parents and inspectors are asking persistent and insightful questions, being able to show clear progress from a reliable baseline isn't just helpful, it's essential.



Advertorial Feature

Beyond the basics:

Why early education must blend tech fluency with timeless skills

While AI and educational technology are transforming how children learn, Principal of the Prep School at GEMS School of Research and Innovation, Dubai, Joshua Levenson, believes they should be integrated thoughtfully and not replace foundational skills. Here he explores how a balanced approach can ensure children are well-rounded future-ready learners.

“In today’s rapidly evolving world, the role of early education has never been more critical or complex. As educators, we’re not just preparing children for school; we’re preparing them for life in a world that will look very different from the one we know today. My belief in future-ready education stems from a simple but powerful idea: every child deserves to leave school equipped with transferable skills, a love of learning, and the confidence to thrive in any environment.

This isn’t about chasing trends or adding flashy tech to the classroom for appearance. It’s about building a foundation that blends innovation with timeless values, so our learners are not only digitally fluent but also deeply curious, culturally aware, and emotionally intelligent.

Tech that works harder than the screen

When we talk about ‘tech fluency’ in early years, we’re not talking about screen time or gadgetry. We’re talking about purposeful integration: technology that supports learning rather than distracts from it. In my classrooms, AI and edtech are used to reinforce phonics, counting, and pattern recognition. These tools are never gimmicks or add-ons; they’re woven into the learning experience.

Importantly, we never use tech for tech’s sake. It’s not about putting a tablet in a child’s hand, it’s about using digital tools to enhance understanding, spark curiosity, and build confidence. Whether it’s phonics apps that help children sound out words or pattern games that develop early maths skills, the goal is always the same: meaningful learning.

Reading is still the superpower

Despite the digital shift, foundational skills remain non-negotiable. Reading, in particular, is one of the most fundamental human skills. It’s the gateway to lifelong learning, independent thinking, and personal growth. A child who can read fluently and with joy is a child who can unlock every other aspect of their education.

Enrichment activities – from storytelling and drama to cultural exploration – are equally vital. They broaden our children’s experiences, helping them become well-rounded, globally aware citizens. We want our students to walk into any room with confidence, curiosity, and cultural fluency. That’s not something you get from an app; it’s something you build through lived experiences.

One of the most powerful validations of this approach is seeing alumni return and share how their early love of reading, curiosity for learning, and passion for numbers helped them achieve academic and professional success. These moments remind us that the seeds we plant in early education truly shape futures.

Tradition + innovation = real impact

Balancing innovation with tradition isn’t easy, but it’s essential. One of the most effective strategies I’ve found is focusing on transferable skills rather than specific tools. Instead of teaching children how to use a particular device, we show them how to think critically, adapt quickly, and solve problems creatively. These are the skills that will serve them well no matter how technology evolves.

To teachers feeling the tech tension

If you’re an educator who feels unsure about integrating technology into your teaching, you’re not alone. But here’s my advice: embrace it, safely and thoughtfully. We have a duty to prepare children for a future that’s evolving faster than ever. That means experimenting, learning, and learning alongside our students.

You don’t need to be a tech expert. You just need to be open-minded and brave. Try new tools, explore new methods, and let curiosity lead the way. Remember, experimentation is the beginning of innovation, and innovation is what inspires our children to be creative, curious, and confident.



Joshua Levenson

One last thought: you hold the power

As educators, we hold extraordinary power. We shape trajectories, open doors, and ignite passions. By setting high expectations – from reading and digital skills to problem-solving and collaboration – we prepare children not just for school, but for life.

Let’s stop funnelling children into narrow roles or outdated skillsets. Instead, let’s equip them with the tools, mindset, and resilience to thrive in a world full of possibility. Because when we blend tech fluency with timeless skills, we don’t just teach – we transform.

Anniversary celebrations

Worksop College, Nottinghamshire, has marked a major milestone in its history as the school community came together to celebrate 130 years since its founding in 1895.

Pupils, staff, and special guests gathered to witness the planting of 50 cherry blossom trees along the college driveway in a symbol of both remembrance and renewal.

In addition, junior pupils buried a time capsule, filled with messages, artefacts, and memories from 2025, as a gift to future generations of Worksopians.

Headmaster, Charles Bailey, said: “For 130 years, Worksop College and Ranby House have stood as places of learning, friendship and opportunity. Today, we honour

Head, Charles Bailey, and the School Council planting a cherry tree



the past while shaping the future. The cherry blossom trees will serve as a lasting reminder of the generations who came before us, while the time capsule reflects our hopes for those yet to come.”



Mission Nutrition: Empowering children with lifelong healthy habits

At apetito, two of our core values are 'Great food to be proud of' and 'Enhancing health and wellbeing'. While providing schools with high-quality, nutritious meals, packed full of healthy ingredients, is at the heart of what we do, we see our responsibility as going further than that. Children spend a considerable amount of their time at school, which makes it the ideal place for them to learn about nutrition and foster healthy food habits, which can last a lifetime.

Why Mission Nutrition matters

Educating children on the benefits of a healthy diet has never been so important. Childhood obesity is a significant health issue, with it estimated that today in England, one in three children will be obese or overweight when they finish primary school¹. While receiving good nutrition in childhood is essential for a strong start in life, it alone is not enough. To truly empower children to lead healthy lives, they must be educated about the vital role food and nutrition play in their overall wellbeing.

In the UK, teaching pupils about cooking and nutrition forms part of the curriculum. However, despite this, studies show that there are significant disparities between schools in the number of hours of food and nutrition lessons that pupils actually receive². One of the main factors contributing to these

differences was found to be a lack of adequate support and resources for teachers.

Diving into Mission Nutrition

As a company with immense in-house nutritional and dietetic expertise, we are passionate about supporting schools to effectively educate their pupils on the benefits of a healthy diet.

To do this, we are launching a suite of lesson plans titled 'Mission Nutrition'. The first in the series is a set of Key Stage Two lesson plans, which are now available for all schools partnering with apetito. These have been created by apetito's in-house dietitians, chefs and nutritionists with the aim of creating educational content in line with the national curriculum that support teachers when delivering lessons on food and nutrition. More lesson plans will be launched in 2026.

The first lesson plan is focused on teaching pupils how to build healthy habits which will stay with them for life. The lesson introduces the Eatwell plate and breaks down each component of the plate, enabling teachers to give their pupils a strong foundational knowledge about what makes up a well-balanced diet.

The second lesson plan covers the frequency with which the food types should be eaten, food labelling and the traffic light system, helping to give pupils a well-rounded understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. Children are then taught how to cook apetito's vegetable quiche recipe, giving them the opportunity to get hands-on and make their very own quiche.

Head Development Chef at apetito, Jethro Lawrence, explains why educating pupils about food is so critical:

"It is so important for our children to be educated about how healthy food can be delicious! The benefit of knowing where certain ingredients come from can help develop important life skills. Food knowledge promotes healthy eating habits, enhances cognitive skills, encourages children to try new flavours and builds their confidence around food."

Through these resources, apetito aims to empower teachers to give pupils a hands-on understanding of the importance of having a healthy and balanced diet, a lesson which, given the childhood obesity crisis, has never been so important. By building a solid foundation of nutritional knowledge from an early age, children are far more likely to adopt lifelong healthy eating habits, essential for their long-term health.

Transform your school 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.

1 Hicks, D.R. (2025). More Children Gaining Unhealthy Weight in Primary School. [online] Medscape. Available at: <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/more-children-gaining-unhealthy-weight-primary-school-2025a10007u8?form=fpf> [Accessed 8 Sep. 2025].

2 Jamie Oliver Food Foundation (2017). A Report on the Food Education Learning Landscape. Available at: https://www.akoofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2_0_fellreport-final.pdf.



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Keeping Children Safe in Education – what has changed since last year?

New Department for Education (DfE) guidance has been released in relation to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). Litigator, Ane Vernon, explores what school leaders need to know and takes a look at what will be changing from September 2026 in relation to Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and health education.



Ane Vernon

The updated version of the DfE's KCSIE guidance came into force on 1 September 2025. While the changes from the 2024 version have been modest, there are some key points to note. More significant changes are expected in a future update, which should reflect the implementation of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, findings from inquiries such as the National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and initiatives designed to tackle violence against women and girls. Future updated guidance should also take account of the Supreme Court's ruling in 'For Women Scotland v Scottish Ministers' as well as guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (currently published as interim guidance).

Online safety

The 2025 KCSIE guidance has incorporated misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories into the content section as safeguarding harms. Schools need to take an effective whole-school approach to educate and protect pupils in their use of technology and be alive to the increased and constantly evolving potential exposure to harmful content.

Generative AI

Clear expectations are set to ensure effective prevention of harmful content, monitoring through activity logs and to prioritise transparency as well as awareness of and compliance with data protection laws. The

updated guidance includes a direct reference to the DfE guidance 'Generative AI: product safety expectations' which was published in January 2025. This sets out the capabilities and features that generative AI products should comply with in order to be used safely in educational settings. There is also a direct link to DfE's guidance 'Plan technology for your school' which contains a self-assessment tool aimed at tailoring recommendations to the needs of an individual school.

Safeguarding

The updated guidance points schools towards resources such as the Lucy Faithfull Foundation's 'Shore Space', which was developed in collaboration with the Home Office. Shore Space is an online confidential chat service for young people who are concerned about their own, or someone else's, sexual thoughts and behaviour. Other links added to Annex B are to the CSA Centre's Resources for education settings, as well as a link to Preventing Child Sexual Exploitation from The Children's Society.

KCSIE 2025 helpfully reminds schools that the DfE guidance 'Working together to improve school attendance' is statutory guidance.

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and health education: what will be changing from September 2026?

This new statutory guidance was released by the DfE in July 2025 but will not take effect until September 2026. The world in which children grow up has changed dramatically since the introduction of the current guidance document which dates back to 2019. The updated guidance needs to reflect concerns arising from social media: trends including misogyny, deepfakes, AI and pornography. It was published with a year's lead-in time so that schools can prepare for its implementation next year.

Involving parents

The new guidance introduces the idea of openness with parents about teaching materials. While parents will not be permitted to veto curriculum content, schools should consult with parents and share a representative sample of resources with them.

This collaboration and transparency with parents feeds into new guidance surrounding requests for withdrawal of a child from sex education. While previously it was recommended that the headteacher discuss the request with the parents, the DfE now suggests that the conversation should cover both the benefits of sex education and the detrimental effects of withdrawal.

Modern family

The new policy encourages primary schools to include same-sex parents in discussions about family, and secondary schools to provide equal opportunities to

explore the features of stable and healthy same-sex relationships.

Respectful relationships

A key driver behind the DfE's new policy was research which revealed just how widespread exposure to misogyny or harmful online content has become. The new curriculum guidance places significant emphasis on consent, and awareness of power dynamics and stereotypes. It addresses how pornography can normalise harmful sexual behaviour and disempower certain groups, most notably women. The new policy mentions the importance of providing pupils with an opportunity to discuss how some sub-cultures (for example, 'involuntary celibates') can influence the perception of sexual ethics.

Increased focus on mental wellbeing

The new guidance is aimed at teaching pupils how to build resilience and manage everyday mental health challenges. The secondary health and wellbeing curriculum content teaches young people about serious mental health conditions and challenges. Care should be taken not to encourage normal feelings to be labelled as mental health conditions, but rather to help pupils develop coping strategies and push themselves to participate in activities which initially feel challenging.

Ane Vernon is a partner at law firm Payne Hicks Beach. She specialises in disputes arising in the commercial, education and regulatory sector, including safeguarding. www.phb.co.uk



Educator, beware. Not all assessments are created equal...

What should schools look for in an assessment? Head of Research & Statistics at GL Assessment, Bernadetta Brzyska, provides a checklist every school should ask before they buy.

“All that glitters is not gold,” Shakespeare admonished. Or “Just because it’s viral doesn’t mean it’s valuable,” as teachers might warn today.

What’s true of information online is true also of assessments. Not all assessments are created equal. And what may look superficially enticing could be substantively lacking.

With more assessment options than ever before, schools are facing a bewildering choice. While features like broad device access are increasingly common, the real value lies in how well an assessment delivers meaningful, reliable insights. Whether it’s integration with complementary tests or the depth of its trial data, the best assessments are those built to reflect the realities of the classroom to help you make informed decisions with confidence.

To help schools decide which tests are not only appropriate for them but also meet the highest statistical standards, Head of Research & Statistics, Bernadetta Brzyska, suggests a few questions you can ask of any assessment provider:

1. Is it standardised ‘nationally’?

Is it based on a large, representative sample of the school population, so results can be benchmarked against national norms? If it isn’t – or is based on an unbalanced subset of students – then it can’t be used to make meaningful comparisons.

2. Is it regularly reviewed?

Good quality assessments are continually reviewed to ensure they align with best practice and schools’ expectations, and that they are still measuring the factors they claim to measure.

3. Is it reliable? Does it provide consistent results across different groups and settings? If an assessment claims it can be taken in a variety of ways, that will inevitably call into question its reliability if those settings or devices haven’t been thoroughly researched and tested.

4. Is it developed to high standards? An essential part of test development is trialling questions with real students. Excellent writers and rigorous reviewing processes will produce good questions – but to be sure they aren’t misunderstood or unintentionally confusing, they need to be road



tested on actual students. If an assessment hasn’t been, it can’t be considered robust.

5. Is it transparent? Can customers see a technical report that shows how the assessment was built and validated? Some information will be commercially sensitive and not published, but much of it won’t be and should be available on request.

6. Are diagnostic insights included? The best assessments enable you to identify potential barriers to learning and provide teachers with the information needed for targeted interventions and personalised learning strategies.

7. Is the reporting easy to interpret? Your data specialist may understand the results of any assessment, but what about classroom teachers, school leaders or parents? Reports should be tailored for different stakeholders, and accessible in a range of formats.

If the answer to any of these is ‘no’ or isn’t clear, are you sure the assessment under consideration is right for your school?



For further information, please visit: <https://uk.renaissance.com/supporting-independents>

Learning support award



Ellesmere College, Shropshire, is celebrating after winning the Best Educational Needs Provider category for its ongoing programme of successful learning support at the 2025 Independent Education Awards hosted by Business Awards UK.

The awards are held to recognise the individuals and institutions whose work contributes meaningfully to the diversity and quality of educational provision. Winners reflect a wide range of specialisms, from academic excellence and adult learning to accessibility, career development, and community engagement.

Deputy Head External Relations, Stephen Mullock, said: "We are

absolutely delighted to win this award. Learning support is critical to our ongoing success and we are proud of the crucial role the school is playing in ensuring that those students who need that one-to-one support receive the appropriate support to access their educational programme, and one that enables them to reach their full potential.

"The award comes as we welcome a new Special Education Needs lead to the staff. Mrs Rhiannon Coxey Evans took up her post at the start of the new term in September and we wish her well in her new role. Mrs Coxey Evans has been part of the SEND team at Ellesmere College previously and has a lot of experience in the field.

Pictured: Ellesmere College Support for Learning team with the award

Social mobility award

Bolton School, Lancashire, is celebrating after the school has been named as "School/ College of the Year" at the 2025 UK Social Mobility Awards (SOMOs).

Described as the "Oscars for Social Mobility", the SOMOs recognise organisations and individuals who go above and beyond to level the playing field for people from less-advantaged socio-economic backgrounds across the UK.

Bolton School was shortlisted for the award earlier in the summer, in recognition of its sustained and systematic work to enable social mobility in the town and beyond.

In recent years, this work has included partnerships with OnSide Youth Zones and The Bursary Foundation to increase equitable access to the school's bursary scheme; the recently-launched Open Futures Bursary Campaign, which aims to expand the school's bursary provision to support one in three pupils; and its pastoral care programme for bursary recipients, which ensures each student is fully supported to thrive and succeed.

Pictured: The SOMO Award
Photo credit: Bolton School



Outstanding service award

Two members of staff, Neill Barrett and David Pollard, from Downside School, Somerset, have been awarded The Lord Lieutenant of Somerset's Certificate for Meritorious Service.

The official citations from the Lord Lieutenant read: "Lt Col Neill Barrett has served Downside School's Combined Cadet Force with extraordinary dedication since joining in 1991. Appointed Contingent Commander in 2004, he has led with quiet authority and unwavering commitment for over three decades, balancing this with numerous wider school responsibilities including faculty leadership, pastoral roles and sports coaching.

His leadership style is inclusive and empowering, earning the respect of both staff and cadets. Under his stewardship, the CCF has thrived as a valued and enjoyable part of school life, thanks to his infectious enthusiasm and ability to inspire others. His encouragement has drawn a steady stream of committed staff volunteers and fostered a strong sense of camaraderie.

"Neill's contribution extends far beyond the school, where his cheerful presence has guided countless young people through Ten Tors and Duke of Edinburgh challenges, and his thoughtful organisation of the annual Remembrance Service continues to be a profound moment in the school calendar.

"For his exceptional service, outstanding leadership and exceptional service to Downside School CCF, Lt Col Neill Barrett is awarded His Majesty's Lord-

Lieutenant Certificate for Meritorious Service."

"Chief Petty Officer (CPO) David Pollard has served as SSI (School Staff Instructor) at Downside School CCF since 2012, bringing with him valuable experience from the Army, Navy, and as a Navy Area Instructor for the South West. His boundless enthusiasm for all things CCF and outdoor education has made him an invaluable asset to the school.

"In addition to expertly managing the day-to-day administration of the CCF, David leads all outward-bound activities for both the contingent and the wider school. His commitment extends far beyond core duties; as a senior Housemaster, he also runs a wide range of adventure clubs – including sailing, canoeing, bouldering, mountain biking and shooting, on evenings and weekends.

"David has been instrumental in revitalising the school's sailing programme, establishing a dedicated fleet at Cheddar Reservoir. He also leads the planning and delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and plays a vital role in Ten Tors Challenge preparations each year.

"His cheerful, can-do spirit motivates cadets to challenge themselves and embrace adventure. Widely respected across the school, David is a role model whose influence has shaped the lives of countless pupils.

"In recognition of his exceptional service, commitment, and impact, David is awarded His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Certificate for Meritorious Service.



Pictured: Lt Col Neill Barrett with The Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Mohammed Saddiq (left); Chief Petty Officer (CPO) David Pollard (right)



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Building confidence and self-belief in children

Today's young people face immense pressures in many areas of their lives. Social media amplifies comparison, academic expectations weigh heavily, and many struggle with low self-esteem. Educational speaker and former teacher, James Shone, explains that by building confidence and self-belief, children can approach challenges with courage and embrace opportunities.

Too often, children define themselves by what they can't do, rather than what they can.

When I meet young people in schools, I often hear them say things like, "I'm rubbish at maths" or "I'll never be good at sport," and it's clear that negative self-talk deflates their self-belief before it even has a chance to grow.

After many years of teaching, I realised the most rewarding part of my job was helping students build their confidence and, most importantly, their self-belief. It often gets confused, but self-belief is not about being the loudest voice in the room. It is about knowing your own value and having the courage to keep going and bouncing back even when things get tough.

Inflating your balloon

To explain the concept of self-belief to young people, we can use the metaphor of a balloon. Every young person has a metaphorical balloon inside them, and when it is filled, they feel positive about themselves and capable of tackling the challenges of school. When the balloon is deflated, they can feel inadequate and lack the resilience to do their best. Similarly, when young people feel part of a community and valued, this sense of belonging gives them the security that they are part of a team. I see significant value in celebrating all successes with young people, however big or

small. Whether it's mastering a new skill or persevering through a challenge, encouraging a sense of achievement reinforces the message of 'I can' and enhances self-belief.

The four pillars of 'I CAN'

This approach can be encapsulated in four core pillars, each designed to keep the 'balloon' inflated. They are Intelligence, Challenge, Attitude and Needed (I CAN).

We all possess unique **intelligence** and by identifying our individual skills, we can boost our self-belief by spending time doing things we are good at and enjoy.

Overcoming **challenges** helps us to build resilience. Everyone makes mistakes and it's important to remember that it is about taking small, progressive steps, rather than giant leaps.

Our **attitude** shapes our perspective. A positive and grateful attitude can turn setbacks into opportunities.

Finally, we all need connection and to feel accepted and **needed**. Surrounding ourselves with people who support us strengthens self-belief and belonging.

Maintaining confidence

Building self-belief in young people does not happen overnight. It grows through consistent encouragement and opportunities to experience both success and failure. I encourage parents and teachers to use

positive language, such as "I believe in you" or "Well done, you tried your best." Many young people need reassurance that their efforts matter even more than the 'achievement'. Everyone excels at different things, and these qualities may not fit into traditional categories such as academic or sport. They might shine through kindness, creativity, or problem-solving.

Self-confidence and belief does not always come from succeeding. It comes from knowing you can bounce back from mistakes and challenging times and be willing to learn next time.

The role of adults in shaping belief

Parents, teachers, and mentors have a significant impact on young people's development. Too often, adults unintentionally deflate balloons by focusing solely on areas that need improvement. Instead, we must alter the narrative and remind them of their unique strengths and qualities.

This doesn't mean shielding young people from difficulties. Self-confidence and resilience grow when they face obstacles, but knowing they are supported when tackling such challenges is a key ingredient. By offering empathy, perspective, and encouragement, we can empower young people to navigate life with greater resilience.

Technology is a key challenge



for teachers and parents. While it offers extraordinary opportunities, it also carries risks. Social media can undermine self-esteem through constant comparison. As adults, we must help young people develop healthy digital habits, reminding them that online portrayals are far from reality. Being part of a community and forming genuine friendships gives them a stronger sense of belonging than any social media platform could.

Why self-belief and confidence matter

Self-belief and self-esteem are not just nice to have. They are the foundation for all future success whether in education, jobs or relationships. A person who believes in themselves will approach challenges with courage and embrace opportunities.

I have seen first-hand the transformation when a young person's balloon is filled. They stand taller and, most importantly, believe they have the tools to achieve great things. Every child deserves to believe they are enough and as the adults supporting their journey, it is our responsibility to nurture their balloons of self-belief and prioritise a positive approach to learning.

James Shone is a founder of the charity I Can & I Am which seeks to help nurture self-belief in young people by equipping them with practical tools that foster personal growth, a sense of belonging and resilience.

Since 2014, they've supported thousands across South England with free tools and resources, focusing on proactive growth within schools and communities to inspire confidence and positivity.

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Profile

In conversation with Sharon Schanschieff

Born: London in 1970.

Married: Yes, to Chris – we've just celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary.

Children: Two – Amy (25) and Tom (27).

Schools and universities attended: St Ursula's Convent School in Greenwich; University of Exeter.

First Job: Sales assistant at Saxon's (shoe shop).

First job in independent education: Maths teacher at Old Buckenham Hall (prep boarding school in Suffolk).

Appointed to the current job: Easter 2024 (although I have been at the school since 2015).

Favourite piece of music: 60s music & musical theatre.

Favourite food: Chocolate.

Favourite drink: A glass of Pimm's on a sunny day.

Favourite holiday destination: I enjoy travelling to new places, but I love Spain (my mother was Spanish, so it is a special place for me).

Favourite leisure pastime: Reading and walking.

Favourite TV or radio programme/series: Any tense or suspenseful thriller.

Suggested epitaph: Love the life you live. Live the life you love. *Bob Marley*

Q You read mathematics and education at university, so teaching must have been on your radar at that age already. Who or what inspired you into the profession?

A I've wanted to teach for as long as I can remember – it's in my blood! My nan and two of my aunts were teachers – so schools always felt like familiar, inspiring places. As a child I loved helping out on school trips, supporting in classrooms with maths and reading, or assisting with swimming lessons. I thrived in that busy, energetic environment.

I'll never forget the first time I witnessed a 'lightbulb moment' – helping a child read a word for the first time and seeing their face light up with understanding. It was magical and confirmed my desire to teach. Maths has always been my favourite subject, and I was fortunate to have some truly inspiring maths teachers myself. By the age of 11 or 12, I knew I wanted to specialise in it.

Q Your first job in education was in the state sector before you made the switch to independent education. Looking back, what would you say was the most striking difference between the sectors that you noticed as a teacher?

A For me, the most striking difference between the state and independent sector was the level of resource and flexibility available in independent schools. There are greater opportunities to offer a much broader curriculum. With fewer restrictions, smaller class sizes and an array of extracurricular enrichment, teachers at independent schools are able to tailor learning more individually than in the state sector. That said, I was also struck by the incredible dedication and resilience of both staff and students in state schools. Yes, they are working with fewer resources and less flexibility, yet they are still achieving excellent outcomes, both academically and pastorally. Both the state and the independent sector have so much to offer young people, and I think working at both has given me a real appreciation of the different approaches to teaching and learning and the challenges both sectors face.

Q You took on the role of Head after working at Abbot's Hill for many years – how did you navigate that move? Any tips for someone considering a similar internal career change?

A Transitioning into a headship role having worked at the school for a number of years was really all about shifting from a supporting role and implementing decisions to shaping the vision and strategy for the school. I think one of the positives of this being an internal move is that I already knew the pupils and my colleagues, so that really helped with continuity, knowing the school and its community and recognising what worked well and what we wanted to change. At the same time, it was important for me to let go of some of the responsibilities that I had previously had and to delegate effectively. I wanted to give the other leaders around me ownership of those tasks so that I could focus on the bigger picture. It was also really important to me that I remained visible and approachable while being clear on my priorities.

Although I had strong relationships in school, I had to be mindful to maintain the trust of those around me and that can be challenging in a new role. For anyone looking to transition internally into a headship role, I would say don't underestimate how much others around you will have to manage that shift too. Strong communication is key because a change like this does have a big impact on your team. My advice is to take time to observe and to really get to grips with what the priorities are for you and also for your school. Don't be afraid to make changes, but also respect what is already working well.

Q Abbot's Hill School was founded on the present site in 1912 by sisters Alice, Katrine and Mary Baird, who founded the school 'to educate young women of character' under the motto 'Vie et Virtute', meaning 'Strength and Power'. What do you think they intended by that at the time, and is it still a valid sentiment?

A Back in 1912, I believe that the sisters were emphasising the importance of resilience, integrity and confidence in young women. This was at a time when

Sharon Schanschieff has been Head at Abbot's Hill School, Hertfordshire, since Easter 2024. She has been at the school since 2015 with previous roles including maths teacher, Head of Year, Director of Teaching & Learning, and Head of the Senior School.



opportunities for women were far more limited than they are now. They wanted young women to leave school not only academically capable, but also able to face the world with moral courage and self-belief while having a positive impact on others.

The core principles around strength and power that they were reaching out to at that point still ring true today; nurturing capable, confident young people continues to guide the way the school operates today. In a world filled with complex challenges and distractions, strength and power involve standing up for one's beliefs and for others, while valuing kindness, empathy, and emotional intelligence. It's about the courage to learn from failures and the confidence to make a difference, not just physical ability.

Q Abbot's Hill today caters for girls aged 4 to 16, and as of September boys aged 4 to 11, along with a co-ed day nursery and pre-school. However, there is no sixth form. Why? What are the benefits to this structure?

A Not having a sixth form is a conscious and strategic decision. The transition at the end of Year 11 is a powerful moment, giving pupils the chance to grow in confidence and independence before they move on to sixth form colleges or specialist providers. It's an important step in embracing change in a supported way, preparing them for the bigger leap at 18.

Because we don't have a sixth form, our guidance is entirely impartial. Our bespoke careers and transition programmes help pupils find the right post-16 destination – whether that's a top academic sixth form, a creative or vocational setting, or something in between.

By Year 11, our pupils are leaders in the school. They take on meaningful roles – such as Head Girl or Prefect – mentor younger students, play lead roles in productions, and represent the school at public events. These experiences build resilience, self-belief, and maturity. Our students leave ready to face new challenges with ambition and confidence.

Q As mentioned above, the school has recently gone co-ed in your pre-prep and prep settings with plans to extend this into the Senior School as of September 2026. Current parents will presumably have chosen the school, at least partly, because they wanted a girls-only environment; how will you convince them that the change is a good thing for their daughters?

A Although we must continue to progress and evolve as a school, we do acknowledge and respect the reasons our current parents chose a girls-only environment and it is important that we validate their perspectives. For us, introducing boys gradually into the prep and pre-prep was a carefully considered decision, and it was always designed to enrich the learning environment rather than change it. The school's commitment to nurturing girls' confidence, leadership and academic excellence remains as strong as ever, as does our ethos and culture that makes Abbot's Hill special. It's important to recognise that change isn't about replacing what works, but it is about enhancing it, widening access and responding proactively to the future.

Our nursery is already co-educational, so this was a natural and timely extension. We've seen growing demand from families with boys in our nursery – especially those with sisters already at the school – who wanted to stay on. At a wider level, the independent education sector is adapting to meet economic pressures, demographic shifts, and changing parental expectations. With several boys already registered, we're confident that this move reflects what families want: a values-led, forward-looking school community for both girls and boys.

Q Some pupils are said to have a fear of maths. With your background in the subject would you say that was your experience as a teacher? If so, how did you help them overcome it?

A As mentioned, I was fortunate to have inspiring maths teachers from a young age, although I also experienced one who I didn't connect with – he was brilliant at maths, but it just didn't

click for me. The reason I wanted to become a maths teacher was because I wanted to be the one who inspired and supported. I have seen pupils who are fearful of maths, they say they don't like it and can't understand it, and I think this is because they feel pressurised to get it right – many feel they have to answer quickly alongside their peers who might get the answer faster, or they've had negative experiences with maths.

For me, the key to helping them overcome that fear is building on their confidence through understanding rather than memorisation. Breaking concepts down into manageable steps, scaffolding, and modelling answers while using real-life examples can help. We need to make maths relevant in the real world and to celebrate successes no matter how small, to acknowledge progress. Making mistakes is part of that journey and learning curve. We need to embrace wrong answers so we can dig into where they came from. Reducing fears around maths means creating a supportive, patient environment that welcomes questions. As teachers we should be developing curiosity and changing that mindset from anxiety to enjoyment and enthusiasm.

Q Thinking beyond traditional academic measures, what would you say are the top three key life skills that you think children need today to prepare them for the modern world? How are you as a school going about helping your students gain these skills?

A I know it's a cliché, but I think resilience has to be in there. Having the maturity and the ability to cope with life's challenges, changes and setbacks is vital for young people. This also means having an emphasis on wellbeing and reflection to help develop resiliency further. Critical thinking is another key skill – being able to analyse and read a situation, make informed decisions and approach challenges creatively. It is important that young people learn there is never one way to do things – however, they need the confidence to be able to push back and voice their ideas in a constructive way. Young people will need to work effectively with others in the future, so they need to possess these skills to express their thoughts and ideas clearly.

Continued >

Profile In conversation with Sharon Schanschieff (continued)

Collaboration and communication complete the trio. Young people need to work effectively with others, express their thoughts clearly, and engage in teamwork. We encourage this through project-based learning, leadership roles, and opportunities across lessons, co-curricular clubs, and the wider school community. At Abbot's Hill, we believe schools shouldn't just prepare students academically – they need to equip them with the skills, confidence, and mindset to thrive in the modern world.

Q Abbot's Hill became part of the Mill Hill Group last year. With many other schools now making similar decisions to come together, do you have any advice for your fellow heads on how to best manage that process?

A Although the decision to join the Mill Hill Group had already been made by the school governors at the point I took over the role, I believe it was a very smart move. Joining the Mill Hill Education Group strengthens our ability to thrive in a changing educational landscape. It ensures we can continue to deliver a high-quality education while benefitting from the support, resources, and expertise of a larger network. Importantly, our identity and values remain unchanged. Being part of a wider family of schools offers tangible benefits: shared best practice, cross-school

collaboration, and economies of scale. It's a step forward that allows us to grow while staying true to who we are.

My advice to other schools considering this route would be to communicate openly and transparently with your staff, pupils and parents from the outset. I also think it's important that that you don't lose sight of your own school's existing culture simply to fit in with another. You have to remain true to yourself as a school and make that clear from the very beginning of any discussions.

Q You are married to the Deputy Head of a nearby prep school. Do you have any house rules about talking shop at home?

A That's a tricky one. We've worked together at the same school in the past, so we are quite used to it now. We both care deeply about education and leadership, but we do try to have some house rules around talking shop at home. That said, it can be difficult sometimes to separate work and home life and to switch off completely and recharge. We do share ideas and we do sometimes discuss the challenges that we are facing because it can help to look at scenarios from different perspectives. Although we try to keep those conversations constructive and limited, particularly when we are around our children (who are older and not often home), because when they are

with us, we want to ensure that home is a place for family and relaxation. There are of course times, especially during the school holidays, when we put our laptops down, we go out, spend time with our family and we avoid talking shop.

Q After a busy day at school, what do you like to do to relax?

A There's not a great deal of time in the evenings to relax during term time so even just sitting down and watching a good box set on TV or going for a nice walk helps me to unwind after a busy day. I try to get a bit of exercise in each day too, whether that is a walk in the park or some time on the treadmill just to retain some balance. Weekends tend to be when I can relax more. Family times are also a priority if my children are around. We often play sports or catch up with my daughter on FaceTime as she is in Australia at the moment. We also enjoy watching my son play hockey or cricket, and when we have the chance, we play tennis together as a family too. If it is just the two of us, we love going away on holiday, going to the cinema and eating out. I absolutely love reading too, so delving into a good book or two is a passion – although I don't allow myself to read during term time because I can't put them down!

Biology art competition

Winners of the Royal Society of Biology's BioArtAttack 2D competition have been announced.



Focusing primarily on 2D artworks that depict the wonders of biology, the competition was open to young people age 7-18, and split into three age categories (7-11, 12-14, and 15-18).

The winner of the 7-11 category was Ameka Karthick from King's College School, Cambridge, for 'Amazonian Poison Dart Frog'; and the winner of the 15-18 category was Naomi Annetts from Ibstock Place School, London, for 'The Lemur'.

Each winner receives a prize bundle provided by Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) to mark the 50th anniversary of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) coming into effect. They will also



be invited to an experience day at the Royal Veterinary College in London.

This year's competition judging panel was comprised of Dr Grace

Sim, Royal Veterinary College; Andrew Crook MBE FRSA, Royal Veterinary College; and Siobhan Brown, Horniman Museum and Gardens.

To view the list of winners and highly commended entries visit: www.rsb.org.uk/bioartattack-winners-2025.html

Pictured: The winning artworks from Ameka and Naomi

'Valued And Treasured' – VAT with a difference

The word VAT in the independent sector at the moment conjures up a picture of financial challenge. However, at St Columba's College, Hertfordshire, these three letters are being used for something else entirely. Head of the school, Karl Guest, outlines how their 'Valued And Treasured' approach aims to recognise and address the needs of every student.

Picture the meme: a transparency of a male lion (black and white and moody of course, teeth bared and adopting a magnificent pose depicting courage in the face of impending adversity). Beneath, motivational words encourage the reader to face their fears immediately lest they morph into that which will only be restrictive tomorrow. Not my idea of motivation.

When seeking inspiration, I am as unlikely to search a Google image now as I was to purchase a cheesy poster from Athena as a teenager (one for those of a certain age!).

I recognise the value of visual motivation – we all watch the London Marathon and then download the 'Couch to 5K' app – but, as a school leader, when lasting and meaningful motivation is required in the face of my own adversity, I need to look much deeper than the memes I can ask AI to locate for me.

Which is why, it may come as a surprise, that in my school, we welcome three letters that have found themselves front and centre of current debate, challenge and strategic conversation: VAT.

The addition of the tax has been – and will continue to be – one that we all face and grapple with in the years ahead, but what of the VAT that we welcome and celebrate at St Columba's College? As the only UK based Brothers of the Sacred Heart School, our mission and vocation as educators is to ensure all our young people are Valued And Treasured.

Compare this VAT to its other, well-known abbreviation: across 11 schools in our Province, reaching from the Philippines, through five major cities in the United States to St Albans in Hertfordshire – all our students are valued and treasured. This is an approach that recognises and addresses the needs of every student in our schools without differentiating need or separating the majority from the minority – no matter how marginal they may be.

This mission of being 'Valued And Treasured' comes from an ideology of partnership – of recognising and adapting a curriculum, a pastoral system and a series of extracurricular activities for its young people, and does not seek to drive a subjective wedge between children. On the contrary,

its adhesive is global – its is purely about the love of education.

A Columban education is beautifully holistic and seeks to meet its young exactly where they are on their journey – the joy of walking alongside a student, understanding their specific need, listening to what will suit them best, finding ways of achieving an end goal through open discussion, being available and talking honestly and with a sense of true openness. If only all VAT impositions were that collaborative, perhaps the conversations would be different – constructive rather than destructive for many schools who once educated children, and whose classrooms are now empty and front doors permanently closed.

There is a uniqueness about being a Columban and being part of the global family of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart:

we are all 'Partners in Mission' which means that not one person in our numerous communities across the world is more or less significant than another. We have a responsibility to enable each other to strive for academic excellence, personal growth, compassion for our neighbour, and for our young people to leave us as balanced and kind adults. St Columba's College strives to create a community where our school environment is a sanctuary for all – where human potential flourishes and where genuine hope inspires the next generation of leaders.

I would like to think – somewhat counter-culturally within the context of three letters – that these leaders will impose a VAT of their own – one that recognises, celebrates, values and treasures all children no matter what.

Harvest Festival



Ursuline Prep School, Warley, Essex, have celebrated Harvest with a huge cereal box domino rally.

Over the last few weeks children and families have brought in large cereal boxes as donations. Over 180 boxes were collected. These were then lined up to create a trail

Pictured: The cereal box domino rally

of cereal box dominoes. On the count of three, charity prefects tapped the first box and off they went to the cheers of the school.

In addition to the cereal boxes, families also kindly donated extra items from their weekly shopping which will be gifted to the local Brentwood Food Bank.

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An important update

Minibus safety inspections now require a brake performance assessment

By John Peterson, Director of Minibus Services, Rivervale Minibus.

Whether you run your minibuses under a Section 19 Permit or a PSV operator's licence, your minibus safety inspections must now include a brake performance assessment.



John Peterson

The DVSA guide to roadworthiness¹ states:

5.3 Braking performance assessment

"To follow best practice and comply with legislation there is an expectation that every safety inspection will include a brake performance assessment using either a roller brake test (RBT), a suitable electronic braking performance monitoring system (EBPMS) or a decelerometer with temperature readings."

What are minibus safety inspections?

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 – ideally not the engineers that you use for MOTs and services. They will make a thorough inspection of all the safety aspects of your minibus, from seat belts to brakes, and inform you if there are any concerns via a report.

The DVSA recommendation is that minibuses under 12 years old have a safety inspection at least every 10 weeks. Minibuses 12 years old and over should have an inspection every 6 weeks.

What is a brake performance assessment?

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.

Common methods include:

- roller brake tests where the vehicle is driven onto rotating rollers to simulate road conditions, and the brakes are applied to determine the force, efficiency, and presence of binding issues
- decelerometer tests which measure the rate of deceleration on a road
- a combined decelerometer and temperature test, which measures the rate at which a vehicle slows down during a controlled stop and the temperature of individual brakes to ensure they are working correctly.

How will this affect your school?

Brake performance assessments are not optional. You need to ensure whoever completes your safety inspections includes a sufficient assessment.

Rivervale Minibus can see this affecting your school in three ways:

1. There will likely be an increase in the cost of each safety inspection because a brake performance assessment is going to take additional time. Rivervale Minibus has kept the additional charge as low as possible for customers at £50 (+VAT).
2. Your minibuses will now need to be driven by the engineers completing your minibus safety inspections up to speeds of about 20mph. You need to ensure your minibuses are accessible and can be taken off site to complete the assessments. If the brake performance assessment cannot be completed the safety inspection will be invalid, but you may still be charged. Please check with your provider.
3. You need to check with your safety inspection provider that they have plans to complete brake performance assessments, and check that they will be sufficient.

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 to comply with your Section 19 Permit conditions.

Learn more about minibus maintenance and management on Rivervale's Advanced Minibus Management Course

Managing your minibuses, drivers and journeys is a lot of work, and the law can be complex and confusing. Minibus compliance is not only an operational concern; it is also a health and safety and legal issue.

This is why Rivervale Minibus offers the 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 empowered and inspired to make any changes you need to protect your vehicles, drivers and passengers, as well as your school's reputation, should the worst happen.

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1 www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-maintaining-roadworthiness/guide-to-maintaining-roadworthiness-commercial-goods-and-passenger-carrying-vehicles

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Finding their voice: bringing a role model into the music classroom

The Croft Prep School, Warwickshire, recently welcomed Baritone Roderick Williams OBE to the school to share his career journey and practical skills with pupils. Director of Music at the school, Laura Collet-Wilby, outlines why visits such as these are so valuable both to pupils and teachers and the lasting impact they can have.

“We recently witnessed the transformative impact of inviting a professional role model into the classroom with former parent and world-renowned Baritone Roderick Williams OBE visiting the school. For music teachers – and teachers in any subject – the visit demonstrated the value of ‘parachuting in’ an expert to inspire students, provide concrete techniques and model the excitement of pursuing a passion professionally.

Sharing the journey, not just the success

Williams’ career spans local church choirs to the Last Night of the Proms. He began the day by recounting his musical journey, emphasising that finding your voice is rarely instantaneous. “There was no single moment

when I ‘found my voice’,” he explained. “It was a slow build – singing weekly in church, teaching, performing and eventually pursuing a solo career.”

For teachers, this is a reminder of the power of storytelling in the classroom. Sharing authentic journeys – not just accolades – helps students understand the value of persistence and lifelong learning.

Finding your tribe

One of Williams’ most memorable reflections came from his childhood: watching a choir process during a Christmas service, he realised, “That’s where I should be – I’d found my tribe.” This moment highlights the importance of belonging in fostering confidence. Teachers can use similar stories to encourage students to connect with communities that nurture their interests, whether in music, drama or other areas.

Hands-on learning

After an assembly performance of ‘The Vagabond’ from Vaughan Williams’ ‘Songs of Travel’, Years 5 and 6 joined Williams for a workshop. He demonstrated voice projection, posture, breathing and techniques for engaging an audience. His ‘mirror technique’, which encourages performers to connect with individual audience members, captivated students and provided immediately applicable skills.

For teachers, this is a model for how external experts can enhance classroom practice: pupils gain both inspiration and tangible skills, while teachers can observe

strategies to integrate into their own teaching.

Music beyond the spotlight

Williams also emphasised music as a source of personal joy. Singing lullabies for his children and performing emotionally resonant pieces such as Schubert’s ‘Die Schöne Müllerin’ reminded pupils – and teachers – that music has personal, lifelong significance. Encouraging pupils to explore music outside of performance contexts fosters creativity, emotional intelligence and a deeper connection to learning.

Resilience and growth

No career is without setbacks, Williams reminded pupils. Auditions and rejections are part of growth, but exploring multiple musical genres gave him “many strings to his bow”, softening the impact of disappointment. Teachers can translate this lesson into classroom practice by encouraging experimentation, interdisciplinary learning and celebrating small successes alongside larger achievements.

Why bringing in experts works

Williams’ visit illustrated the broader benefits of inviting role models into the classroom:

- **Inspiration:** Pupils see the excitement of real-world practice.
- **Practical skills:** Workshops give hands-on experience they can apply immediately.
- **Connection:** Hearing personal stories fosters engagement and motivation.



- **Confidence:** Witnessing resilience and passion models growth mindset in action.

Takeaways for teachers

- Consider how a visiting professional can complement your existing curriculum.
- Prioritise stories of process, struggle and discovery alongside technical skill.
- Use workshops to bridge inspiration and skill-building.
- Encourage pupils to find their ‘tribe’ in areas they love – it boosts confidence and engagement.

A lasting impact

Our pupils left energised, equipped with practical tools and reminded that discovering their own voice – both musically and personally – begins with joy, curiosity and connection. For teachers, the lesson is equally clear: a carefully chosen external expert can elevate a single lesson into a rich, multifaceted learning experience, leaving pupils inspired and better prepared to explore their own talents.

Bringing a world-class practitioner like Roderick Williams OBE into the classroom transforms inspiration into action, offering both pupils and teachers a renewed appreciation of what learning, creativity and mentorship can achieve. Across subjects, the principle holds: well-chosen role models can spark curiosity, provide tangible skills and demonstrate the excitement of pursuing passion at the highest level.





Transport your class to the heart of the African savannah with Disney's award-winning musical THE LION KING

Exploding with glorious colours, ingenious puppetry, stunning effects and enchanting music by Elton John, Tim Rice and Lebo M, this acclaimed reimagining of the beloved film by visionary director Julie Taymor is now celebrating its 26th year at London's Lyceum Theatre.

Over one and a half million pupils have already experienced the production in London through its award-winning Education Programme. Combined with seeing Julie Taymor's ingenious production, this exciting programme will take your pupils on an engaging journey that they will never forget.

Here are just a few reasons why this landmark show is perfect for igniting your class's imaginations and introducing them to the power of live theatre.

- The cast members bring to life more than 232 puppets between them. These represent 25 kinds of animal species, ranging in size from the 5.5-metre-tall giraffes and the large elephant which takes four people to operate, to the tiny trick mouse which is just 13cm!
- It took Julie Taymor and her team 37,000 hours to complete the original masks and puppets. The same attention to detail can be seen in every aspect of the production – some of the 350 costumes are decorated with thousands of beads, sewn on one by one.
- Julie introduced the 'double event' technique for the stage production which means you can always see the performer's face as well as the mask or animal puppet. Alternatively, the puppets of Zazu and Timon are inspired by Japanese Bunraku puppetry, where the puppet is held as a separate entity from the performer.
- A wide variety of materials and techniques are used in making the masks and puppets, and inspiration was taken from a range of African and Asian art and culture. They also require a lot of maintenance. When a new mask is required, a raw carbon version is moulded by a specialist company and shipped to the local production, where it must then be painted and treated while strictly respecting the original design, down to the smallest colour detail – from the fabric feathers



carefully cut for the bird puppets, to the hair fitted by hand onto the lion masks.

- Two of the masks have built-in technology: those of the noble king Mufasa and his envious brother Scar. The actors wear discreet headgear made of thermoformed plastic. Whenever the characters' emotions are composed, the lion masks stay above the actors' heads, showing their facial expressions. But when they are overcome by their instincts, the masks are lowered and hide their faces – then their animality becomes dominant.

Developed by teachers for teachers, THE LION KING Education Programme is fully curriculum-linked to support subjects at KS2 & 3 and is easily adaptable to suit the needs of your pupils. From worksheets to live production notes and behind-the-scenes videos – and even a social action project – there is something suited for every classroom.

Tickets from £22.50 per pupil for groups of 10+ with 1 free teacher ticket for every 10 paid tickets.

Reserve your tickets now at thelionking.co.uk

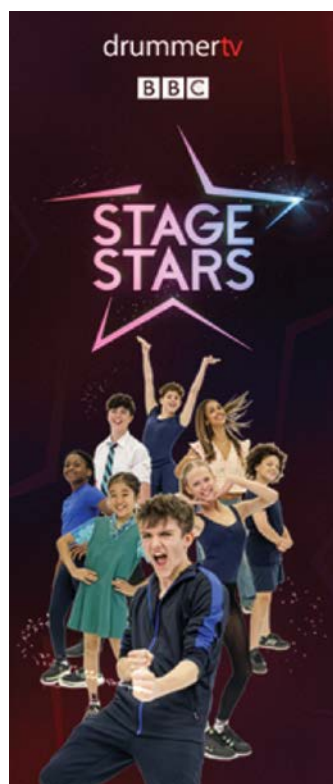
Stage Stars



A brand-new all-singing, all-dancing, and drama-filled entertainment documentary series which shines a spotlight on young talent at Tring Park School for the Performing Arts, Hertfordshire, has launched on CBBC and BBC iPlayer.

Produced by Drummer Television for the BBC, 'Stage Stars', a reality observational documentary series, offers viewers exclusive access to the delicate balance between boarding school life and a career in the spotlight.

Audiences will experience everything from nerve-racking auditions and spectacular end-of-year productions to celebrated performances, while also discovering who these young stars are when the curtain comes down.



Pictured: 'Stage Stars'

The show will take viewers on a journey throughout the school year. From fundraising on Bonfire Night and performing at the local Christmas fair to celebrating Valentine's Day and hosting Sports Day, the series will highlight not only the hard work and dedication required for a career on stage but also the joy and camaraderie of school life.

Key themes throughout the series include perseverance, friendship, teamwork, and the courage to follow your dreams.

Among the young people featured are:

- the UK's only dancer to qualify for the world's top international ballet competition
- students with West End credits in shows including Billy Elliot, Matilda, and The Lion King
- a tap dancer who represented Team GB at the world championships
- a seven-year-old who had to give up her contract in Starlight Express after breaking her arm
- a teenage songwriter who released his debut album at just 17
- two aspiring rappers seeking guidance from the coolest kid in school.

Stage Stars is a Drummer Television Production for the BBC. The series was commissioned by Sarah Muller, Senior Head of Commissioning 7+, BBC Children's and Education. The Executive Producer for the BBC is Fiona Piper and Executive Producers for Drummer Television are Tamsin Summers and Rachel Drummond-Hay.

Performing on the world stage



Seren Harris, a pupil at St Gerard's School, Gwynedd, is celebrating after a string of achievements on the live stage.

The 14-year-old, who first picked up an instrument at the age of three, when she was gifted a classical violin, was crowned All-Britain Champion in Coventry in the summer, taking first place in both the Fiddle and Fiddle Slow Airs (12-15) categories, and was runner-up in the miscellaneous (viola) section.

Her success secured her place at the All-Ireland Fleadh in Wexford which attracts competitors from Ireland, the US, Japan, Singapore and beyond.

Against this international field, Seren excelled once again, winning second place in Fiddle Slow Airs and third place in Fiddle Dance Tunes in her age group.

Pictured: Seren Harris

Alongside competitions, Seren plays with the band The Faerohs, performing at venues and gigs across North Wales.

Headteacher of St Gerard's School, Campbell Harrison, commented: "Seren is a role model for her peers, and we are certain that she will continue to inspire others as she targets the All-Ireland in Belfast next year. We have no doubt she will go on to even greater heights in the year ahead."

Seren also credits her traditional Irish music teacher, Mairead Forde, for her success, continuing lessons online after moving from Ireland to Wales. She has recently joined the Amairgin the Gael branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann – the only branch in Wales – to strengthen her links with the culture she loves.

Outside performances



Gordonstoun, Moray, has put on a free Shakespeare show for the public at the childhood holiday home where The King occasionally stayed while he was at school.

More than 200 people from the local area enjoyed two outside performances of 'The Tempest' by senior school students at Innes

Pictured: 'The Tempest' at Innes House Photo credit: Gordonstoun

House, the country house where the late Queen and late Duke of Edinburgh used to stay when they visited Prince Charles and his brothers Andrew and Edward, while they were at Gordonstoun.

Senior students performed the play with a bespoke soundtrack written by two departing Year 13 students.

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Academic excellence and the rise of degree apprenticeships – bridging the gap in school leaders

The post-school options available to students are increasing and while going into higher education remains the most popular path, more and more young people are choosing degree apprenticeships¹. Head of Sixth Form at Giggleswick School, North Yorkshire, Annie Coward, examines the shift and looks at the role schools should play in preparing students for their futures beyond the classroom.

For decades, top-performing school leavers in the UK have followed a well-trodden path: excel academically, progress to university, then step into graduate-level careers. Today, that trajectory is changing. Increasingly, degree apprenticeships are emerging as equally respected and rigorous alternatives – affording young people direct routes into employers like Jaguar Land Rover, BAE Systems, KPMG, Rolls-Royce, and the Ministry of Justice.

Why the shift? Simply put, employers are no longer satisfied with academic credentials alone.

Employers sound the alarm

A growing body of research highlights that university graduates no longer guarantee workplace readiness:

- The Institute of Student Employers (ISE) found that 37% of graduates did not meet employers' expectations in resilience and 43% did not meet their self-awareness expectations².

These statistics point to a clear message: academic success is no longer sufficient in isolation. Employers expect broader

capabilities – addressing both technical and 'softer' skills.

The role of schools in building industry-ready graduates

Schools that embed real-world skills into the student journey, rather than treating them as optional extras, are setting learners up for success regardless of whether they pursue university or apprenticeships.

Embedding competencies through co-curricular design

At Giggleswick School, for instance, our CASE programme (Creative, Active, Service, Enrichment) is integral to the school day – not an afterthought. This model encourages students to:

- tackle robotics and innovation
- lead charitable challenges that demand planning, resilience, and team co-ordination
- run initiatives like a beekeeping enterprise to explore sustainability, finance, and marketing.

These experiences cultivate leadership, emotional agility, and adaptability – the very skills

employers have identified as lacking in new graduates.

Sixth form as an incubator for real-world skills

In effective settings, sixth form serves as a launchpad for both academic rigour and practical readiness:

- Students mentor younger peers, run projects, and engage in experiential learning.
- Small class sizes and tailored support ensure they are seen, challenged, and supported.

Whether heading for Oxbridge, Russell Group universities, or elite degree apprenticeships, learners leave equipped not just with qualifications, but with the mindset to excel.

Successful school models demonstrate a balanced approach: academic excellence remains the foundation – but is complemented by holistic development.

Degree Apprenticeships: a complement, not a compromise

Degree apprenticeships should not be framed as an 'alternative' but rather as a parallel route



to leadership and professional success. Both paths demand high standards and deep engagement; what matters most is that schools enable learners to make informed decisions, supported by transferable skills and maturity.

Looking ahead: education that evolves with the workplace

The education sector must continue to evolve. Institutions have a responsibility to build resilience, curiosity, and leadership into their curricula – not just through qualifications, but through lived experience. When schools embed these competencies, graduates are not only more attractive to employers, they're also better positioned to contribute meaningfully from day one.

The future belongs to young people who are not just academically accomplished but thoughtfully shaped by experience. Whether heading to university or a degree apprenticeship, the most successful school leavers will be those who can both learn and lead.

¹ Prospects, 'Should I go to university or do an apprenticeship?', <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/apprenticeships/should-i-go-to-university-or-do-an-apprenticeship>
² Institute of Student Employers, Is career readiness in decline? https://ise.org.uk/knowledge/insights/195/is_career_readiness_in_decline/

New playground equipment

Over the summer holiday period two large pieces of new playground equipment have been installed into the Upper School playground at St. Helen's College Prep School, Hillingdon.

Part of a planned upgrade to provide pupils with the very best outdoor play facilities, the bespoke natural wood climbing

frames have been designed to stimulate learning and development through play and provide the children with lots of breaktime fun. The structures include a rope swing, a large slide, tunnels and a climbing wall and provide pupils with an adventurous and exhilarating playground experience.

Head at St. Helen's College, Ms Sophie Green, said, "We are delighted with the new play equipment and the positive response from the children, who are thoroughly enjoying it. The natural wood frames complement our green school grounds and offer the children lots of developmental challenges and fun."



The final hurdle: helping students excel in Oxbridge interviews

Each year, thousands of outstanding students compete for a place at Oxford or Cambridge and, with acceptance rates as low as 15%, the competition is intense. Strong grades act as the first filter, but it is at interview where the most decisive selection takes place: only 1 in 5 students interviewed ultimately receive an offer. For guidance counsellors in independent schools, preparing pupils to face this stage with confidence and intellectual maturity is critical.

Oxbridge interviews are designed to test how students think, not simply what they know. Tutors look for subject engagement, analytical reasoning, and the ability

to respond to unfamiliar material under pressure. The interview is also a way of assessing whether students are suited to the tutorial system itself, where ideas are constantly challenged and debated.

Guidance counsellors play a vital role in helping pupils develop these skills. Through mentoring and academic extension, they encourage habits of analysis and reflection that build intellectual confidence. Yet the practical reality is that few counsellors have the time or capacity to run repeated mock interviews for every Oxbridge

applicant. This leaves many schools searching for effective ways to extend their provision.

This is where Crimson can help. Our Oxbridge Interview Bootcamps provide schools with an intensive, one-day preparation programme that equips students for the rigour of the real process. Combining expert guidance, group discussion, and question practice using proprietary materials, the bootcamps give students the chance to build resilience and adaptability in a supportive, high-challenge environment.



For schools, bootcamps offer a scalable way to provide targeted preparation without increasing staff workload. For students, they deliver both strategy and confidence, ensuring that when the interview arrives, candidates are ready to demonstrate their depth of knowledge, their curiosity, and their passion for their chosen subject.



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Fractured futures: The contradictions of for-profit education in the UK

Educationalist, Andrew McEwen, considers some of the challenges facing the sector at the moment and puts forward his thoughts on what needs to change in order for the sector to thrive.



The private, for-profit education sector in Britain stands at a crossroads. Behind the polished marketing, global slogans, and aspirational imagery lies a system grappling to define its identity, purpose, and principles. Once a confident ecosystem – distinct from the traditional public schools yet buoyed by the promise of innovation – it now faces a series of profound challenges: financial, philosophical, and moral.

A shift in political context

This uncertainty reflects broader political and social change. The fading of Britain's old political binaries has left the sector without a clear ideological framework.

Where once the lines were sharply drawn – Conservatives defending independence, Labour critiquing inequality – both parties now tread cautiously. The result is a vacuum of direction: a landscape shaped less by public debate than by market forces and private ambition.

Ownership and accountability

Many for-profit schools are now part of complex investment

structures, often owned by groups with limited direct connection to education. This financialisation brings benefits – new facilities, modernisation, and professional management – but it can also create instability. When ownership changes hands, communities can feel the impact through shifting priorities or restructuring.

Accountability, traditionally anchored in local governance and educational mission, can become diffuse when schools are managed as assets within larger portfolios. Clarity about ownership and responsibility is therefore essential if trust is to be maintained.

The corporate turn in management

In adopting corporate management practices, some schools have gained efficiency but risk losing focus on their educational core. Leaders face pressures to meet revenue targets as well as academic ones; teachers are measured by performance data as much as professional judgment. Parents, increasingly seen as consumers,

are encouraged to expect measurable outcomes.

While professionalism and innovation are strengths of the sector, there is a danger that business language – of margins, conversion, and growth – may overshadow the values of care, curiosity, and creativity that define genuine education.

Governance and values

Good governance has long been a strength of Britain's independent schools. Yet in the for-profit model, the role of governance can shift towards financial oversight rather than educational stewardship. To sustain credibility, boards must balance commercial realities with a commitment to educational and ethical integrity. True accountability in education cannot be measured solely in financial terms.

Academic integrity and market pressures

The pressure to compete in a crowded marketplace has consequences for academic standards. When education is treated as a product, results

risk becoming the product's guarantee. The temptation to narrow curricula, inflate grades, or prioritise customer satisfaction over challenge is real. Maintaining intellectual rigour and moral purpose must remain central to the sector's identity.

Towards a renewed sense of purpose

Private education will continue to play a role in the UK's educational landscape, but the sector must evolve with transparency and self-awareness. Reform should begin with clear accountability – knowing who owns schools and what principles guide them. Governance should be grounded in educational outcomes, not just financial performance. And policymakers must articulate where the boundary lies between public responsibility and private enterprise.

If for-profit education is to thrive, it must do so with clarity of mission and integrity of purpose. Without these, the sector risks continuing drift – polished on the surface, but uncertain at its core.

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

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Merger

Two Dorset schools, Canford and Dumpton, have announced that they will merge to form The Canford Schools Group of charitable independent schools.

Canford is a boarding and day co-educational school for pupils aged 13-18 years. Dumpton is a co-educational day prep school for pupils aged 2-13 years, three miles from Canford.

Both schools will keep their individual identity, name, headmaster, teachers, uniform and site.

The Governing Body of The Canford Schools Group will consist of governors from both schools and Dumpton will have an Education Committee overseeing its offering.

Headmaster of Canford, Chris Wheeler, said: "This is an exciting

first step in establishing a new group of leading independent boarding and day schools that share common values. The Canford Schools Group has an ambitious vision for the future and will continue to build ever more dynamic partnerships, enhancing teaching, providing new opportunities for pupils and staff, and ensuring a collaborative and exciting future for independent education across the South of England.

"We believe in high autonomy partnerships, which celebrate the existing traditions, ethos and identities that our school communities love while challenging one another to be ever better. Both Canford and Dumpton hugely appreciate their long-standing and close relationships with other schools,



and as a group will seek to develop even closer ties with a range of partners who share the Group's educational values."

Headmaster of Dumpton School, Christian Saenger, said: "Dumpton School is flourishing, after many years of stability and success. This merger offers us both short-term benefits and long-term stability, ensuring this success can continue. Canford is the ideal partner – an outstanding school

whose educational ethos aligns so well with our own. Establishing such a well-resourced and skilled group will allow us to learn from each other, ensuring Dumpton is even better placed to prepare our pupils for their next steps in education. While our strong flow of pupils to Canford will continue, Dumpton will remain committed to a range of destinations, helping every family find the right future school for their child."

Pictured: Heads, Chris Wheeler and Christian Saenger

Advertorial Feature

Modulek momentum: how Cerne Abbas School's new build signals a shift in school expansion

When Cerne Abbas CE VC First School in Dorset unveiled its new modular classroom and administrative wing, it did more than add space – it set a precedent for how schools can grow sustainably, swiftly, and sensitively. Delivered by Modulek in just 12 weeks at a cost of £680,000, the project exemplifies the balance between rapid delivery and enduring quality.

Designed to blend seamlessly with the existing school architecture, the building's brick facade and pitched roof respect the local aesthetic while benefitting from the efficiency of offsite modular construction. The result? Minimal disruption to pupils, precise cost control, and a high-quality learning environment ready for immediate use.

Headteacher Catherine Cresswell reflected on the experience: "Working with Modulek has definitely been a positive

experience. The advice and guidance provided helped us meet and achieve our project objectives. They were very professional and always positive."

Beyond practicality, Cerne Abbas's expansion highlights a growing imperative in education – sustainability. Modulek's modular systems are designed with a clear focus on environmental responsibility, using energy-efficient materials, high insulation values, and options for net zero performance. Manufacturing components offsite significantly reduces waste, transport emissions, and onsite disruption – key factors as schools align their estates with the UK's carbon-reduction commitments.

Modulek's net zero-ready buildings integrate renewable technologies such as air source heat pumps, LED lighting, and solar-ready roofing, ensuring



long-term operational efficiency. For schools striving to model environmental leadership, these modular solutions enable tangible action without sacrificing quality or aesthetics.

Cerne Abbas's success underscores a wider shift in mindset. For independent schools seeking expansion without the delays and upheaval of traditional builds, modular construction offers a modern, responsible pathway. It combines architectural sensitivity, financial prudence,

and environmental stewardship – a blend increasingly essential in today's education landscape.

As Cresswell's endorsement affirms, this is more than a building; it's a vision of how educational environments can evolve – faster, greener, and smarter.

Beyond branding: How design shapes a school's success

At Oyster Design, we work with schools to help them define and express their story through branding, prospectus design, advertising campaigns, websites, and ongoing communications. As Creative Director Ryan Morgan explains, effective design is not about decoration; it's about building trust, strengthening reputation, and attracting new families.

Schools are not only centres of learning, they are thriving communities with distinct missions, values, and aspirations. In the shadow of recent VAT changes, standing out in a competitive landscape takes more input and thought than ever before. Like all organisations, your school requires a clear and professional brand identity that communicates and sometimes challenges who you are to parents, students, and the wider community. That's where design comes in.

What makes a school brand?

A school's brand goes well beyond a logo or uniform. It's the impression people form at every interaction: whether browsing your website, reading your

prospectus, seeing an advertising campaign, or attending an open day. From your tone of voice to the way your values are presented visually, your brand is a living identity that tells families what you stand for and why they should choose you.

The key benefits of strong school marketing & design

1. Clarity and consistency

A unified visual identity expressed across all communications gives families a clear picture of your values and vision. This consistency builds recognition and trust.

2. Driving enrolment

First impressions matter. A carefully designed prospectus, a responsive and engaging website, and professional advertising campaigns ensure your school

stands out and remains front of mind for prospective families when decisions are made.

3. Enhancing school culture

Design isn't just outward-facing. A clear, shared brand identity strengthens internal culture, giving staff and students a sense of belonging and pride in the school's mission.

4. Community connection

Well-crafted communications help schools build deeper relationships with parents, alumni, and local communities, turning them into advocates and ambassadors.

5. Professionalism and trust

Consistency across every touchpoint, from signage and social media to prospectuses and advertising, signals credibility. It shows families that your school



Ryan Morgan

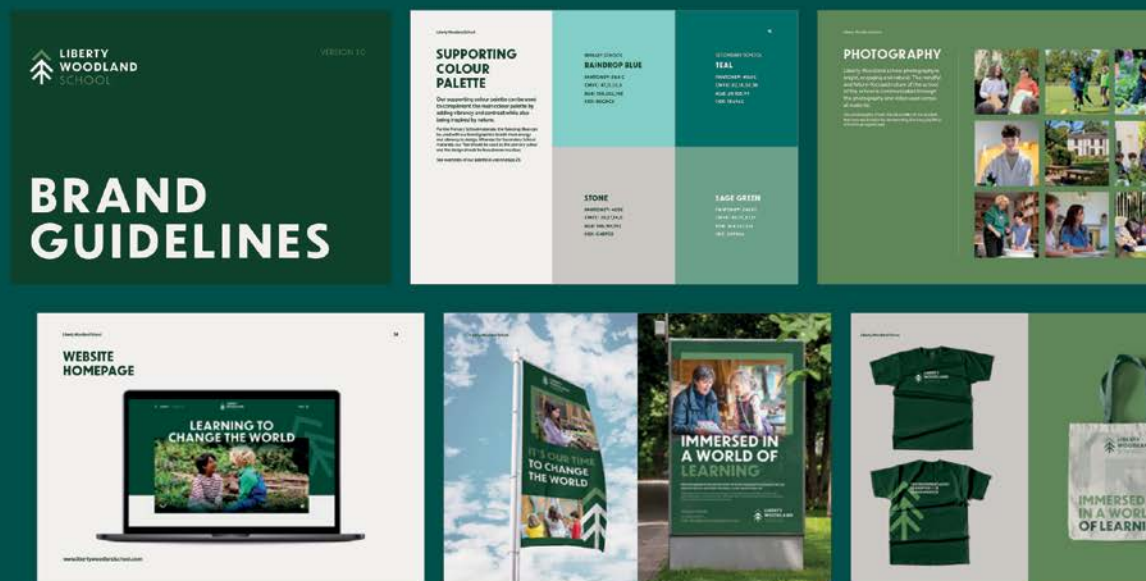
is confident, and offers a high-quality education and a safe and engaging environment to learn in.

Design as a strategic investment

Whether through prospectus design, targeted campaigns, digital presence, or full rebranding, design is more than an aesthetic choice – it's a strategic investment. It's about telling your story with clarity and purpose so families can discover you, connect with you, and become part of your journey. In a world where reputation, purpose and trust are everything, strong branding and design aren't optional; they're essential.

Case Study: Liberty Woodland School

Liberty Woodland is a school with a difference. At Oyster we developed their new identity, brand guidelines, prospectus, uniforms, signage and campaign assets to ensure every communication reinforced their values. By aligning their digital presence with their educational ethos, we helped achieve a 348% increase in organic web visits and a 240% uplift in admissions. Every element, from photography and campaign messaging to online admissions, now works seamlessly to highlight the school's unique approach.





All creatures great and small

Winterfold School, Worcestershire, has held its annual pet blessing.

Held in the Secret Garden, the blessing, which brought together pupils and staff, was led by Father Douglas Lamb, with the support of Mrs Katie Howarth and the school's Spiritual Leaders team: James Jones Elliott, George Garner, Loan Braize, Daisie Hill, Isemay Lilywhite-Sutton, Immy Jealous, Jonny Hale, George Jones Elliott, Charlotte Monk, Stanley Mitchell, Rafferty Stoneley and Isla Bache.

The service welcomed pets of all shapes and sizes to be blessed in a peaceful, reflective setting. The

musical accompaniment, provided by Mr Jeremy Price on keyboard, included a rousing rendition of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'.

Among the pets in attendance were the usual collection of dogs, cats, gerbils, hamsters, chicks and ferrets – but this year also saw a first in Winterfold history: the appearance of a horse, affectionately named Dolly Bird.

The annual pet blessing has become a much-loved tradition at Winterfold, offering children a chance to reflect on the importance of compassion, care and responsibility – values deeply embedded in The Winterfold Way.

Pictured: Dolly Bird with owner Caroline Coss and mini-rider Harrison Hart (bottom left) with pupils Immy Jealous, Zachary Maguire and Frank Stinton

MP visit



St Francis' College, Hertfordshire, has welcomed MP Chris Hinchliff, for a visit that brought together pupils from across the school.

Mr Hinchliff began by meeting Prep pupils who had written letters to him, sharing their thoughts and concerns about the environment. He listened carefully to their ideas and questions, which ranged from how the government could improve the environment and address global warming, to how recycling could be made more effective, and how to reduce water use and plastic waste. The school Eco Representatives also had the opportunity to explain the initiatives already underway at the school.

Pictured: MP Chris Hinchliff at St Francis' College

In the afternoon, Mr Hinchliff turned his attention to the Senior School, where he spoke about his own journey into politics and the many different career paths available within the political sector. He reflected on the value of diversity in public life and the importance of encouraging more women to consider a career in politics, such as becoming an MP. Students were particularly interested to hear what a typical week looks like for a Member of Parliament, and Mr Hinchliff offered an honest picture of the highs and lows of the role, from the most rewarding aspects to the challenges that must be faced.

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Independent schools – leading the way in the rugby concussion debate



Sam Peters

With concern around concussion and player welfare in rugby continuing to pose serious challenges to participation at grassroots level, former Mail on Sunday rugby correspondent and author of 'Concussed', Sam Peters, highlights what is being done by leading independent schools and businesses to safeguard the future of the sport and those who play it.

Two years ago Sally-Anne Huang, High Master of St Paul's School, London, who were a founding member of the Rugby Football Union (RFU), publicly voiced her concerns about rugby's future in schools. Alarming headlines about injuries, competition from other sports, and increasing polarisation within the game have led some schools to struggle for numbers while others recruit scholarship players to physically dominate opponents. Huang warned that rugby's traditional place in school life is now under threat. Two centuries after William Webb Ellis reportedly picked up the ball and ran with it, many within rugby agree the grassroots game faces an existential challenge.

Even stalwart supporters now concede that the professionalisation of rugby presents significant challenges for school-level participation. Neil Rollings, Chairman of the Professional Association of Directors of Sport in Independent Schools, outlined in his 2021 report how the professional game's focus on size and physicality has alienated many young players. "Some parents are keen for their children to emulate the size and appetite for heavy contact seen in the Premiership. But focusing on big hits and celebrating abnormal size undermines rugby's claim to be a game for all shapes and sizes," Rollings observed.

Participation in sixth form rugby has hit an all-time low, even

in schools traditionally strong in the sport. The RFU, having previously insisted the game was "safer than ever", now accepts that school rugby is struggling. A recent report led by Sir Jon Coles, Chief Executive of United Learning, stated: "In the schools' 'marketplace', rugby is not winning." The sport is losing ground to other activities as changing social attitudes and increased risk aversion erode its traditional appeal. Without robust school rugby, the report warns, the entire ecosystem of community and professional rugby in England is at risk.

Whether falling participation is a result of excessive risk aversion or a sensible response to changed risks is debatable. Over the last thirty years, concussion rates in the professional game have soared. Safety measures – stricter penalties for high tackles, Head Injury Assessments, microchipped mouthguards, and independent medical observers – have helped stabilise rates of traumatic brain injuries at the elite level, but meaningful reductions remain elusive.

Today's elite male players are on average almost two stone heavier than in the 1990s. The sport's culture continues to glorify 'dominating collisions', a notion that suits professionals but is increasingly unsettling for schools and parents. The push for 'bigger, stronger, faster' athletes is now mirrored in schools, with strength

and conditioning, data analysis and sports science commonplace.

Parents are now better informed about concussion and, quite understandably, more cautious about their children playing rugby. Increased awareness and improved management have helped, but societal factors such as the rise of mobile phones and limited access to top facilities also contribute to declining numbers.

In response, Sally-Anne Huang commissioned St Paul's Undermaster, Glenn Harrison (a former Harlequins and Cambridge University player), to redesign the game to reduce collisions and prioritise skills and evasion. Harrison's new format, 'The Third Game', removed the risky 'jackal' contest, limited phase play to four to deter relentless collisions, and rewarded tries scored out wide, putting enjoyment front and centre. In 2023, five independent schools – St Paul's; King's College School, Wimbledon; Hampton, Middlesex; Tonbridge, Kent; and

RGS Guildford, Surrey – trialled the new format under RFU supervision. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive: more ball touches, greater involvement for all players, fewer collisions and breakdowns, and no injuries. Players and coaches found the game more enjoyable and believed it improved skills development.

Buoyed by these results, Harrison presented his findings at an RFU law symposium at Warwick University. While most schools welcomed the changes, some age-grade clubs were cautious. Harrison hopes The Third Game will inspire wider adoption of safer, skills-based rugby, reducing the reliance on physical dominance. On 7 October, Harrison hosted an online talk at St Paul's titled 'The Future of Rugby' (see link below).

Jo Thomson, head teacher at Claysmore School, Dorset, summarised the challenge: "I am a huge believer in rugby and the values it can instil. It remains a fantastic sport that teaches



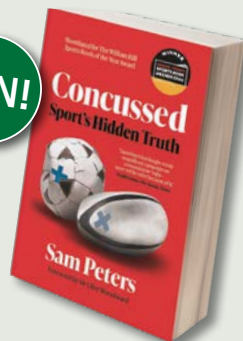
The Third Game in action

Sam Peters has spent 20 years covering sport for a variety of national newspapers and is a respected voice in sport around the issue of concussion and player welfare. In 2014 he was shortlisted as Sport journalist of the Year at the UK Press Awards and his latest book 'Concussed' won the UK Sports Book Award for Outstanding Sports Writing and was shortlisted for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year.

Link to The Future of Rugby talk: www.stpaulsschool.org.uk/virtual-events-recorded-events

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Sam Peters has kindly offered readers the chance to win a copy of his book 'Concussed'. To be in with a chance of winning please answer the question below and submit along with your name and email address to: competitions@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

What is the name of the new formatted game created by Glenn Harrison? Is it:

- A) The First Game
- B) The Second Game
- C) The Third Game

Closing date: 14 November 2025

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vital life lessons. Some pupils absolutely live for it and I want it to continue. But the data is hard to ignore and, rather than bury our heads in the sand, we're seeking solutions to safeguard this brilliant game." Claysmore, like St Paul's and others, has hosted events encouraging open debate about the future of contact sports in schools.

Medical and technological solutions are also emerging. Luca Health, founded by ex-Northampton Saints professional turned Harvard Business School graduate Nick Greenhalgh, aims to become the UK's leading name in concussion care, advocating for data-driven, objective return-to-play decisions using smartphone technology.

Meanwhile Meliora Medical (formerly Return2Play), established by Dr Sam Barke in 2014, has built a large network of more than 140 schools, conducted over 15,000 appointments in 2024 alone, and recently opened a central London concussion clinic aimed at adolescents.

Having played a leading role in advancing the medical management of concussion in schools and clubs for more than a decade, as well as improving other aspects of player welfare, latterly as partner in the Centre of Youth Sports Medicine, they are now collaborating with Dyamotech, which produces a wearable headband to monitor impacts, to gather data on cumulative head injuries among senior school players.

Rebuilding parental trust after years of negative headlines depends on education, especially for coaches. A 2019 World Rugby study found coaches were the least educated group in rugby regarding concussion:

"There remains significant resistance to moving from tackle bags and collisions to coaching skills, evasion and spatial awareness," says Richard Dixon, former Claysmore coach who recently accepted a role with Toulouse's academy. Dixon supports 'Le Plaisir du Mouvement', a French coaching philosophy prioritising enjoyment and skill development over contact. The UK group is led by Tom Phillips, a former British Army officer turned sports teacher at Cokethorpe School, Oxfordshire, another school increasingly engaged in this discussion.

Dixon and many educators reject the idea that schools should serve as feeder systems for professional clubs. "Rugby in schools should be taught as part of a broader education, not to create a factory line for the professional game," echoes Brian Ashton, former England coach and teacher at King's Bruton, Somerset.

As rugby stands at a crossroads, independent schools, medical experts and technology innovators are leading efforts to evolve the sport and protect its players. The debate continues, but the message is clear: if rugby is to thrive in schools and beyond, the status quo cannot continue.



National debut

The Boys' Rugby team from Leweston School, Dorset, is set to make history as they compete in the National U18 Continental Tyres Schools Vase for the first time since the school became co-educational in 2019.

The competition begins with eight regional groups, each producing a quarter-finalist, before moving into the national knockout stages. Leweston will first face schools from Dorset, with The Thomas Hardy School first up in their opening match away in Dorchester. The winner will then progress to meet either

Bryanston School or Claysmore in the next round.

Recent investments in new team kits and a new rugby pitch have added to the sense of excitement and pride within the squad. With 90% of Leweston's rugby-playing boys representing the school in fixtures, the programme is thriving – further strengthened by Leweston's partnership with the Bath Rugby Development Programme, which provides specialist coaching, masterclasses, and development opportunities. There are also proposed plans to launch a girls' rugby team next term.

Pictured: Leweston School's Boys' Rugby team 2025–26

Photo credit: Leweston School

Rugby sponsorship

Burgess Hill Girls, West Sussex, and Burgess Hill Rugby Football Club (BHRFC) have announced a new partnership to promote and develop rugby opportunities for girls at the school and the wider community.

The collaboration comes at the same time as the appointment of Shelley McComiskey as BHRFC's first-ever Director of Women and Girls Rugby.

She said: "I am passionate about creating a pathway for girls to progress in rugby, from their first experience of the sport through to competitive league play. Working with Burgess Hill Girls will help us reach more young players who will join some of the girls who already are members of the club, and I can't wait to see this partnership flourish."

Rugby coach appointment

Glenalmond College, Perthshire and Kinross, has announced the appointment of former Scotland international, WP Nel, to its rugby coaching team.

Nel, who takes on the role of Forwards Coach with a particular focus on the College's Senior Rugby teams, brings both international and professional experience to Glenalmond. Still playing professionally with Stirling County, WP Nel won more than 60 caps for Scotland, representing his country at three Rugby World Cups, and

Pictured: WP Nel



made over 200 appearances for Edinburgh Rugby.

He will work to support the development of forwards' play and technical skills.

Sporting trends – an evolving landscape

The sports education landscape continues to change. Head of Sport at Windlesham House School, West Sussex, Mark Duncan, assesses some of the current trends and discusses how, by taking a progressive approach, schools can enhance pupil experience as well as prepare them for modern life.

The world of sport in schools today is constantly evolving for several interconnected reasons, from increased awareness around student mental health and wellness, to advances in technology and the growing emphasis on inclusivity and diversity. As such, a progressive approach to sports education is vital if schools are to enhance pupil experiences and prepare them for the dynamic modern world. When it comes to the kind of sports played in school, there is a notable trend emerging around pupil and parent choice, but this must always be balanced with best use of facilities and staffing expertise. The rise of overseas pupils in boarding schools across the UK today has also played a pivotal role in this trend because pupils often arrive from other countries with very different sporting backgrounds and interests.

Individual sports such as golf and tennis are becoming increasingly popular amongst students today. Even though sports like golf have been historically more popular with adults and are perhaps not quite as widespread as football or rugby in schools, those schools that have decided to invest in golf are seeing excellent learning and development benefits as a result. With our younger society often driven by the prevalence of screens and devices, golf is an excellent outdoor activity that not only sharpens the mind, with a long list of health benefits, but also helps to get children active and out into nature.

Likewise, the rising popularity of cricket and football for girls has now put both sports at the forefront of physical education and team sports in schools. Amazing teams and individual role models, with profiles built through social media and raised further on

television, have helped these sports to gain momentum, making them indistinguishable from other more established games in terms of the aspirations of girls. Giving these sports an equal platform on school noticeboards, during assemblies, on use of facilities, coaching expertise and match opportunities are all things that will continue to cement the place of these activities moving forward.

Nurturing sporting ambition

There is of course little doubt that global mainstream events such as World Cups and the Olympics have turned the heads of children and have created ambition around what can be achieved. This can be incredibly positive with role models showing a clear pathway to success – a key factor in getting young people interested in competitive sport. On the flip side this can result in a negative impact on those lesser niche sports that are not backed by powerful national governing bodies with extra funding and widespread television coverage.

Rounders is a good example of this – a traditional sport beloved by many children over the years despite now having little to no space within the PE curriculum. With this in mind, it is worth remembering that a pathway to elite greatness is not the only driver behind youth sport and for most of us perhaps not even a significant one. Engaging in sport simply to have fun with friends while getting fit should remain front and centre for prep school aged children.

Prep school inclusivity and opportunity also continues to be a focal point for all heads of sport, in what has been a welcome move away from trying to ensure you have a world-beating first team/U13A to the detriment of all others. The landscape in general

across prep school sport is much healthier than it has ever been, ironically at a time when schools themselves are under unparalleled pressure.

Sporting partnerships

Windlesham House has always seen itself as having an important role in the local community when it comes to sharing sports facilities, expertise and hosting events. This has never had anything to do with attracting pupils or ticking the charity box but is built more upon an understanding that communities work better when in partnership. Independent sector schools have some of the finest sports facilities in the world, so it is only right that they benefit the wider community. The school has committed to the use of its facilities and artificial grass field for the purposes of training and playing NFL Flag Football (non-contact American football) and hosts regular tournaments as well as travelling alongside other schools in the region to play in the NFL official league.

Becoming a regional Hub for the NFL (National Football League) is part of Windlesham's drive to offer a more diverse range of sports to its pupils and to support the wider local pupil community. Pupils are also being taught NFL Flag Football as part of a curriculum programme and from a coaching perspective. Any sports like this that champion core team values and have the ability to be played as a mixed sport on a fair footing, with speed, agility and creativity to the fore, will always be popular and have a place at the school.

The ability for children to have intellectual input into 'play-calling' (the language and process used to communicate strategy) adds another dimension to their involvement in Flag Football, as does the stop/start play-by-



Mark Duncan

play nature of the game which, while a sticking point for many traditionally British sports fans, is another aspect which can really help children who find sustained concentration and movement more problematic. Linking with the NFL as a regional Hub for the South East, Windlesham has been a training base for local teachers across all ages and sectors. To date, we are nearing 100 staff trained up on the day courses run here by the NFL. We have also hosted the area tournament for the last three years – the growth of the sport locally outlined by an increase in attendees from eight teams three years ago to 22 in 2025.

Areas for expansion

The landscape of sport is ever-evolving, never more so than in the 'post-Covid' years. As such, the next five years will see a mixture of expansion, consolidation and reboot. Areas for expansion at Windlesham House include basketball, which was re-introduced as a team sports programme last year, and girls' rugby, with the recent World Cup creating new interest. Dance has also become really vibrant over the last three years at the school following the launch of a new programme, now under new staff management. While girls' hockey, which has traditionally been an area of strength for the school, has been undergoing some reshaping to better serve the ever-changing pupil population.



International Tennis title

Students, Toby Ward and Charlie Fielding, from Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire, have secured a victory on the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Junior Tour, winning the doubles title at the J30 tournament held in Mytilene, Greece.

The ITF J30 forms part of the global pathway for aspiring junior players, providing valuable world ranking points and experience on the international stage. By triumphing in Mytilene, the duo have each earned 25 ITF world ranking points, a milestone that opens the door to higher-level international events and further opportunities on the Junior Tour.

Both Toby and Charlie are part of

Pictured (l to r) Charlie Fielding and Toby Ward

Bromsgrove's Performance Tennis Programme.

Speaking of their achievement, a member of Bromsgrove's coaching team, Mr James Nolan, commented, "I've had the pleasure of supporting Toby's tennis journey since he was three years old, and of working with Charlie from the age of thirteen. Their commitment within our programme is exceptional, but what stands out is the extra, self-directed work they put in. This result is a testament to their efforts and an important stepping stone towards their future aspirations."

Looking ahead, both boys have ambitions to pursue tennis at the collegiate level in the United States.



Cricket

Bede's Senior School, East Sussex, is celebrating following a successful summer of cricket performances by Lower Sixth student, Jake Vosloo, which saw him top the Sussex honours board in July, where he took 8 wickets for Mayfield Cricket Club against Worthing (Division 2).

He also celebrated an undefeated season playing for Preston Nomads Under 16 league and U16 Festival teams. His experience includes playing D40 1st XI Sussex disability games and participating in the Disability T10 Cup at Hove.

Pictured: Jake Vosloo

Photo credit: Bede's Senior School

Jake also earned several selections, including the Alan Lee Memorial Cricket Match at Goodwood, the Disability Hundred at Arundel and the England Mixed Disability Charity T20 fixture in Luton. His performance at the England game led to his drafting into the Disability Premier League (DPL) to play for the Hawks. At just 16 years old, Jake is the youngest player to debut in the DPL, with a journalist from the league noting that he is "making a noted impression on this year's competition".

ISFA National Football Sixes

Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, has hosted the Independent Schools Football Association (ISFA) National Sixes tournament for the first time.

The competition, first played in 1957, is ISFA's oldest event and remains one of the most respected fixtures in the school football calendar. This year's tournament brought together 24 teams from across the country, including Harrow, Middlesex; Charterhouse, Surrey; Repton, Derbyshire; and Dulwich College, London, and saw over 240 boys compete in a full day of high-level school football.

The tournament followed a six-a-side format played on full-sized

pitches, offering a game style similar to Rugby Sevens. Teams were required to think quickly, defend deep or retain possession to create goal scoring opportunities, all within short, high-intensity matches.

The competition was split into four groups of six, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the Cup knockout stages and the third and fourth placed teams entering the Plate competition. Those finishing fifth and sixth were eliminated after the group stage.

Kimbolton's 1st XI performed well in the group stage, securing one win and two draws to finish fourth in their group. This earned them a place in the Plate quarter-finals, where they faced Charterhouse. After creating a clear opportunity to win in open play, Kimbolton were narrowly beaten in a penalty shootout.

The Cup competition was won by Hampton School, Middlesex, with Epsom College, Surrey, claiming the Plate trophy.



Pictured: Kimbolton's first XI

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Addressing swimming pool shortages – how independent schools can help

With Swim England and ukactive warning that the pace of swimming pool closures in the UK is increasing, along with Sport England statistics showing that the number of children unable to swim 25m confidently by the time they reach Year 7 is on the rise, is there anything independent schools can do to help address these challenges? Swim School founder, Caroline Sparks, believes there is: here she explains how.

In the UK, a concerning trend has emerged over the past few years: the decline in swimming proficiency amongst children. A recent report highlighted that nearly 40% of children leave primary school unable to swim the recommended distance of 25 metres. Since learning to swim is not simply a fun activity, but a vital life-saving skill, this statistic poses serious implications for children's safety and wellbeing, especially in a country surrounded by water and with a strong aquatic culture. In light of the growing pool shortages across the country and the recent VAT hike impacting independent schools, hiring out underutilised swimming pools to local community groups could not only contribute to school partnership objectives, but it could serve as a strategic financial benefit while also addressing the need to enhance swimming skills for children.

Despite being a skill that can save lives, disappointing trends reflect a notable gap in access to swimming resources. Urbanisation and sky-high energy bills have resulted in the closure or repurposing of many community pools that would otherwise have been accessible to local residents. Those pools that have remained in service, however, often face heavy usage and booking difficulties as a result. Those schools with private onsite swimming facilities that aren't in use 100% of the time could play a crucial role in meeting their local community's needs.

New revenue streams

Increasing community access to swimming facilities could dramatically improve local children's ability to swim. Schools often have pools that are underused during off-timetable hours, especially outside of academic terms. By looking at various ways to open access to these facilities, schools can contribute

to addressing the skills gap that has increasingly existed amongst children since the Covid pandemic took hold. Encouraging swimming proficiency is also tied to public health and safety, so by offering swim classes and programmes to the local community, schools can make a worthy contribution to reducing the risks of drowning, while enhancing children's overall wellbeing, health and fitness.

The VAT increase on independent schools earlier this year highlights the need for financial adaptation. Schools are under pressure now, more than ever, to justify the value they deliver while retaining competitive advantage in the market. As such, schools are having to work smarter while identifying new ways of creating additional revenue streams. Hiring out under-used swimming pools is a great way of generating much-needed income to counterbalance increased operational costs.

Community cohesion

Likewise, collaborating with local community groups nurtures stronger relationships between schools and their surrounding communities. Such partnerships not only reinforce the school's role as a valuable community hub, but they also send a positive message to students around reducing wastage, the importance of philanthropy and what it means to share and give back to society. For independent schools looking to bolster their reputation and visibility amongst prospective parents, ongoing community engagement can be hugely beneficial while also providing a range of new learning opportunities for existing students who can get involved in partnership activity where appropriate.

For those schools looking to create additional revenue, developing hiring models that accommodate various

community needs is essential. Whether that be through third-party organised swim classes for children, adult lessons, or even leisure swimming sessions for local families, adopting a tiered pricing structure will allow schools to offer affordable rates for local community groups and small businesses, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to access the facilities regardless of family income.

Potential targets for independent schools might include local swimming clubs, small business owners and personal trainers who lack access to training facilities and who would greatly benefit from access to underused pools in their area. Likewise, state schools without pools, youth organisations and charities may also benefit from the use of pools to provide structured swimming lessons for children and adults. Local councils and health organisations that focus on physical wellbeing could also benefit from the use of local pools to conduct swim therapy sessions or water-based programmes that enhance overall health and wellness. Recreational courses such as lifeguarding, water safety and water-based first aid sessions could also benefit from the facilities. The point is, reviewing how such facilities are used can make a big difference to the local community.

Implementing pool hire

To successfully implement a pool hire partnership programme, independent schools might consider the following steps – **Assessment of facilities:** schools should conduct a thorough inventory of their pool facilities and the current hours of availability. Identifying peak usage times is key to ensuring that the space available can reasonably accommodate outside groups.

Reaching out: It is important to reach out to local community groups and promote the benefits of using



Caroline Sparks

the school's pool for swimming purposes. Schools can also create marketing materials outlining hire policies, pricing, and availability, to spread the word within the local community. **Creating rental agreements:** Establishing clear terms outlining hire conditions, maintenance responsibilities and insurance considerations is essential to protect both the school and the hiring parties.

Monitoring and evaluation is also important – after launching the programme, schools should monitor participation and gather feedback from community members who have used the pool. This will help in adjusting the hiring process as necessary to improve accessibility and satisfaction. Finally, collaborating with local authorities can be helpful – engage with local councils to gain their support. Partnerships from this perspective can also create additional funding opportunities or provide promotional support for swimming programmes in the local area.

As independent schools continue to navigate the complexities of rising operational costs alongside a complex and constantly evolving educational landscape, embracing innovative ways to maximise usage of school assets is both an economic necessity and a social responsibility. By stepping up and opening their pool doors to the local community, schools can help to champion the importance of all children in the UK learning to swim – ultimately contributing to a safer and healthier future.

Caroline Sparks is founder of baby, toddler and children's swim school, Turtle Tots. Headquartered in Bristol, there are 52 franchisees across the UK and internationally in the United Arab Emirates and Ireland, operating a child-led swimming programme, teaching babies from birth, and delivering aqua-natal yoga classes for mums-to-be.

www.turtletots.com

Solar cooker

A Sixth Form student from Lord Wandsworth College, Hampshire, has designed and developed a way of heating water which could save lives.

Seventeen-year-old Thomas, together with a group of friends, created a parabolic solar cooker after watching news coverage of a cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe. The severe diarrhoeal infection is caused by consuming food or water contaminated with the *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria. While many of those who contract it suffer mild to moderate symptoms, it can become lethal within hours.

"We decided to make a product that could boil water easily," Thomas explained. "Firewood is an unsustainable energy resource and because of deforestation, people in Zimbabwe often have to travel long distances to access it. Their electrical supply is unreliable and expensive and so we came up with the idea of designing a solar cooker."

After the friends came up with the initial plans in the summer of 2024, they travelled to Zimbabwe



to showcase their prototypes to villagers. "Most of them had never seen a product like this and they were very impressed," Thomas continued. "We left them with the models we made, along with the blueprint for the designs. Now they can boil water a lot more easily than using more conventional methods."

The cooker resembles an inverted umbrella and works by concentrating light via its mirrored surface onto a single focal point. This can then heat water to boiling point within 15 minutes and costs around £11 to make.

Since coming up with the initial

model, the group has created a second, more efficient device using an aluminium frame and glass fibre. The friends have recently returned from a second trip to Zimbabwe, where they were able to demonstrate this.

"We arranged for 100 solar cookers to be transported there," Thomas revealed. "We donated 25 of them to the National Council of Disabled Persons of Zimbabwe (NCDPZ) and 25 to three hospitals and two schools. The remaining 50 will support a 'business to philanthropy' framework, where local partners and government officials will work together to retail the cookers locally, using the



income to sustain the programme in the longer term."

For Thomas and his fellow budding engineers, the aim of the project is not financial. He admits, "We have registered a utility patent for our designs, but we don't want to make money from it. To me, this is about engineering and designing a solution to a problem. Engineering relates to real life and can help people. It can heal and provide better living conditions for those who also have big dreams."



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CHANGING FACES... CHANGING PLACES...



Mr Duncan Sinclair is the new Headmaster of St Hilary's Prep School in Godalming, Surrey.

This marks his third headship, following eight years leading Somerhill School, Kent. Born in Zimbabwe to teacher parents, Duncan Sinclair moved to South Africa at the age of seven. He completed his schooling in Johannesburg before coming to the UK for a gap year, during which he worked at Port Regis School in Dorset. Although he initially planned to return to South

Africa to study environmental science, his passion for education led him to change direction – and the rest, as they say, is history.

A keen sportsman, Mr Sinclair is a former professional rugby player who later became a hockey goalkeeper, and now enjoys golf – by his own admission, "very badly". Music is also close to his heart: he plays the clarinet, trombone, and tuba.

Alongside his leadership duties, Mr Sinclair will also be teaching PSCE (personal, social, citizenship and health education)..



Churcher's College, Hampshire, has announced the appointment of Will Scott as its new Headmaster, effective September 2026.

Will Scott, currently Principal of Dame Allan's Schools in Newcastle upon Tyne, was born in Omagh, County Tyrone, and educated in Dublin and Edinburgh where

he studied Economics at the University of St Andrews. After six years of naval service, including postings on HMS Broadsword and HMS Ark Royal, he transitioned to financial markets before finding his vocation in education. His teaching and leadership roles have included positions at the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle; Clifton College, Bristol; and St Lawrence College, Kent.



Oundle School, Northamptonshire, has welcomed Dominic Oliver as its new Head this

academic year.

Dominic graduated from the University of Sheffield with First Class Honours before completing an MPhil in English at St Peter's College, Oxford. He went on to a lectureship at St Peter's and taught there and at other colleges

in the university, specialising in Shakespeare. He joins Oundle after over a decade of leadership as Headmaster of Lancing College, West Sussex.

Prior to that Dominic began his teaching career at the Royal Grammar School, Worcester, before progressing to senior academic roles at Malvern College, Worcestershire, and serving as Managing Head at Bedales School, Hampshire, for four years.

New Head of Development

Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, has announced the appointment of Russell Speirs as Head of Development.

Russell has spent more than 25 years working with schools in the UK and internationally, most notably as Founder and CEO of consultancy RSAcademics.

Alongside his professional career, Russell has served as a Governor at several independent and international schools, including the Stamford Endowed Schools, Lincolnshire, the British School



of Paris, and St George's British International School in Rome, where he currently has oversight of development and alumni engagement.



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Thomas's Clapham	London
Crescent School	Warwickshire
Dean Close Prep	Gloucestershire
Beech House Infant School	Lancashire
The King's School Canterbury (Junior)	Kent

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

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The Independent Schools Magazine

Vires per Verum – Strength through Truth

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

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