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The Independent Schools Magazine



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In this issue...



Curtains up!

Oswestry School, Shropshire, has officially opened the doors to its new Grove Performing Arts Centre, marking the culmination of a £1.5 million fundraising campaign.

The 'Curtains Up' event brought together supporters, benefactors and many of the people whose generosity, vision and hard work made this project possible. Guests included Helen Morgan MP, representatives from Oswestry Town Council and Shropshire Council, and members of the Shropshire Lieutenancy.

In an address, Headmaster, Peter Middleton, shared the news that, only that morning, he had received a telephone call from a benefactor pledging the final £60,000 required to complete the campaign. The donation means that the school's £1.5 million fundraising target has now officially been reached, providing a fitting finale to the project's fundraising journey.

Peter Wilcox-Jones, now in his 27th year as Chair of Governors at Oswestry School, was given the honour of cutting the ribbon and officially declaring The Grove Performing Arts Centre open.

The Grove Performing Arts Centre will provide an environment in which Oswestry School pupils can discover and develop their talents across music, drama and dance. Its impact will also extend beyond the school, with the theatre, studios and rehearsal spaces creating opportunities for local performers, groups and members of the wider community.

Pictured: Peter Middleton with Helen Morgan MP

Cover background

From novice to nightclub

Emanuel School, London, has not only firmly embedded learning how to DJ into the school's offer but used it to form the basis of a partnership which aims to provide structured musical opportunities to pupils in communities facing high levels of deprivation and educational disadvantage. Find out what it's all about on page 30.

Pictured: DJ booth

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Is your school mentioned?

Schools featured in this issue include:

Abbey Gate College; Ashville College; Bede's School; Bedford School; Beech Hall School; Belmont School; Bradfield College; Blundell's School; Brentwood School; Bromley High School GDST; Bromsgrove School; Bryanston Prep School; Bryanston School; Caterham Prep School; Caterham School; The Cavendish School; Chorister School; Cobham Hall, Kent; Downe House; Duchy College; Ellesmere College; Emanuel School; Exeter School; Fairfield Prep School; Francis Holland Regent's Park; Gayhurst School; George Heriot's School; Glenalmond College; Haberdashers' Monmouth School; Harrow School; Hendon Prep School; Highfield School; Kimbolton School; King Edward VI School, Hampshire; King's Worcester; Kingswood Prep School; Langley School; Latymer School; Longridge Towers School; Lord Wandsworth College; Loughborough Grammar School; Magdalen College School; Malvern College Hong Kong; Merchiston Castle School; Milton Abbey; Moon Hall School; New Hall School; North London Collegiate School; Oakhyrst Grange School; Oxford International College Brighton; Priory School of Our Lady of Walsingham; The Queen's College, London; Queen's College Preparatory School; RGS Worcester; Rossall School; The Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle; Royal Hospital School, Ipswich; Rugby School; Shebbear College; St Albans Education Group; St Albans School; St George's School, Edinburgh; St Helen's School, Northwood; St Hugh's School, Oxfordshire; St Martin's Prep School, Grimsby; St Teresa's School; Surbiton High School; Tring Park School for the Performing Arts; Truro School; Tudor Hall School; Ursuline Preparatory School, Warley; Westfield School; Westholme School; Wycliffe College Prep

Children must never be the collateral damage

With an increased number of independent schools closing with little or in some cases virtually no notice, Head of Belmont School, Lancashire, Devin Cassidy, reflects on his own past experience of closure and suggests that it should never be treated as a purely commercial decision – children, families and staff must remain at the heart of it all.

Having led the closure of an independent school in July 2025, I know first-hand how emotionally and professionally demanding that process can be. Closing a school should never become routine, nor should it ever be treated as a simple commercial decision. It is about children, families and dedicated professionals whose lives are profoundly affected.

When our school closed, we made the difficult but principled decision to give a full term's notice to pupils, parents and staff. That time mattered. It allowed children to prepare for change, families to make informed decisions and staff to seek alternative employment with dignity. We worked tirelessly to secure places for every pupil at other local schools, supported by remarkable co-operation from neighbouring providers who recognised that the priority had to be the welfare of children. Personally, I wrote hundreds of references to help colleagues secure new roles. It was exhausting, but it was unquestionably the right thing to do.

Against that backdrop, I have watched with growing dismay the increasing number of independent schools that have closed with

little or, in some cases, virtually no notice. Such actions are simply inexcusable. School owners have both a moral and professional responsibility to ensure that closure is managed in a way that protects those most affected. Even more troubling are those cases where the responsibility for communicating the decision has been delegated to the Headteacher while those who made the decision remain absent from the conversation. That is not leadership. Leadership requires accountability, particularly when delivering the hardest of messages.

My heart goes out to those headteachers who have found themselves standing in front of devastated pupils, anxious parents and shocked staff, delivering news they did not make and often had little influence over. No school leader should be placed in that position. Equally, my thoughts are with the many members of staff who have discovered, with little or no notice, that they are facing redundancy. Behind every redundancy is a family worrying about mortgage payments, household bills and an uncertain future. Behind every displaced pupil is a family trying to reassure a child whose world has suddenly been turned upside down. The

human cost of these decisions cannot be measured solely in balance sheets.

The greatest victims are, inevitably, the children. For pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, whose educational journeys often depend upon consistency, trusted relationships and carefully planned provision, the consequences can be devastating. Abrupt disruption risks undoing years of progress. Some children will struggle to re-engage with education at all, increasing the likelihood of persistent absence or school refusal. The long-term educational, social and financial consequences will almost certainly be borne by the state for years to come.

These closures also raise serious questions about the wider policy environment. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the projected tax revenues expected from the introduction of VAT on independent school fees have not materialised as anticipated. Meanwhile, local authorities are facing increased pressure to find suitable places for displaced pupils, often at significantly higher cost where specialist provision is required. The promised benefits for the state sector have yet to become evident, while the



disruption to thousands of children is all too real.

Education policy demands careful, evidence-based decision-making. Decisions that affect children's futures should never be driven by assumptions or incomplete financial modelling. It is inconceivable that a government should implement reforms of this magnitude without fully understanding the likely consequences for pupil placement, SEND provision and the wider education system.

Independent schools are more than businesses; they are communities built around children. If closures become unavoidable, they must be managed with compassion, transparency and proper notice. School owners must be prepared to stand behind their decisions rather than leaving headteachers to shoulder the burden alone. Above all, we must remember that children, families and dedicated staff should never become the collateral damage of political decisions or commercial failures.

Closure update

Subsequent to our report in the summer issue of the possible imminent closure of St Joseph's College, Reading, Berkshire, it has since been confirmed.

In a statement, the Board of Governors said that they "had taken the extremely difficult decision to close St Joseph's College at the end of the summer term, 10 July."

It follows a consultation period with the school community.

Acknowledging the suggestions and proposals made during this time, the statement went on to say: "This is a heartbreaking end to the community that has thrived at St Joseph's for so many years. We would like to thank everyone who came forward with valuable suggestions and proposals, including the Save St Joseph's College Parents Group and all the staff involved in the consultation, but unfortunately,

we were unable to find a solution to keep the college open.

"The Board of Governors, supported by the Head, and our Interim Bursar, have explored numerous options to save St Joseph's. We looked into opportunities to be acquired by a schools' group, and to merge or work in close partnership with another school. Prospects for financial investment were also actively sought, including from

the Sisters of St Marie Madeleine Postel, but none of these possibilities provided a viable solution.

"St Joseph's is not alone in having been hit hard financially in recent years. Rising costs have significantly impacted the college and our fee-paying parents alike; and the introduction of VAT on fees and the removal of business rates relief have added to the financial pressure."

Legal view: acquisitions and mergers

What are some of the considerations governors need to take into account when contemplating a partnership or merger? Legal expert, Paul Ridout, shares some thoughts.

There has been a lot of commentary over the last couple of years on the accumulation of financial challenges facing independent schools and about the resulting pressure to look at partnerships and mergers as ways of keeping schools going. We have seen a lot of governing bodies reach the conclusion that the best way forward for their pupils, parents and staff is to merge and, in almost all cases, governors are quite quick to reach a consensus.

From the perspective of a lawyer advising on mergers between schools that are established as charities, it is interesting to consider what factors governors take into account when reaching their decisions and how they satisfy themselves that a merger or partnership is the right answer.

School governors, like other people holding office as charity trustees, have a broad range of duties that determine how they make strategic decisions. They do not have the freedom that the owners of a commercial business have to decide it is time to throw in the towel and sell the business and, unless they are considering a sale of their school to a non-charitable operator, they are not in the business of trying to secure the best sale price.

As set out in the Charity Commission's guidance on decision-making by charity trustees [at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/decision-making-for-charity-trustees-cc27>], governors are required to think about what is going to be in the best interests of their charity. Governors often (and quite rightly) have a strong loyalty to their school and of course may have been to the school themselves or have sent their children to the school. However, there is a key distinction to be drawn between, on the one hand, the school as an institution and its land and buildings and, on the other hand, the charitable entity that advances education by running that school.

Governors need to be ready to focus more on what will deliver

of the purposes of their charity and perhaps slightly less on the continued existence of the specific institution that their charity currently runs. It can, in some cases, be helpful for governors to remind themselves that their school will already have gone through geographical moves and other major changes over the decades: some schools will have started as proprietor-managed schools before adopting a charitable structure, while others may originally have been run by members of religious community who have since passed the baton to lay governors.

Judging what will best serve the school's purposes is not a straightforward task. It will usually involve some sort of "reverse due diligence" to build up a clear picture of the market position of the other party and its potential weaknesses and to enable the governors to conclude that they will be leaving their school in a safe pair of hands.

However, governors will usually have to go further than this, not least because parents and staff need to be brought on the same merger journey and they will, in most instances, have a strong sense of loyalty to their school and may be convinced that their school possesses special strengths and characteristics that set it apart from other schools and that could be forgotten and lost in a merger. This can be particularly challenging where the other party to a proposed merger is seen as a rival or competitor in the local market, or if the other party is perceived as having ambitions to grow and consolidate its market position by absorbing other schools.

Governors may find it helpful to go through a process of developing a shared vision for the merged organisation. As well as ensuring that both governing bodies have aligned views on academics and marketing, it may also be useful to establish that there is commitment to any capital expenditure that forms part of the school's existing strategy.

The importance of articulating these things is linked to a question that crops up in many discussions about school mergers, namely how can governors who are contemplating handing everything over to the other party be sure that the warm words and promises provided by the other party will be honoured? They are unlikely to have any effective legal mechanism for enforcing promises, even where these have been set out in the merger documentation, as their company will usually be an empty shell after the merger is completed and will shortly be wound up.

The answer lies, to some extent, in the process of getting governors on both sides to devote time and energy to articulating what they believe the merged organisation will look like. Even if the details are never directly communicated to pupils, parents, staff and other stakeholders, the vision has to underpin conversations with those stakeholders and therefore needs to be something that can be communicated with conviction. As part of that process of securing support for the merger, it may be



necessary to recognise that the two organisations do not have identical cultures. To assert otherwise runs the risk of losing the confidence of people who are embedded in those cultures and know they are not the same. It can be more productive to aim to show how these differences may be complementary rather than obstacles to a harmonious future.

It is not an enviable task to oversee the closing pages of a school's long history, and governors may feel they have been required to make some tough decisions that may not have met with universal approval. However, provided they keep an eye on the factors they are expected to take into account, they should be able to feel satisfaction in having secured a brighter future for their school community as well as continuity in delivering education to beneficiaries.

Braving the shave!

Students and staff at Shebbear College, Devon, have raised nearly £2,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support after taking part in a head-shaving fundraising event.

Led by Assistant Head Pastoral, Ms Shauna Vetch, a group of pupils and colleagues volunteered to have their heads shaved in a show of solidarity for those affected by cancer. The event,

nicknamed the "Sheb Shave", drew strong support from across the school community.

The fundraiser aimed not only to generate financial support but also to raise awareness of the challenges faced by those living with cancer, recognising the impact it has on many families and communities.



Pictured: The Sheb Shave team

Paul Ridout is Legal Director for the Charities and Independent Schools division at legal firm Moore Barlow. Visit: www.moorebarlow.com

A new way to belong: evolving your model without losing what matters

Bradfield College, Berkshire, has introduced a new Day option from the start of this academic year. It will see pupils entering Year 9 and the Lower Sixth have the choice of three offerings – Day, Day/Boarding and Boarding. Bradfield's Group Director of Marketing and Communications, Ruth Thorogate, outlines what the new model looks like and the thinking behind it.

For a school with more than 175 years of boarding tradition, introducing a Day option was not an insignificant decision. But against a growing understanding of changing family patterns and local market demands and drivers, it was one we found ourselves seriously considering just 12 months ago.

Why change?

Bradfield is fortunate geographically. We have a 285-acre rural campus in the Pang Valley and the environment and infrastructure of a boarding school, but we also sit within reach of significant populations in Reading, Newbury and the wider Thames Valley.

Our research found core groups of families at local feeder preps and within a 30-minute drive who were strongly attracted to Bradfield's educational offer but did not necessarily see boarding as right for their family. Our existing day offer, now rebranded "day boarding", was not attractive to these families, priced well above local day schools and offering essentially everything but a bed. Many didn't even visit us, sometimes choosing day schools involving a 60-plus-minute commute instead.

When I spoke to parents, they told me they loved Bradfield's space, broad co-curricular opportunities, impressive facilities, its co-ed, down-to-earth character and proximity to home, but finances aside, they wanted a clear home-school separation, prioritising time together as a family in the evening. This was either their own preference or reflected their child's wish for quieter evenings or time to pursue other interests.

For us, introducing a shorter Day option was both a response to significant local demand and

a strategic decision to broaden access to the College within our immediate area.

Defining what must not change

Perhaps the most important question we asked during the research and planning process was not what needed to change, but what must not.

Bradfield's boarding structure creates a full and highly integrated school day. Academic lessons sit alongside sport, activities, performing arts, societies and House life. We were clear that introducing pupils whose school day ended earlier could not alter the culture of the College.

Our Day model was therefore designed to enable access to all parts of the academic and co-curricular programme, while maintaining a clear distinction from our more immersive day boarding option, which includes all meals and now five nights of boarding per term.

Day pupils can arrive by 8am and leave by 6pm. They follow the same academic curriculum and have the same access to sport, pastoral care, tutoring, leadership opportunities and co-curricular programme. They can also access activities after 6pm, either returning from home or staying for supper and study supervision.

There are operational implications, but these were necessary consequences of a more important principle: we did not want to create first- and second-tier versions of a Bradfield education.

Integration or separation?

One of the more interesting questions was where day pupils should sit within the House structure. Our Year 9 pupils already begin their Bradfield experience together in Faulkner's, our

dedicated Year 9 House, before moving into senior Houses. This gave us a natural mechanism for integration. Our first-day pupils therefore enter exactly the same community as their boarding and day boarding peers, allowing relationships and a shared identity to develop from the outset.

From Year 10, day pupils will move into Bridge House, which will open in September 2027 and welcome pupils across years 10 to 13. The pupils will not be referred to as day pupils, but Bridge House pupils – like all pupils in houses.

There is an apparent tension here. If integration is the objective, why create a separate House? Our research found that most families did not envisage their child remaining at school more than perhaps one evening a week. Provided there was a critical mass of day pupils – our target was 20-25 per year group – parents were reassured that this would create a community comparable in size to a combined girls' and boys' boarding house, with its own Housemaster or Housemistress, identity and place within House competitions.

The challenge is therefore to create a distinct Bridge House identity without creating a distinct category of pupil.

The operational detail matters

Some of the biggest considerations have been less philosophical and we established working groups to examine individual areas of provision and are grateful to other schools that have undergone similar changes for sharing their experiences.

Transport, for example, is fundamental to the viability of a day model and was identified by many parents as crucial to their decision and we have introduced



Ruth Thorogate

transport routes shaped by initial demand and locations of local feeder preps.

Evolution rather than dilution

One concern inevitably raised when a boarding school introduces day provision is whether it signals a retreat from boarding.

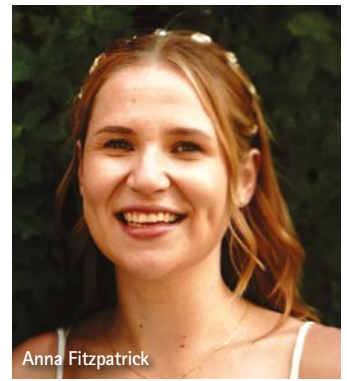
We have been very clear that it does not. Boarding remains fundamental to Bradfield and we believe strongly in its value, as do the parents and pupils who continue to choose it. But preserving an institution's character does not necessarily mean preserving every aspect of its operating model. The strategic question was whether pupils had to board to fully benefit from the Bradfield experience. Our conclusion was that they did not, provided we designed the model deliberately around belonging, participation and parity of experience within a core day.

It is too early to claim that we have all the answers. Our first-day cohort has only just arrived and we will learn much as we introduce it to other year groups. But at a time of considerable change, independent schools need to be clear about what is fundamental to their identity and equally prepared to challenge and adapt what is not.

For Bradfield, introducing a Day option is not about becoming less of a boarding school. It is about ensuring that the qualities created by that boarding heritage remain relevant and accessible in a changing market. The arrival of 30 new day pupils, recruited in less than nine months, suggests we have done just that.

What international families are really asking in 2026: Notes from the enquiry inbox

Decision making for international families around UK boarding school selection post-VAT has shifted. Former Deputy Head of Boarding, and one of the founders of a free matching service for international families, Anna Fitzpatrick, outlines some of the latest patterns and insights emerging from international enquiries and what this might mean for schools developing their international admissions strategies for the next cycle.



Anna Fitzpatrick

Having spent more than a decade living and working in UK boarding, most recently as a Deputy Head of Boarding, last year I stepped out of the boarding house and co-founded a small, free matching service for international families exploring UK boarding schools. It has given an unusual vantage point. We are not a school, and we are not an agent. Families arrive at our questionnaire early in their journey, often before they have contacted a single school, and they tell us things with a candour that admissions forms rarely capture. Around 150 families have now come through, from every continent, and some clear patterns have emerged that we believe are worth sharing with colleagues across the sector.

The scholarship expectation gap

The most striking pattern is this. Somewhere between 60 and 70% of our enquiries mention scholarships, bursaries or financial aid, and a significant proportion of those families are hoping for full or near full funding. These are not casual browsers. They are motivated, articulate parents of genuinely able children, often writing thoughtfully about their child's achievements and ambitions. Many have anchored their entire plan on the belief that a talented child can win their way to a UK boarding education.

The reality, as colleagues will know, is that most scholarships reduce fees by a modest percentage, and that substantial means tested support rarely extends to international applicants. When we explain this honestly, most families are grateful, and some adjust their plans. But the scale of the gap suggests something worth reflecting on. Somewhere between our sector's global reputation and the individual family kitchen table, the message about what scholarships actually are is not landing.

Schools that state the financial reality plainly and early, on the pages international families actually read, will save their admissions teams considerable time and protect goodwill that vague language quietly erodes.

Demand is not where the marketing points

Our two strongest source markets are Nigeria and Pakistan, and our enquiries increasingly arrive from places that rarely feature in sector marketing plans, with Kenya and Uzbekistan among the recent surprises. These are families with genuine ambition for UK boarding, often led by determined parents and sometimes by remarkably proactive teenagers researching on their own initiative.

The traditional markets have not disappeared, but the growth energy in our inbox is coming from West and East Africa and Central and South Asia. Not every enquiry from these markets is fundable, and the scholarship expectation gap is at its widest here. But within them sit genuinely viable families who feel underserved. The honest question for school leaders is whether admissions attention and marketing spend still reflect where demand was ten years ago rather than where it is quietly building now.

What parents ask first

Perhaps the most encouraging pattern is what international families ask about before anything else. It is rarely league tables. The first questions are practical and pastoral. Who will look after my child? How does guardianship work? How far is the school from the airport? Will my child be understood, culturally and personally? What happens at half term?

Entry at 13 remains the dominant intended starting point among our families, which means parents are making these decisions about children who are still young, often from thousands of miles away. Viewed from that distance, safeguarding, belonging and communication are not secondary considerations. They are the decision. Schools that answer these

questions visibly and warmly, before they are asked, hold a genuine advantage that has nothing to do with facilities spend.

We are already seeing some schools respond to this shift. Clearer fee transparency on international pages, named admissions contacts for overseas families, published guardianship guidance and airport transfer arrangements are quietly becoming differentiators. None of these are expensive changes, but from the family side of the enquiry, they are increasingly the difference between a school that feels ready for international pupils and one that merely accepts them.

Honesty converts

If there is a single thread running through our first 150 enquiries, it is this. Families do not disengage when they are told difficult truths about fees, scholarships or suitability. They disengage when they sense vagueness. The families we have had to disappoint on funding have thanked us more warmly than almost anyone else, and several have stayed in touch while they build longer term plans. Post-VAT, with costs at a level that demands honesty, transparency is no longer just a virtue. For international recruitment, it is a strategy, and the schools that embrace it earliest will be the ones these determined, globally scattered families come to trust.

Anna Fitzpatrick is a former Deputy Head of Boarding and the co-founder of Top International Boarding Schools. Visit: www.topinternationalboardingschools.com

Radio participation

Pupils at Francis Holland Regent's Park have taken to the national airwaves, participating in a sustainability workshop that was featured live on BBC Radio London.

The workshop, delivered by Renee Tonkin, founder of Science Owl, alongside Libby Gordon, CEO of FARA Charity Shops, encouraged pupils to explore the importance of reducing waste through creativity

and recycling. BBC Radio London journalist Gem O'Reilly attended the session, with interviews and highlights broadcast during Aaron Paul's breakfast programme.

Pupils took part in the 'Broken Umbrella Challenge', transforming broken toys and unwanted household items into imaginative new creations while learning about the environmental impact of waste

and the role individuals can play in tackling climate change.

Several pupils were interviewed live on air, sharing their thoughts on why sustainability matters to young people and discussing the simple, everyday actions that can make a meaningful difference.

The BBC Radio London feature is available to listen to on BBC Sounds.



Pictured: Gem O'Reilly with pupils

Why AI detectors are doing more harm than good

Is the use of AI detectors creating an incentive structure that rewards poor writing over clarity? Is this not the wrong lesson to embed in assessment? Head of Computer Science and AI Strategy Lead at St Albans School, Hertfordshire, Rebecca D'Cruz, discusses.

AI detection tools are unreliable by design. They work by calculating the statistical probability that a given piece of text was machine-generated, analysing patterns in word choice and predictability. The fundamental problem is that these are also the patterns associated with clear, well-structured writing. A student who has thought carefully, expressed themselves concisely and edited their work will produce text that looks, statistically, more like AI output than one who has written hastily and idiosyncratically. The tool cannot distinguish between the two.

Research consistently shows high false positive rates, so students are being penalised for work they genuinely produced, while others using AI go undetected with some deliberately introducing spelling and grammatical errors to evade the detector. By using AI detectors in this way, we are building an incentive structure that rewards poor writing over clarity, which is precisely the wrong lesson to embed in assessment.

Most secondary-age pupils are already fluent users of generative AI tools outside of school and they are using them to draft messages, generate ideas, summarise content and navigate everyday decisions. What they often lack, however, is a critical framework for understanding what these tools actually do, where they fail and why the process of thinking matters independently of the output. As a result, schools are in the uncomfortable position of being slower to adapt to AI than their students. When institutions

respond by banning tools that pupils use daily beyond the school gates, they lose credibility and, more importantly, they lose the opportunity to shape how young people engage with AI in a thoughtful and discerning way.

Bypassing a struggle means bypassing learning

When it comes to examinations, our assessment structures were not designed for a world where generative AI exists. For instance, a GCSE essay question asking students to analyse a text, construct an argument or evaluate a historical event was designed for a world where the cognitive effort required to produce a response was itself the point. Generative AI collapses that effort. The structural problem is not that students are lazy, because most are not, but that the assessment does not distinguish between a student who has thought carefully and one who has outsourced that thinking. Younger students in particular often lack the metacognitive maturity to recognise that bypassing the struggle is bypassing the learning.

Moving forward, we have no choice but to redesign the assessment process, moving beyond "did a human write this?" towards process portfolios, annotated drafts and dialogic tasks that foreground reasoning and development. In the near term, the most robust approach would likely involve a foregrounding process rather than product. For example, a student who submits an annotated draft which showcases their initial thinking, the questions they asked, the revisions they made and why, is demonstrating

something that AI cannot fabricate on their behalf. Dialogic assessment, where a student discusses their work verbally with a teacher, is similarly resistant to substitution.

Longer term, examination boards will need to reckon with this process seriously. Controlled assessment conditions remain the most defensible environment, but they test a narrow band of performance. The honest answer here is that we might not have the certainty or guarantee that a final product was written by a human; but we can, however, design tasks where the human thinking is the visible and assessable artefact.

Using AI with transparency and sound judgement

Genuinely effective AI integration means teaching students to use these tools critically, transparently and with sound judgement. Critical use means understanding that a generative AI output is a probabilistic construction, not a reliable source of truth, so students need to interrogate it as they would any text of uncertain origin. Transparent use means being explicit about when and how AI has been used in the production of a piece of work, a habit of academic honesty we should be building in young people from an early age.

Judgement means knowing when AI adds value and when it hinders learning and progress. Using it to stress-test an argument or generate alternative perspectives is quite different from using it to avoid thinking something through. These are teachable skills, and schools that treat them as such will serve their students



Rebecca D'Cruz

far better than those that simply attempt to prohibit.

The question is, is AI literacy really a threat to academic rigour or should we be viewing it in a different way? Whatever one's view of generative AI, the question of whether schools should engage with it is already settled: students are using these tools now, inside and outside of the classroom. The framing of AI literacy as a threat to rigour assumes that rigour is a fixed property of existing assessment structures, rather than a commitment to genuine understanding and intellectual development, which should never be the case.

Protecting the values of rigorous education

Academic rigour means ensuring students can think, reason, evaluate and communicate and none of those capacities are diminished by learning to use AI tools well. What would diminish them, however, is allowing AI to replace those processes unexamined. The real threat to rigour is not AI literacy but AI invisibility: a culture where students use these tools unreflectively, without understanding their limitations or their own responsibility as independent thinkers. Teaching AI literacy is not a concession to the technology. It is really about how we protect the values that rigorous education has always been trying to serve.



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International science and innovation title

Students from one of Malvern College's family of international schools have been recognised after winning the Under-16 category at the Global Natural Science and Innovation Competition, held at Imperial College London.

The success for Malvern College Hong Kong follows the team's victory at the Imperial College Hong Kong Hackathon, which secured their place in the international finals.

Pictured: The Malvern College Hong Kong students

The Global Natural Science and Innovation Competition brings together pre-university students from qualifying events around the world to present scientific solutions to real-world challenges.

Competing as 'Handy Helpers', students Cayley, Hannah, Nathan, Alison and Iskander impressed judges with their personalised arthritis assistance glove, designed to support people experiencing reduced hand mobility and joint pain.

Conservation Initiative

Abbey Gate College, Cheshire, has been named winner of the Outstanding Conservation Initiative Award at the 2026 National Conservation Education Awards, organised by Chester Zoo.

The award recognises the impact of the College's Cheshire Schools Sustainability Conference, an event that brings together young people from across the county to address environmental challenges and drive positive change.

Now in its third year, last November's conference welcomed more than 140 students aged 8–18, alongside teachers from eight schools across Cheshire. Led by Abbey Gate College students and opened by the Lord Mayor of Chester, Councillor Sherin Akhtar, the event provided opportunities for collaboration, discussion and the sharing of sustainability initiatives.

Pictured: National Conservation Education Awards



Students participated in workshops, presentations and discussions focused on environmental responsibility, leadership and practical solutions to some of the most pressing sustainability issues facing society today.

The conference forms part of Abbey Gate College's Community Partnerships Programme, which fosters collaboration between schools, businesses, charities and community organisations across the region.

TeenTech Awards

The Royal Hospital School, Suffolk, is celebrating after achieving triple success at the National TeenTech Awards.

The TeenTech Awards programme plays a central role in a wider initiative to promote creativity, innovation and real-world problem-solving across the school curriculum.

Delivered through the Year 8 Compass curriculum, the programme saw 100% pupil participation and led to a range of outcomes. Under the guidance of STEM Lead and Design and Technology teacher, Mrs Beverly Maloney, pupils were inspired to think ambitiously, innovate with purpose and apply their ideas with confidence.

A Year 8 team project, Cappybuddy, won the Creative and Digital Media Award. Cappybuddy is a pupil-focused app designed to connect younger pupils with trained peer mentors, creating a supportive and accessible platform to help

Pictured: Receiving the TeenTech Teacher of the Year Award



individuals navigate challenges, build confidence and feel more connected within the school community.

In recognition of her leadership and commitment to STEM education, Mrs Beverly Maloney was also awarded TeenTech Teacher of the Year. The award recognised her contribution to inspiring young people through STEM.

The Royal Hospital School was also recognised as a Silver TeenTech Centre of Innovation and Creativity at the awards.



A project on smart bandages which aid chronic wound healing for dogs has secured **Duchy College, Harrogate** (formerly **Harrogate Ladies' College**) national award recognition at the TeenTech Awards Finals in London.

Sophia Lo, Smillia Meister and India Thomas' project, PetMedD, won the Best Research category Years (12–13).

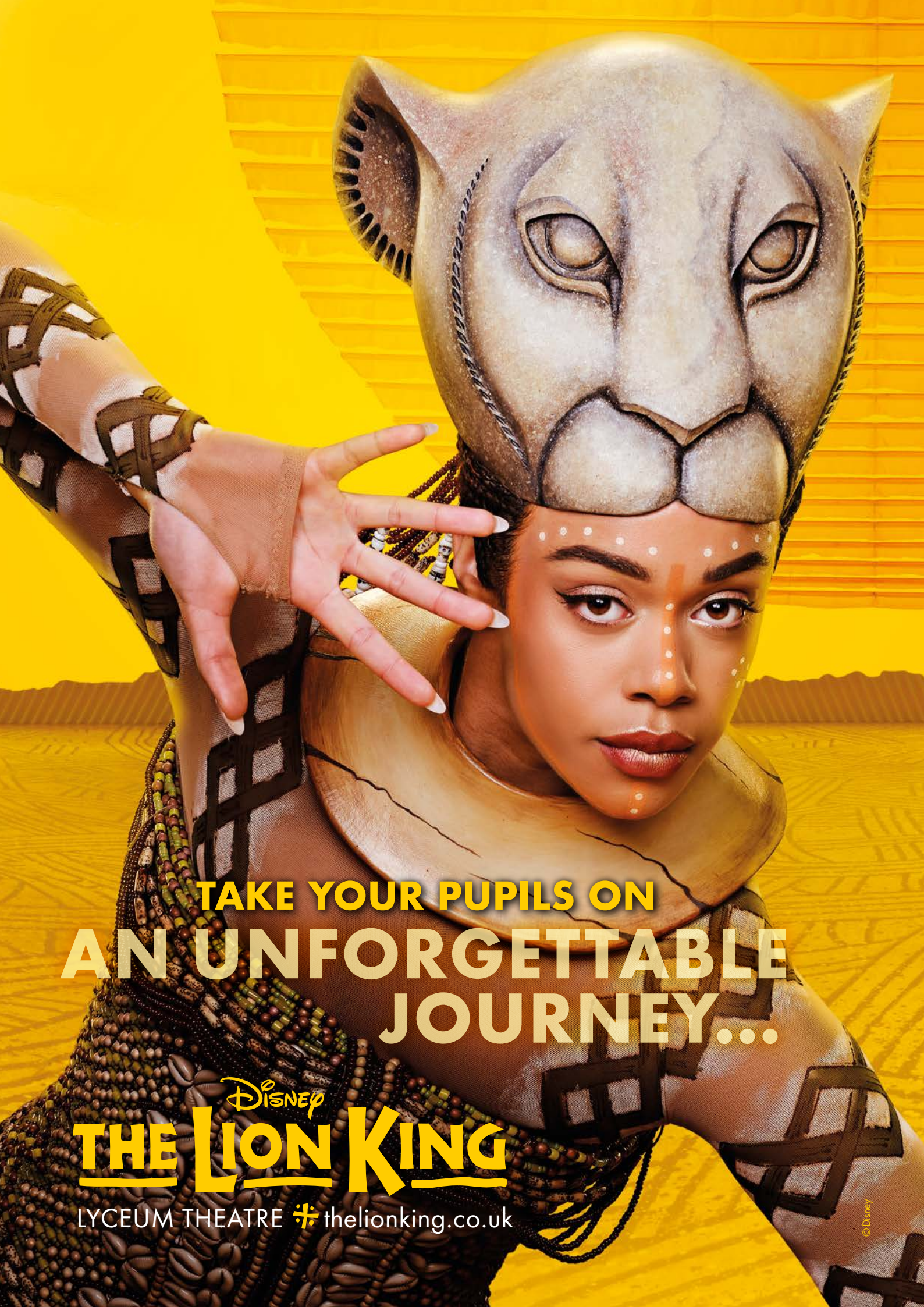
All three teams the school entered were named finalists in 2026, with PetMedD the only Yorkshire

Pictured: Sophia Lo and India Thomas who won the Best Research Award (Years 12–13) at the TeenTech Finals

team to win their category in the TeenTech Finals.

Joining PetMedD at the TeenTech Finals were Ruby and Harriet with their project on regenerated methane panels and Reewa, Eunice and Ryanna, who researched improving living conditions in Sub-Saharan African countries.

The projects focused on ethical innovation and research, highlighting issues and providing creative and sustainable solutions to issues facing society.



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The safeguarding crisis we aren't talking about: children have lost the space to grow

Can social media alone be held responsible for the current mental health crisis among young people? Deputy Head Pastoral at St Teresa's School, Surrey, Rachel Whitton, explores how constant connectivity, instant gratification and around-the-clock communication have fundamentally changed friendships, resilience and emotional wellbeing, but that rather than being the root cause argues that giving pupils the opportunity to step away from conflict, reflect, recover or simply be bored, are vital experiences to healthy emotional development.

As Deputy Head Pastoral, I have become increasingly concerned by the way we frame the conversation around young people's mental health. Time and again, I hear the same conclusion: social media is causing a mental health crisis. While social media undoubtedly plays a part, I believe it is a symptom rather than the cause. The deeper issue is that many children have lost something essential to healthy development – space.

Over two decades working in education, I have watched childhood become increasingly compressed. Children live in a world where almost everything happens immediately. Food can be delivered to school with a few taps on a screen. Entire television series are watched in a single weekend. Answers are instant, entertainment is constant and waiting has become unfamiliar.

I often think back to my own childhood. We waited a week for the next episode of our favourite programme. There were natural pauses that allowed excitement to

build and conversations to happen. Today, there are very few pauses left in a young person's day.

The same is true of friendships. Once, relationships largely paused when pupils left the school gates. Now they continue 24 hours a day. Conversations become group chats, disagreements become public comment threads and friendships are measured through likes, streaks and notifications. A minor fallout that might once have settled overnight now continues until the early hours of the morning.

From a safeguarding perspective, this is one of the most significant changes we have seen. Increasingly, pastoral teams are supporting pupils who are emotionally exhausted rather than simply upset. There is no opportunity for distance, reflection or perspective. Every emotion is amplified because there is no time for it to settle.

Many parents understandably fear removing devices. They worry their child will miss out socially or become isolated. Yet, in trying to avoid short-term conflict, we may

unintentionally be denying children something they desperately need: time away from the intensity of their social world.

Imagine a field that is constantly walked across. Without periods of rest, the grass never has the chance to grow back. Eventually the ground becomes worn and compacted. Young people are much the same. Their emotional wellbeing cannot flourish if every moment is filled with stimulation, expectation and interaction. Space is where recovery happens.

Children also need to rediscover boredom. Boredom is not something to fear; it is often the birthplace of creativity, problem-solving and imagination. It teaches patience and independence. Equally, they need to understand that not every difficulty has an immediate solution. Healing takes time. Trust takes time. Confidence returns gradually. Healthy relationships sometimes need breathing space rather than constant contact.

As schools, we have an important safeguarding role, but we cannot



Rachel Whitton

do this alone. Families, schools and society need to work together to protect children's time as deliberately as we protect their physical safety. Boundaries around devices, protected family time and opportunities to be offline are not punishments; they are protective factors.

Perhaps the conversation should no longer centre on how much time children spend online, but on whether they have enough space to simply be children. Space to think. Space to reflect. Space to be bored. Space to fall out and make up. Space to realise that difficult emotions are temporary and that resilience is often built not through constant intervention, but through time.

If we truly want to improve young people's mental health, safeguarding must move beyond managing risk on screens. We must also protect the quieter spaces where resilience, perspective and emotional maturity have always been allowed to grow.

Wellbeing award

St Helen's School in Northwood has been awarded the Wellbeing Award for Schools (WAS), in recognition of its commitment to promoting emotional wellbeing and mental health across its school community.

Over the past 15 months, the school has implemented a programme of initiatives relating to wellbeing in response to feedback from pupils, parents and staff. These include a comprehensive programme of staff training focused on emotional wellbeing

and safeguarding, equipping staff with practical strategies to support resilience and respond effectively to a range of pastoral situations.

Pupil voice has been central to the school's approach. A team of pupil Wellbeing Ambassadors and Digital Wellbeing Ambassadors has led peer initiatives.

The WAS Award also recognises the fact that wellbeing is thoroughly embedded within the curriculum and is seen as a collective responsibility at St Helen's School. Weekly tutor-

time sessions and 'GROW' (Goals, Reality, Opportunities, Way Forward) coaching conversations provide space for activities such as mindfulness, gratitude, reflection and action planning, thereby helping pupils to develop lifelong skills for managing their mental health.

The school has also strengthened its partnership with parents and carers, introducing weekly wellbeing guidance in the newsletter, expanding pastoral education events, and creating

more opportunities for dialogue and feedback. This work is supported by collaborations with external organisations such as Young Carers in Schools, and informed by the latest research and best practice.

Clear and accessible support systems have also been prioritised across the school, including more channels for pupils to share any worries or concerns, and regular opportunities for pupil feedback via school council and other forums.

Beyond the Open Day

When every school looks impressive, how do parents decide?

Chapel & Tuck founder Douglas Wilson identified a clear market gap while evaluating boarding schools for his own child, noting how difficult it was to distinguish one boarding school from another after visiting three top candidates.

When every school promises a happy, confident and well-rounded child, what really sets one apart?



Speaking as a parent, I didn't find it easy comparing boarding schools. We visited three, and all of them were really impressive. Beautiful buildings, happy pupils and engaging speakers; not exactly helpful when the task is to rule two of them out.

Speaking as a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, I really admired the admissions teams' ability to put on a polished event with a personal touch. The issue for parents is that every school is selling much the same promise: happy, well-rounded, curious-but-confident young adults, ready to make their mark on the world.

In such circumstances, little differences really matter. So, which differences should your school emphasise? Are they unique? What price is appropriate in these new, tougher market conditions?

Every good strategy begins with a diagnosis, and any diagnosis is

only as good as the information behind it. This information isn't scarce, but it is fragmented, siloed and subjective. The most revealing detail is often the least visible, and that's why I created Chapel & Tuck.

The Chapel & Tuck platform brings together the public record of industry data and presents it clearly and without agenda. It was created to help the independent school community make better decisions.

It covers more than 430 boarding schools in England, Scotland and Wales. We used five years of financials from Charity Commission and OSCR filings. We have the inspection outcomes from all of the regulators and fees at every entry point. The platform contains every bursary and staffing disclosure, and the demographics of each school's real drive-time catchment.

Every figure links to its source document.

It also contains what I believe to be a genuine first: we have systematically read the literature of the entire sector – every school website, every inspection report – and analysed the language. What each school claims, what its inspectors actually said, where the two align and how your competitors compare.

You choose your peer group, and our platform displays your position continuously: fees, reserves, staff costs, capital expenditure, provision, messaging and more.

It is not a league table. There are no rankings and no sponsored listings. Every derived metric, such as operating stress or fee dependency, is clearly explained.

Top-tier subscribers can also access our Ask Chapel & Tuck feature, meaning natural language questions can be used to query our extensive database.

Here are just some of the insights it has provided so far:

- One in three schools spent more last year than they brought in.
- The most expensive schools in the country are not the ones I'd have guessed.
- From taxidermy to sheep farming, there are some genuinely unique co-curricular activities on offer!
- Values are discussed at length. Value is not discussed at all. This is surprising, given that parents are more focused on value-for-money than ever before.

A school's leadership understands its own institution better than anyone, but strategy cannot be formed without considering the competitive landscape. Without that, diagnosis is guesswork, strategy is instinct and the tactics underperform.

Chapel & Tuck supplies the missing half of the picture. It was designed to be affordable for every school, and full pricing information is on our website.



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Creative education: thinking beyond traditional models

Cobham Hall, Kent, has recently launched a new International Art and Design Foundation Programme in association with university pathway provider, NCUK. Head of Art at the school, Mike Turner, outlines how the one-year university programme has been designed not only to nurture confident, independent and globally creative minds but to bridge the gap between school and degree-level study and prepare students for future careers in the creative industries rather than simply preparing them for examinations.



Mike Turner

When Cobham Hall began discussing the possibility of launching a new International Art & Design Foundation programme, the initial conversations were not simply about adding another qualification to our curriculum. Rather, they centred around a much bigger question: how do we create a genuinely meaningful pathway for creative students entering an increasingly global creative sector?

Launching this month, in partnership with NCUK, we will welcome our first cohort onto the NCUK International Art & Design Foundation Programme. While the announcement itself is exciting, what has been most rewarding is the journey behind its development and the opportunities it presents for students, schools and art educators alike.

As teachers of creative subjects, we often see exceptionally talented students struggle with the transition between school-level study and the demands of higher education. While many pupils possess strong technical ability or imaginative ideas, they lack the confidence, portfolio, experience or independent working methods that universities increasingly expect. Equally, international students can find navigating university applications, cultural transitions and portfolio preparation particularly daunting.

The vision behind this programme was therefore simple: to create a bridge between school and university, that prioritises both creative development and pastoral support.

At Cobham Hall, we are fortunate to work within an environment that naturally lends itself to creative exploration. Our historic setting, extensive grounds and

specialist facilities encourage students to think ambitiously and work experimentally. However, facilities alone are never enough. The real strength of any creative programme comes from building a culture where students feel safe to take risks, develop their own voice and learn through experimentation.

One of the most important elements in designing the course has been resisting the temptation to over-structure creativity. As art educators, we know students produce their most exciting work when they are given frameworks rather than formulas. The NCUK International Foundation Art & Design Programme allows students to explore a broad range of disciplines while gradually refining their interests and developing a highly personalised portfolio. This flexibility is essential because the creative industries themselves continue to evolve at extraordinary speed.

The course combines studio practice with academic development, critical thinking and portfolio building, while preparing students for guaranteed progression to NCUK partner universities in the UK and internationally.

Importantly, it also introduces students to the expectations of independent creative study: time management, reflective practice, research methodologies and sustained project development. These skills are sometimes difficult to fully embed at school level, within the constraints of traditional examination courses. Alongside this, students also benefit from dedicated English classes, helping to them to develop their language, communication and critical writing skills. Further preparing them for success within higher education.

More broadly, the development of courses and projects over recent years has prompted a valuable reflection of my own teaching practice. It has encouraged me to think more deeply about how we prepare students for future careers in the creative industries rather than simply preparing them for examinations.

While assessment objectives and outcomes remain important, students increasingly need adaptability, collaboration, resilience and confidence in presenting their ideas. Embedding these qualities into teaching, alongside encouraging independence, curiosity and creative risk-taking, has become an increasingly important focus within my approach to teaching art and design.

For colleagues considering similar developments within their own schools, one of the most useful lessons we have learned is the importance of collaboration from the outset. Building a successful foundation programme requires strong communication between academic staff, pastoral teams, EAL specialists, university partners and admissions departments. It cannot sit solely within an art department. The most successful student experiences emerge when creative and pastoral provision work hand in hand.

Another important consideration has been recognising the international dimension of contemporary art education. Creative industries are now deeply global, and students benefit enormously from working within culturally diverse environments. The opportunity for students to learn alongside peers from different backgrounds, perspectives and artistic traditions enriches

discussion and broadens creative understanding in ways that cannot easily be replicated within more homogenous cohorts.

The launch of the programme has also coincided with a particularly encouraging period for the Art Department at Cobham Hall, including my recent recognition at the Kent Education Awards with the Kent Secondary Teacher of the Year in Art award. Recognition of this kind is always appreciated, but more importantly it highlights the value of creative education and the impact that the arts continue to have within schools. It reinforces something many of us working in creative subjects already recognise that art and design can be genuinely transformative for young people, particularly when students are given the confidence to explore their own ideas, perspectives and identities.

Ultimately, the launch of the NCUK International Art & Design Foundation programme is not simply about progression routes or university destinations, important though those are. It is about creating an educational experience that allows students to become thoughtful, adaptable and ambitious creative practitioners.

As independent schools continue to evolve and diversify their curriculum offer, there is perhaps an increasing opportunity for us to think more boldly about what creative education can look like beyond traditional models. For us at Cobham Hall, this programme represents one exciting step in that direction, and we look forward to seeing where the programme will take our first cohort of students next.

A warm 'back to school' welcome to all our new partners

Over the last academic year, many independent and international schools joined our community of Password test users, including:

✓ Battle Abbey School	✓ International School of London	✓ Queenswood School
✓ British International School of Stockholm	✓ International School of Zug and Lucerne	✓ Roedean School
✓ British School in the Netherlands, Leidschenvveen	✓ Jinseki International School	✓ Rugby School Japan
✓ Dean Close Kingham Hill School	✓ King's College Wimbledon, HMC	✓ Shrewsbury International School Bangkok
✓ Eastbourne College	✓ Kingsley School	✓ The Perse School Singapore
✓ Epsom College	✓ La Garenne International School	✓ The Read School
✓ Frankfurt International School	✓ La Regent International School	✓ Vienna International School
✓ Glenalmond School	✓ Lord Wandsworth College	✓ Warwick Schools Foundation
✓ Global Jaya School	✓ Marlborough House Vinehall School	✓ Wellington College
✓ Hallfield School	✓ Oakham School	✓ Westonbirt School
✓ HMC Projects	✓ Port Regis School	✓ Zurich International School

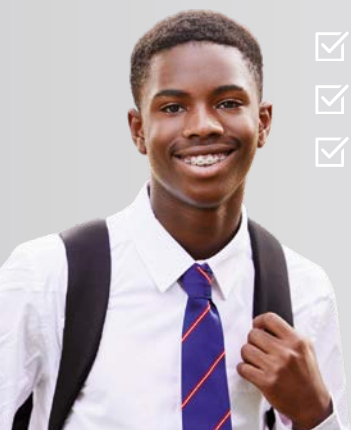
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Challenging the perception of STEM at an early age to achieve inclusivity

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) shape almost every aspect of modern life, from the technology we use daily to the medical innovations that transform healthcare. Yet the people who go on to study and work in STEM fields often come from a surprisingly narrow range of backgrounds. Physics teacher at Loughborough Grammar School, Leicestershire, and head of STEM at Loughborough Schools Foundation, Rebecca Mack, discusses why creating a more inclusive and accessible STEM programme doesn't begin at university or even GCSE level, but the second children step into education.



Challenging stereotypes from the start

One of the biggest barriers to inclusivity in STEM is not ability, but perception. Working in a single-sex boys' school, I've had to challenge the perception many times that STEM is just engineering and building cars. While that is a route, this attitude already closes doors for people who don't "feel" like they fit this mould.

The language surrounding core academic subjects can shape confidence before students have even had the opportunity to explore them properly. Stereotypes about subjects like maths and physics begin very young. Students often hear phrases such as "maths is tricky" or "I'm just not a maths person." Interestingly, we rarely hear similar comments about reading.

Later in education, girls are statistically more likely to choose biology over physics because biology is often perceived as more "people-oriented," however physics can be deeply connected to people and society.

In class, we might explore how physics contributes to medical technologies such as cochlear implants, showing students how scientific principles can directly improve lives. By presenting science through these real-world contexts, students begin to see that STEM is not confined to laboratories or equations.

Representation in the classroom

Gender stereotypes continue to shape how students view STEM

subjects. I was fortunate to attend an all-girls school, where I could explore science without the noise of these assumptions. It wasn't until university that I became aware of the stereotype that women "didn't belong" in science and I quickly noticed how homogeneous my cohort was. That lack of diversity extended into my career, a challenge that many female physicists have worked hard to overcome.

It's encouraging that in 2025, female participation in A Level physics in the UK reached a record high with 10,814 girls taking the subject – representing 24.1% of the total cohort. While still a minority, this is one of the highest participation levels in at least 25 years.

Now, as a female physicist teaching in an all-boys school, I see it as my responsibility not only to inspire interest in STEM but also to prepare my students to respect and collaborate with women from the earliest stages of their education.

Another challenge is the underrepresentation of students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Many of these students see fewer examples of people who look like them in physics or other STEM fields.

As teachers, we have a responsibility to broaden the stories we tell about science and that means highlighting contributions from scientists across different cultures and backgrounds, as well as recognising the work of women in fields that have historically been

male dominated. These examples help students understand that science has always been shaped by diverse voices and perspectives.

Opening doors through experience

Sometimes the most powerful way to spark interest is simply giving students the opportunity to try something new. As Head of STEM, I focus a lot of my work on engaging Key Stage 3 pupils, as I've found it's easier to grow a love of physics from an early age and nurture it.

My aim is to create opportunities outside the traditional curriculum such as robotics challenges, STEM competitions and themed enrichment days that allow students to explore science and technology in collaborative and creative ways.

Importantly, many of these activities at the Foundation are built into the school timetable rather than being optional clubs. When students encounter STEM in this way, they often discover interests or strengths they might not have realised they had.

These programmes also highlight the wide variety of roles within STEM projects. A robotics challenge, for example, might involve engineers, designers, presenters and problem-solvers all working together. Students quickly see that STEM careers require a diverse set of skills and perspectives.

Exploring topics such as sound engineering, medical physics or space exploration can help

students understand how science intersects with music, healthcare, communication and even creative industries.

When students see those connections, STEM becomes less about fitting a particular stereotype and more about exploring interests they already have.

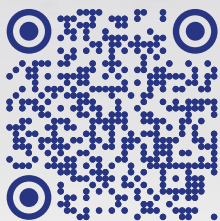
Ultimately, inclusive STEM education is about creating an environment where curiosity can flourish. That means challenging stereotypes, broadening representation and ensuring students have opportunities to experience science in real-world contexts.

To achieve genuine inclusivity, I would love to see more cross-curricular projects built into the timetable. Imagine students studying design and technology working alongside those in computing, or science students collaborating with art classes on a shared project. Bringing these disciplines together would help students see how skills connect in the real world, while encouraging critical thinking and creativity. It would also broaden their understanding of the many careers that draw on STEM skills – something traditional subject boundaries in education don't always make visible.

Physics, after all, is the study of the entire universe. Somewhere within that universe, there is something that will capture every student's imagination. Our job as educators is to make sure they feel confident enough to explore it.

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Sydney marathon

Two members of the Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire, community, have taken on the TCS Sydney Marathon, raising funds for two charitable causes.

Teacher of PE and Games and Second Academic at the school, Miss Lois Brown, ran the marathon in aid of Birmingham Children's Hospital Charity, which provides life-changing care and support to children and their families.

Joining Miss Brown on the start line was Mrs Gill Punt, wife of the Headmaster of Bromsgrove School, who continued her commitment to charitable fundraising after completing the London Marathon earlier this year dressed as Paula the Polar Bear.

Mrs Punt, who is also the recipient of the British Citizen Award (BCAv) Medal of Honour for Services to Volunteering and Charitable Giving, has helped raise 30 years. The Sydney Marathon marked the next chapter in her



fundraising journey as she works towards a new milestone of raising £3 million for charity.

Pictured: (top) Gill Punt as Paula the Polar Bear and Lois Brown (bottom)

Raising money

Every pupil at Bryanston Prep School, Dorset, from Nursery through to Year 8, has helped raise £4,000 for School in a Bag (SIAB), funding one packed bag for every child on the school's roll.

School in a Bag delivers essential supplies to children left without basics by poverty, disaster, or displacement. The charity was founded by Luke Simons following the loss of his brother in the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, and each £25 rucksack contains carefully chosen items, pencils, exercise books, a bowl, water bottle, spork, and toothbrush, designed to give children in crisis the tools to move their lives forward.

The fundraising drive began after SIAB representatives visited the school at the start of the Spring term, sharing the story behind the charity and explaining what a single bag can mean to a child with nothing. Pupils set themselves a personal target of £25 each and got to work selling homemade

Pictured: Bryanston Prep pupils with their rucksacks



lemonade, helping neighbours with gardening, busking, and taking part in sponsored cycling events. The school's Gardening ECA Group contributed by selling homegrown strawberries, jalapeños, tomatoes, and chive plants to Bryanston families.

Once the target was reached, pupils packed every rucksack themselves.

SIAB operates across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and beyond, reaching children who may otherwise have no access to education or basic everyday items.

Running the length of Britain

A student from Lord Wandsworth College, Hampshire, has become the youngest known woman to run the length of the country.

Phoebe, who is 18, set off from John o' Groats on 20 June and arrived in Land's End on 26 August, having taken 68 days to complete the journey.

Prior to Phoebe's challenge, it's understood that the youngest female to have run the length of Britain was Imogen Boddy, who completed the feat at the

age of 22 in 2022.

As with Imogen's run, Phoebe's achievement cannot be verified as an official Guinness World Record because of restrictions around age.

Phoebe only took up running four years ago, after admitting that she previously hated sport. She began with a school fundraising run at LWC and hasn't looked back.

In 2024, Phoebe received an Autism diagnosis and now confesses to finding therapy through her running.

During this summer's challenge, she has been raising money for the National Autistic Society and the Lord Wandsworth Foundation, which supports children who have lost the support of a parent, primarily through bereavement. So far, she has raised over £4,000.



Pictured: Phoebe with her dad and running partner, Chris Photo credit: Chris Harris

Charity walk

Two siblings from New Hall School, Essex, Leo Walsh, Year 8, and Henry Walsh, Year 10, have completed a 40-mile charity walk from Little Baddow to Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH), to raise funds and awareness for Epilepsy Action and Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity.

The brothers were inspired to take on the challenge following Leo's epilepsy diagnosis, subsequent surgery and recovery.

Leo's life changed dramatically in December 2024, when he suffered his first tonic-clonic seizure. After months of specialist care, Leo underwent brain surgery at Great Ormond Street Hospital exactly one year after his first seizure, to remove a tumour.

Leo and Henry, along with their parents, undertook the 40-mile charity walk in order to thank the organisations that had supported

Pictured (l-r): Henry and Leo Walsh at GOSH



their family and to raise awareness of epilepsy, which affects around one in every 100 people in the UK. The family's charity walk has so far raised £14,156, helping to ensure that other children continue to benefit from the life-changing care, treatment and support provided by Great Ormond Street Hospital and Epilepsy Action.

Running challenge for charity



A group of teenagers have completed a 14-hour, 71.5 mile all-terrain running challenge to the highest point in Wales for charity.

The students from Ellesmere College, Shropshire, completed a relay run from the college to the summit of Yr Wyddfa/Snowdon to raise funds for the Inspire Children and Youth Trust.

A total of 19 students, from Year 11 to 13, and nine members of staff – including Headmaster Jonathan Shaw – left the school gates at 4am, ran through the Welsh countryside, and reached the summit of the mountain at 6pm.

Pictured: Ellesmere College students on Snowdon for the Snowdon Run 2026

The challenge is an annual fundraising event that has been completed by students at the school since 1999. It is split into 28 legs and participants are equipped with a map and compass.

Last year a team of 27 people raised £1,408 for Pancreatic Cancer UK – a disease that claimed the life of former Ellesmere College Headmaster, Brendan Wignall, in January 2024.

This year they chose to raise money for Inspire Children and Youth Trust after students visited the charitable school in South Africa as part of a senior girls hockey and netball tour.

Fundraising success



The Queen's College, London and Queen's College Preparatory School community has exceeded all expectations in a fundraising challenge, collectively covering nearly 7,000 miles in a challenge that invited families, pupils and staff to walk, run, swim, and move their way towards a shared goal of 1,848 miles over 8 days in June 2026, to celebrate the founding of Queen's College in 1848.

Pictured: Pupils who took part in the challenge

The achievement represents 280% of their original 1,848-mile target and saw more than £65,000 raised for the school's Bursary Fund.

A significant contribution came from families who pledged sponsorship of £10 per mile from the outset, alongside a generous donor who match-funded contributions towards the end of the challenge.

Advertorial Feature

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Entrepreneurship programme

Glenalmond College, Perthshire, is launching a new entrepreneur programme in partnership with Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. Running from October 2026, the programme will be open to Glenalmond pupils aged 14 to 17 and combines in-person events at both Glenalmond and Oxford Saïd with monthly online sessions led by Oxford Saïd academics.

Chairperson of Glenalmond College, Professor Basak Akdemir, said: "Education must evolve alongside the world it serves. Our ambition for Glenalmond is to create an environment where academic excellence is complemented by real-world experiences that develop creativity, leadership and entrepreneurial thinking. Partnering with Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, allows us to offer

pupils access to some of the brightest minds in business and innovation, while encouraging them to become confident problem-solvers and future changemakers. It is exactly the kind of opportunity that will define the next chapter of Glenalmond's growth and global outlook."

From October through to March, students will take part in monthly 75-minute online sessions led by Oxford Saïd. Between sessions, mixed groups of three to five pupils will develop their own business ideas, using SOFIA – an AI tool trained on the Inspiring Female Founders (IFF) case library – to research and refine their thinking, with day-to-day support from Glenalmond teachers and feedback from Oxford Saïd at the start of each new session.

Pictured: Launching the new partnership at the Saïd Business School



The programme concludes with a full day at Saïd Business School, Oxford, in Spring 2027. Pupils will enjoy a keynote from Professor Pinar Ozcan, a panel of women founders, selected group presentations, and awards at the Saïd Business School.

Professor Pinar Ozcan, Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, said: "I am delighted to be

working with Glenalmond College on this programme. The Inspiring Female Founders case library and SOFIA, the AI tool for entrepreneurship we trained on the case library, were built to be free and globally accessible. Glenalmond is the first school we are working with to build additional educational content using these tools in order to train boys and girls in entrepreneurship using female role models."

Advertorial Feature

Beyond the classroom, beyond the chatbot: AI that acts, not just answers

Much of the discussion about AI in schools has centred on the classroom: how students use it, data security and keeping the human at the heart of teaching. But Callum Donnelly of Access Education software thinks what AI could do in the office deserves equal attention.

The classroom debate is live, and understandably so. Does AI help pupils learn or let them cut corners? Is it eroding critical thinking? What should a policy say, who is it for and who carries the responsibility if it goes wrong?

The school office conversation is quieter. Perhaps because chatbots don't feel relevant here. But as fees have risen, and parent expectations with them, the pressure on operations staff has grown. When time and money are tight, how they are spent matters more than ever.

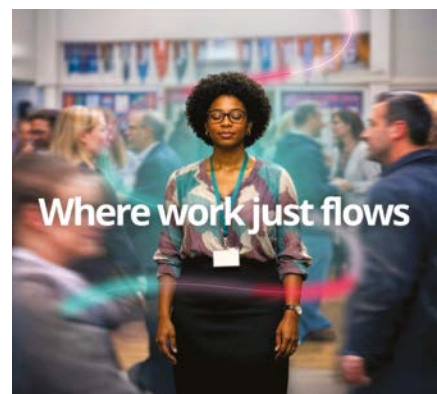
Every school office runs on a thick layer of routine work:

confirmations to send, records to check, forms to reconcile. This is where agentic AI is interesting, and far less controversial than in the classroom. Imagine AI that doesn't just answer questions, but researches, builds and automates the routine work. Used well, it works inside the systems a school already uses, on the data those staff can already see, with nothing sent anywhere it shouldn't be, and it does nothing a person has not chosen to let it do. It makes the suggestion; you still make the call.

Take parent communication. So much of an office's week goes

on chasing, confirming and tracking who has replied. Hand that over, and there is more time for the actual conversations. The irony is not lost on me: while we worry about AI eroding human judgement and connection, this is the kind that could buy back the time and space for it.

The real question, then, is not what agentic AI can do. It is whether schools trust it enough to let it, and whether that trust has been earned yet. Because this is not only a question for the classroom. It is worth asking of everything that keeps a school



running, and whether those hours spent wrestling with systems and data might be given back to the human parts of the job that AI cannot do.

To find out more about how Access can support schools, visit: www.theaccessgroup.com/education

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It started with raised voices

Schools face real security threats. Counter Terrorism Policing have confirmed that plots against UK schools have been disrupted. With Martyn's Law expected to commence from spring 2027, schools are preparing the public protection procedures the Act will require.

CTprepare helps schools build site-specific procedures through guided, expert questioning, then keep them current with drill logging, reminders and clear evidence of preparedness over time.

Tuesday. 2:47pm.

The school day was moving towards its usual conclusion.

A former pupil walked through the gates. He knew the site well. He knew where to find the teacher he had come to see. The disagreement between them had started years earlier, but in his mind it had never ended.

As he approached the classroom corridor, his voice began to rise. Staff nearby could hear the confrontation becoming increasingly heated. One teacher stepped into the corridor. Another quietly closed a classroom door. The headteacher, working elsewhere on site, received a message: there was a disturbance.

At that moment, nobody knew exactly what they were dealing with. An angry parent. A distressed former pupil. A medical emergency. Or something worse.

And that is the point.

What happened next depended entirely on whether the school had prepared for not knowing.

In another part of the building, a member of staff followed the communication procedure.

A message moved quickly and clearly: not a rumour, not a scramble of hurried phone calls, but an agreed process everyone understood.

Classrooms secured.

Reception informed.

Senior leaders updated.

Staff knew their roles because they had practised them.

The former pupil was met calmly, supported, and the situation was resolved safely. The disruption was limited. Pupils were reassured. Staff followed agreed procedures without hesitation.

Thirty miles away, a school trip was returning from a museum visit, 20 minutes from site.

The trip leader took a call.

Continue, delay or divert?

Who had authority to decide?

Who would speak to parents, and what could be said before the picture was clear?

Again, the answer came down to preparation.

This is the part most planning misses.

Emergencies rarely arrive with a label attached.

They begin with uncertainty: a raised voice, a worried message, a phone call, a decision that cannot wait.

The staff member in the corridor and the trip leader on the coach were not following different plans for different threats. They were following one set of practised procedures that held regardless of what the incident later proved to be.

The procedures did not need to know exactly what was happening.

The staff did not need certainty before they could act.

That is what preparedness actually buys: not simply a response to a named danger, but the ability to act well before the full picture is clear.

Most schools have policies. Many have procedures.

The real question is whether they work when information is incomplete and decisions must be made under pressure.

Whether every member of staff could explain their role confidently.

Whether off-site activity is covered as thoroughly as the site itself.

And whether, when parents ask what happened and what was done, there is a clear and honest answer ready: not constructed afterwards, but available because the procedures were already in place and had been followed.

Martyn's Law, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, will require standard duty premises to put procedures in place to reduce harm should an attack occur, across evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication.

But a plan in a filing cabinet is not a prepared school.

And the same procedures that help schools meet the Act are often the ones that prove most valuable on an ordinary Tuesday afternoon.

CTprepare works with schools to build those procedures from the ground up: not by applying a generic template, but by working through the specific geography, staffing structure and operational realities of each site.

The result is a set of procedures that staff have shaped and understand, rather than a document they have simply been handed.

That distinction matters.

Because procedures that staff help to build are procedures they are far more likely to follow with confidence when the moment comes.

Three questions every school should be able to answer:

1. How would information move across the site in the first two minutes?
2. What happens if an off-site trip is returning during an incident?
3. Could every member of staff explain their role confidently?



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Jonathan Roback, Co-Founder, CTprepare

In a lockdown, no one will be reading a policy.

Your evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication procedures are built on answers to questions like these. CTprepare is how you answer them.

Which doors can be secured from the inside?

Where does everyone go if the field is unusable?

What happens to the class in the pool?

Who takes charge if the Head is out?

Who lets the police onto the site?

Who gives the all-clear?

How do you alert staff without alarming pupils?

How do you account for every child?

What happens when parents arrive at the gate?

Preparedness is knowing the answers.

Procedures your staff understand

A generic plan says secure the area. Yours names the door, the room and the person responsible, in plain English staff can act on.

Your school, not the sector

Questions set by people with counter-terrorism and school governance experience. Your answers make them yours, inside a day.

Still true next term

Drill logs, review reminders and a record of every action, so what you build in September still describes the school in June.



Understanding school finance: empowering school leaders to make informed decisions

Last year, the St Albans Education Group in partnership with Philip Avery (The Business Mechanic) held a one-day course on 'Understanding School Finances'. Designed to help school leaders with making informed financial decisions that align with a school's educational mission, Chief Operating Officer for the Group, Mike Lewis, offers some useful insights from the course.



Mike Lewis

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, school leaders are tasked with balancing the dual responsibilities of delivering exceptional education and ensuring financial sustainability. The 'Understanding School Finance' course looked to offer a guide to navigating the complexities of school finance. Here are some of the key insights.

The golden thread: activities drive financial outcomes

At the heart of the course was a fundamental principle: "We control activities, not money." Financial statements are not the end goal; they are the scorecard reflecting the outcomes of operational decisions. Whether it's staffing, admissions, fee-setting or facilities investment, every activity creates financial consequences. By understanding these consequences, school leaders can make better decisions that strengthen their schools.

Building financial literacy: the four financial statements

There are four essential financial statements:

1. **Balance sheet:** A snapshot of what the school owns (assets) and owes (liabilities) at a specific point in time. It reveals the school's financial position and capacity to invest in future opportunities.
2. **Income statement:** A measure of performance over time, showing whether the school's operations are generating surplus or consuming reserves.
3. **Cash flow statement:** Tracks actual cash movements, ensuring the school can meet obligations as they fall due.
4. **Capital account:** Demonstrates how profit or surplus

accumulates, linking the balance sheet to the income statement.

These statements are interconnected, providing a holistic view of the school's financial health. For example, a surplus in the income statement flows into reserves on the balance sheet, strengthening the school's financial position.

Understanding cost behaviour and breakeven analysis

Schools operate with predominantly fixed cost structures, meaning most costs – such as teaching staff salaries and building maintenance – remain constant regardless of pupil numbers. This creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities. It is important to understand contribution and breakeven analysis:

- **Contribution per pupil:** Fee income minus variable costs per pupil. This amount contributes to covering fixed costs and generating surplus.
- **Breakeven point:** The number of pupils needed to cover all costs. Small changes in enrolment can have a significant financial impact due to the high proportion of fixed costs.

Relevant costing: making better decisions

One of the most practical aspects of the course was the concept of relevant costing, which helps leaders focus on costs that actually matter for specific decisions. The framework involves:

1. **Ignoring sunk costs:** Money already spent is irrelevant to future decisions.
2. **Focusing on incremental costs:** Costs that change directly because of a decision.
3. **Considering opportunity costs:** The value of the best alternative foregone.

For instance, when deciding whether to accept a mid-year pupil, leaders should focus on incremental costs like examination fees and catering, rather than the misleading "average cost per pupil." If the incremental income exceeds the incremental costs, the decision is financially beneficial.

Surplus improvement strategies: a hierarchy of tactics

There are five tactics for improving financial surplus, ranked by effectiveness:

1. **Raising fee levels:** The most powerful tactic, as every pound of fee increase directly adds to contribution. A 10% fee increase can tolerate up to a 10% enrolment loss and still improve financial position.
2. **Reducing direct costs:** While impactful, this tactic has limited scope as direct costs typically represent only 10-15% of total costs.
3. **Optimising revenue mix:** Shifting the balance between day pupils and boarders can significantly affect contribution margins.
4. **Increasing pupil numbers:** Effective if the school has capacity and market demand.
5. **Reducing Fixed Costs:** A last resort due to the potential disruption to educational quality and operations.

The danger of discounting

Fee discounting, often seen as a quick fix for enrolment challenges, can be financially disastrous. A 10% discount often requires a 12.5% increase in enrolment just to break even. If the school fails to attract enough additional pupils, it risks worsening its financial position and damaging its reputation.

Case Studies: St Successful vs. Failing Fortunes

The course contrasted two schools that started with identical financial positions but took different paths

- **St Successful:** Focused on modest fee increases, strategic investments, and disciplined cost management. Over five years, it achieved a surplus margin of 11.95%, 211 days of cash reserves, and zero debt.
- **Failing Fortunes:** Relied on aggressive fee increases, desperate discounting, and reactive crisis management. By Year 5, it faced a 26% operating loss, 73 days of cash reserves, and unpayable debt.

The key takeaway was that financial outcomes are the result of operational decisions. Schools that prioritise strategic growth and disciplined management build resilience and sustainability.

Conclusion – Empowering educational leadership

By understanding financial statements, cost behaviour, relevant costing and surplus improvement strategies, leaders can confidently engage with financial information and make decisions that strengthen their schools.

Remember, the numbers are just the scorecard. The real game is the activities you control – staffing, admissions, fee-setting, and investments. By mastering financial literacy, school leaders can ensure their institutions thrive, delivering exceptional education while maintaining financial sustainability.

St Albans Education Group runs regular one-day courses designed specifically for heads, members of senior leadership teams and governors. To register your interest in future events, contact Mike at COO@staeg.org.uk

Ode to the teacher

What is a teacher? Assistant Head, Teaching and Learning, Bryanston School, Dorset, Carrie Marsden, reflects on the various definitions that can be found today and why a teacher is much more than someone who just delivers knowledge.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a teacher as someone whose job is to teach in a school or college. The OED gives one definition dating back to c1290: "One who or that which teaches or instructs." Less confusingly, Wikipedia says a teacher is "a person who helps students to acquire knowledge, competence, or virtue". UNESCO states that "a teacher covers all individuals dedicated to facilitating learning and fostering intellectual growth in students." "Working to ensure children are safer, happier, healthier, and more hopeful," Barnardo's views the definition of "teacher" through a safeguarding lens. A teacher is: "the primary adult presence who can spot changes in behaviour, emotional distress, or safeguarding concerns in children."

What does AI say a teacher is?

ChatGPT says a teacher is a person who helps others learn by explaining ideas and guiding students in their education and personal growth. Copilot posits that a teacher is a person who helps others learn knowledge, skills, values and understanding, and Claude simply states a teacher is a person who helps others learn.

All these definitions, including AI's, use terms such as "individuals," "someone" and "persons." While philosophers debate the precise meaning of these terms – perhaps now more than ever – all definitions signal that a teacher is a human.

It was ever thus.

Ever since, in fact, Socrates first said: "Hmm, there's something powerfully important in this teaching-young-people-to-think lark..." (I paraphrase).

With the advent of AI, a teacher today need not be human. But why anyone would think this is a desirable state of affairs, I cannot fathom. All of us remember Covid. Which demographic amongst us –

student, teacher, parent – would go back to that? We all remember what teaching and learning felt like; we lived through it, painfully. And that was with two humans on either side of the screen. An "AI teacher" is to radically redefine the term.

And that is because teachers connect. Teaching is inherently relational and in-person. It is, in fact, a very human endeavour; real chemistry emerges between two biological humans. It is one of the most formative human relationships there is, and it can change lives.

Everyone remembers their favourite teacher. I bet your favourite teacher cultivated the Great Teaching Art of Noticing. I bet they noticed you – perhaps they remembered, as mine did, your greatest academic passions and looked out a book for you (there in your hands next lesson!). They invested their time in you, and I'll bet they freely initiated a conversation with you, unprompted and often. They certainly would have sparred with you; they wouldn't have been afraid of hurting your feelings (which happens between humans – and must, in order that we learn). Sweet Moses, didn't they make you break a mental sweat?! They pushed your thinking while giving you permission to be wrong. They gave you cognitive confidence to sit with an idea and think it over. When they made mistakes themselves, they owned it – "hallucinations" were for the Psychology Department – and they role modelled being comfortable with nuance. They showed you a way of being human that you aspired to. They didn't leave you with the feeling that it is right to prioritise speed over accuracy. They didn't leave you thinking your brain wasn't worth cultivating. You got the very strong sense, in fact, of the opposite: the development of your own thinking was of paramount importance. They were ambitious

for you and it was infectious. You started to believe in your own abilities because they did. You knew they were on the side of helping you grow. And didn't they just make you laugh?! Didn't you look forward to their lessons?

I have a 12-year-old daughter, and I want this memory of a beloved human teacher for her. It is not possible to hit these heights with an algorithm. If we believe that the AI platform(s) we are using can do the human business of teaching better than we can, then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is not technological progress but human surrender.

AI in education deserves neither root-and-branch condemnation nor uncritical praise. But neither does it require a carefully balanced trade off; as though we were



forced to accept the "bad" of AI in the classroom, in the misguided view that this unavoidably just comes with the "good." That is technological fatalism and I will not go gentle into that good night. That sounds more like a nightmare, frankly.

Who knows what the future will bring, but I am for human teachers behind the wheel. Not "in the loop", but behind the wheel.

You cannot mechanise the relationships that give life meaning. The teacher-student connection is one such relationship.



For independent schools with large estates, sports facilities, boarding accommodation or rural campuses, the Polaris Ranger XP 1000 Nordic Pro is a utility vehicle designed for year-round site management.

This substantial side-by-side combines the power and capability of the Ranger XP 1000 platform with the added comfort of the Nordic Pro specification. Its factory-fitted cab helps protect staff, passengers and equipment from wind, rain and cold, making it particularly practical during the autumn and spring terms.

School sites still need to operate whatever the weather, with grounds and estates teams regularly moving tools, sports

equipment and maintenance supplies between pitches, buildings and outlying areas. The Ranger XP 1000 Nordic Pro offers the carrying capacity, comfort and all-terrain capability to make these jobs easier, particularly across wet ground, tracks and grassed routes. It can also transport staff, visitors, students or parents around larger sites during events, open days and sports fixtures.

For schools looking for a practical and comfortable estate vehicle, the Ranger XP 1000 Nordic Pro is more than a rugged workhorse. It is a versatile all-season support vehicle that can help teams work more efficiently – and with its 2027 update, it's an even more attractive option.

www.polarisbritain.com

1 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/teacher> [Accessed 17 August 2026]
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Big Sing



Hundreds of young voices from Years 5 and 6 in primary schools across Leicestershire are set to unite for 'Big Sing 2027: Voices in Harmony', an event organised by Fairfield Prep School, which this year will celebrate the life and legacy of Sir David Attenborough.

Following his 100th birthday year, the concert will recognise Sir David Attenborough's work with a brand-new song cycle titled 'Attenborough's Wondrous World'.

The collection comprises six original songs written by Head of Prep Music at Loughborough Schools Foundation, Andrew Groom, and has cross-curricular links with Key Stage 2 Science and Geography. The lyrics explore life across the planet, conservation and environmental responsibility.

Pictured: Getting ready for Big Sing 2027

Building on the success of the 2026 event, the 2027 Big Sing will take place at De Montfort Hall but will also feature full orchestral accompaniment by the Leicester Symphony Orchestra.

Designed to encourage confidence, teamwork and musicality in pupils of all abilities, Fairfield Prep School will provide participating schools with lyric videos, guide and backing tracks, action videos and sheet music to help make rehearsals for the event as easy as possible.

Each participating school can bring its own related song to sing as a solo item, and there will also be an opportunity for schools to enter a poetry and artwork competition in which the winning pieces will be showcased during the concert.



Tring Park School for the Performing Arts, Hertfordshire, is now offering three of its vocational courses for Sixth Form, accredited by the University of the Arts London (UAL) Awarding Body.

The UAL Level 3 Diplomas will be in Performance and Production Arts for the Acting and Musical Theatre courses, and in Music Performance and Production for the Commercial Music course. These two-year qualifications combine practical training with project-based learning, enabling students to develop the creative, technical and professional skills needed to progress to higher education or careers within the performing arts.

The diplomas from UAL Awarding Body, who focus on delivering pre-

degree arts qualifications, provide learning, relevant to today's ever-changing arts industry. At the end of the two-year courses, students will secure a UAL Level 3 Diploma, which is worth up to 84 UCAS points. It forms part of Tring's dual curriculum ethos with students also able to take up BTEC or A Level options.

Director of Studies at Tring Park School for the Performing Arts, Elizabeth Odell, commented: "We believe that blending rigorous academic study with world-class vocational training enables young people to grow into well-rounded, driven individuals ready for futures in both the arts and wider professions. We are delighted to be working with UAL Awarding Body to further expand our offering."

Pictured: Students performing as part of Tring Commercial Music

Edinburgh Fringe

Pupils from Ashville College, North Yorkshire, have taken centre stage at the Edinburgh Fringe with their home-grown rock musical.

More than 20 pupils and recent Old Ashvillians took to the stage for five days with "Beth", a 70-minute rock musical inspired by Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'.

Written, created and brought to life by Ashville's Performing Arts team, the production is a gender-swapped re-imagining of The Bard's classic tragedy through a contemporary lens. It transforms Macbeth into 'Beth – an ambitious

warrior whose pursuit of power, destiny and desire drives the story forward.

Taking on the role of 'Beth was former Ashville pupil Gabby Salvin, who is currently training at Leeds Conservatoire.

Ashville's Director of Performing Arts, Karl Boyd, said: "What makes 'Beth unlike any Fringe offering is its immersive sonic architecture."

Using spatial audio, the soundtrack was broadcast directly to each audience member through wireless headphone



technology. Karl Boyd continued: "Audience members were able to hear every whisper in every corner of Glamis Castle, every slice of the dagger in the Queen's bedroom, and every disembodied

cry upon the heath which created a theatre experience that placed viewers directly in the thick of the action. The result was theatre as lived experience: close, immediate and eerily physical."

Chicago



King's Worcester is celebrating after its senior production of Chicago was named Best Musical at the National School Theatre Awards in London.

King's Worcester's production of Chicago, staged in December last year, was selected from a competitive field of 86 schools from across the UK.

Pupils and staff travelled to London for the Gala Awards Show, where they enjoyed official red-carpet photographs before spending the evening celebrating

outstanding school theatre.

The Senior Production of Chicago had been nominated for Best Musical, alongside four individual award nominations for pupils Bella Crompton, Flo Sinfield, Henry Friend and Amelia Walmsley.

When King's Worcester was announced as the winner of Best Musical, the production was described as "a polished, energetic and highly engaging performance that demonstrated exceptional talent, creativity and teamwork."

Pictured (l to r): Henry Friend, Bella Crompton, Amelia Walmsley and Florence Sinfield



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Performing Arts commendation

Surbiton High School, Surrey, has been commended in the Independent Schools of the Year Awards 2026, in recognition of their Performing Arts provision.

The annual awards celebrate excellence across the independent education sector, highlighting schools that provide innovative and enriching experiences for young people. This year saw a record number of nominations from schools across the UK.

The commendation recognised the breadth and ambition of Performing Arts at the school, Principal of Surbiton High School, Mr Matthew Shoults, said: "It is wonderful to see the commitment and creativity of

our Performing Arts community recognised in this way. Every production, concert and performance is the result of countless hours of dedication from our pupils and staff, and I am continually inspired by their willingness to challenge themselves, support one another and strive for excellence. This commendation celebrates everyone who makes Performing Arts such a vibrant and valued part of life at Surbiton High School."

The Independent Schools of the Year Awards recognise schools across a range of categories for their achievements, innovation and contribution to the lives of their pupils.

Pictured: Performing Arts at Surbiton High School

National School Theatre Awards

A student from Westholme School, Lancashire, has been crowned Best Actress in a Musical at the National School Theatre Awards 2026, in a ceremony held in London's West End.

Olivia Ko, 17, won the award for her performance as Kim in the school's production of Miss Saigon, collecting her trophy at the Gillian Lynne Theatre on Drury Lane in June.

Olivia was one of three Westholme students to walk the red carpet on the night, all nominated for the same production. She was joined by Louka Miller, a finalist for Best Actor in a Musical for his performance as Chris, and Francesca Iles, a finalist for Best Supporting Actress in a Musical for her performance as Ellen.

The National School Theatre Awards – known by pupils

Pictured: Olivia Ko at the NSTA



as "the Oscars for schools" – celebrate the best school theatre productions across the UK, with entries from state, independent and specialist performing arts schools judged nationally. Patrons of the awards include actors David Bradley and Joe Cole.

From novice to nightclub: what DJing can teach about music, partnership and access

Since the successful introduction of DJing classes at Emanuel School, London, DJing has not only become firmly embedded in to the school's offer, but formed the basis of a partnership which aims to provide structured musical opportunities to pupils in communities facing high levels of deprivation and educational disadvantage. Emanuel's outgoing Director of Music and music educator, Charles Janz explains more.

Three years ago, DJing at Emanuel School was an enjoyable add-on: contemporary, energetic and useful for engaging pupils who might not otherwise find their place in the Music Department. It has since become something bigger: a way of widening access, developing musical skills, strengthening partnerships with primary schools and challenging assumptions about what counts as school music.



The project began with a simple question: how can music education feel genuinely relevant to more young people, while still maintaining rigour? Emanuel has a broad musical culture, from choirs, orchestras and chamber music to jazz, rock, pop and musical theatre. But the music that most immediately excites many pupils is not represented by traditional school ensembles. DJing offered a powerful way in: creative, collaborative, technical, performative and rooted in young people already know

From those beginnings, the work has grown into a substantial programme. Around 50 Emanuel pupils learn DJing in one-to-one lessons, as they might learn piano, violin or singing. It is also embedded into our KS3 curriculum, with pupils exploring electronic dance music, remixing, track structure and live mixing. We have organised school rave nights too, with our DJ pupils taking over nightclubs such as Ministry of Sound, Fabric and XOYO on a Friday night.

For pupils, the impact has been striking. DJing demands far more than pressing play. Pupils learn beat matching, phrasing, cueing, EQ, looping, transitions, harmonic mixing and how to control the energy of a room. They must listen precisely, understand structure, anticipate what is coming next and make decisions in the moment. Pupils who may never have seen themselves as performers stand behind professional decks, responsible for holding an audience's attention.

The partnership dimension grew from recognising that this work should not remain only within an independent school. Through Emanuel's outreach programme, we began working with local primary schools, including Falconbrook, Westbridge and Shaftesbury Park, offering a ten-week DJ course for Year 5 and 6 pupils. Many have limited access to co-curricular music provision; some have never had instrumental lessons or performed publicly before. DJing gave them an immediate, culturally relevant route into music, and a framework

for confidence, discipline, teamwork and self-expression.

The course is deliberately practical. Pupils work on DJ controllers using Rekordbox, learning the same core skills, then build towards a final performance in a nightclub-style setting, performing to parents, teachers and peers. For many, the journey from a classroom in week one to a DJ booth in week ten is extraordinary. The performance matters because it changes the stakes: pupils are preparing for a real musical event.

One of the most powerful moments comes when pupils realise DJing is not just about confidence, but craft. They begin to hear when two tracks are out of time, when a phrase has been missed, or when a transition really works, and start using musical language with increasing independence. As the headteacher of one partner primary school reflected after a showcase at XOYO: "The children's parents were in awe of what their children had not only learned but accomplished over such a short period of time."

There have been lessons for us as teachers, too. Teaching DJing requires clarity, patience and careful sequencing. Skills that seem simple to an experienced musician, such as keeping time or recognising a musical phrase, cannot be assumed. The best teaching has involved breaking complex processes into manageable steps, modelling repeatedly, encouraging peer learning and giving pupils time to practise until something physical and musical begins to click. DJing has reminded me that good music



teaching is not defined by genre, but by the quality of listening and the care with which pupils are supported to improve.

I am now leaving Emanuel, though the school intends to keep supporting this outreach work, and I am developing a Liberal Studies course at Dulwich College, where Year 13 pupils will learn not only to DJ, but to teach DJing to younger pupils, all helping to build a vibrant DJ culture within and beyond the school.

The wider lesson is that partnership work is strongest when it is ambitious, practical and rooted in genuine educational value. DJing may look different from a string quartet or a school choir, but it can be every bit as musical, disciplined and transformative, giving young people a language they recognise, a skill they can develop and a stage on which they can be seen differently.



Charles Janz is a music educator, DJ and former Director of Music at Emanuel School. He is the founder of Novice to Nightclub, a DJ education programme for schools, partnerships and outreach projects. Email: contact@novicetonightclub.com or visit: www.novicetonightclub.com



© Disney

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 27th year at London's Lyceum Theatre.

Over 1.5 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 ten+ with one free teacher ticket for every ten paid tickets.

Reserve your tickets now at thelionking.co.uk

White Paper response

Following the submission by Highfield School (formerly Highfield and Brookham School), Hampshire, to the Department for Education of the White Paper 'Education for a Changing Society: Human Skills, AI Readiness, and Preparing Learners for the Future of Work' which brought together findings from the schools Raising the Future conference, a response has been received.

The White Paper, argued that while the government's planned curriculum reforms represent a positive step, further action is needed to equip young people with the skills and resilience required for modern life.

Among its recommendations were:

- Greater emphasis on communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving skills across the curriculum.
- Reform of a GCSE assessment to better reflect real-world competences and applied learning.

- A national framework for AI literacy and the responsible use of AI in schools.
- Stronger guidance around smartphone use, online safety and digital wellbeing.
- Closer collaboration between schools, employers and policymakers to ensure education reflects future workforce needs.

In response to elements highlighted in the report, the DfE spokesperson said:

- "In terms of the recommendations set out in the paper relating to transferable skills, we are taking steps to ensure that the curriculum reflects the demands of modern life. We will embed vital applied knowledge and skills, including digital literacy, media literacy and financial education within the revised curriculum so that young people are well prepared for the future.
- "In relation to the paper's recommendations on GCSE

assessment models, the Review found that the current assessment and qualifications systems is broadly effective.

- "Regarding the recommendation for implementing national guidance for the responsible and effective integration of AI in education, we recognise the importance of preparing young people for an increasingly digital world. As part of reforms to the computing curriculum, we will ensure pupils develop strong digital literacy, including understanding emerging technologies such as AI, so they are equipped to thrive in modern society.
- "Regarding strengthening collaboration between educators, employers and policymakers to ensure education remains aligned with future workforce needs, we also recognise the importance of ensuring that post-16 education is closely aligned with labour market needs and future skills demand. Through ongoing reforms, we are strengthening collaboration with further education providers, employers and industry to support high quality pathways into further study, apprenticeships and employment. We will continue to develop approaches within post-16 education that reflect applied learning, technical understanding and the development of real-world competencies, alongside the strengthening of essential transferable skills. In addition, we are ensuring that learners develop advanced digital skills, including an understanding of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, supported by clear guidance on their responsible and effective use.
- "In line with the paper's recommendation to introduce stronger national strategies to address the impact of smart phones and social media on children's wellbeing, concentration and learning outcomes, we also recognise

concerns about the impact of social media and emerging technologies on children's wellbeing, concentration and learning. The Government is taking action to strengthen online safety protections, restrict young people's access to harmful online content and features, and expand opportunities for enrichment and positive experiences both online and offline."

The DfE spokesperson went on to say that work to redraft the national curriculum programmes of study and subject content for GCSEs is underway. They will test these proposals with stakeholders ahead of publishing draft content for public consultation in September. They are working towards a revised national curriculum being published in Spring 2027, for first teaching in 2028. They highlighted they are confident that these changes will deliver a curriculum that is "ambitious, inclusive and future-focused, providing every young person with the foundations they need to thrive."

Head, Suzannah Cryer, commented: "The messaging from the government is positive. However, there is a very real concern amongst teachers and parents that children today are not learning at the pace required to prepare them. Reform needs to be quicker and it needs to give schools the flexibility to develop skills such as collaboration, adaptability, communication, digital literacy and ethical decision making alongside academic attainment.

"While AI clearly presents fantastic opportunities for the future generations, there are huge risks involved when we look at the evolution of the workplace. Without meaningful curriculum and assessment reform, young people will leave education insufficiently prepared for the demands of the modern workplace."

National Film Competition

Milton Abbey, Dorset has secured third place in the Secondary Category at the 17th annual Childnet Film Competition.

Judged by a panel of experts from the BBC, BBFC, Disney, the Motion Picture Association, as well as young people, the competition showcases the power of youth voice in online safety education. The Childnet Film Competition attracted

participants from all nations of the UK who embraced the challenge of creating short films on the theme of 'Smart tech, safe choices – exploring the safe and responsible use of AI'.

Milton Abbey's film follows a young person using a chatbot to get advice on how to talk to somebody he likes, however, he becomes more isolated by this approach. Through editing and storytelling, we are shown how important it is not to replace our human relationships with AI chatbots.

All winning films received filmmaking equipment, as well as attaining BBFC Classification, which allows them to be played in cinemas across the UK.

The awards were presented by President of the Motion Picture Association, Emilie Anthonis.



Pictured: Middle Sixth students, Xavi W and Olly S

Tes School Awards 2026

The winners of the Tes Schools Awards 2026 have been announced, recognising the schools and teachers whose work is transforming outcomes for pupils and setting new standards across education in the UK.

This year's awards attracted a record number of nominations, highlighting the breadth of innovation and excellence taking place across the sector. Winners were selected by a panel of experienced school leaders and education experts across 23 categories spanning leadership, teaching, wellbeing, pupil outcomes and innovation.

The awards were presented at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London, with comedian Katherine Ryan hosting the ceremony.

Winners from the independent sector this year included:

Michelle Catterson from Moon Hall School, Surrey for Headteacher of the Year (Independent), who was recognised for her leadership which has seen Moon Hall become a recognised beacon of excellence for dyslexia education

– and for herself, who has become an influential voice in the SEND sector.

Caterham Prep School, Surrey, for Independent Prep School of the Year, who as a previous winner of the award was found to be continuing to innovate with purpose, maintaining and strengthening the local partnerships that have long been a hallmark of its approach. Its adoption of educational technology was also carefully considered. The school has developed an in-house ed-tech operation built around RileyBot, reputedly the first AI teaching tool safe for use from reception

age. The research underpinning this work is shared nationally and with international visitors, and has directly informed the DfE's national AI review.

RGS Worcester for Independent Senior School of the Year, whose work with a range of external partners on the development of AI was recognised, as was how they manage to hold together academic excellence and genuine pupil wellbeing without sacrificing one for the other.

Beech Hall School, Macclesfield, was also awarded the Excellence in Pupil Enrichment title. This achievement recognised the number of co-curricular clubs on

offer and the breadth and depth of provision for a school of its size.

Highlighted was its open water swimming programme. The school's Channel Swimming teams include anxious swimmers and young people with SEND, embodying a philosophy that children – not elite athletes – can achieve extraordinary things when given the belief and support to do so. A purpose-built tracking system called Evolve allows the school to monitor not just participation but the genuine impact of that engagement on individual pupils.

The full list of winners is available at www.tes.com/schools-awards/uk



Pictured: The Tes Award winners with host Katherine Ryan

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Competitive collaboration: The girls' school way

Three schools from the UK and Australia are working together on a research project to explore how conceptual thinking can transform girls' engagement with the process of learning. Two of the people involved with the project, Head of English at Godolphin and Latymer School, London James Christie and Head of English at Bromley High School GDST, Kent, Priya Christie, share what the research has found so far and how in a competitive environment collaboration is key.

“In their recent presentation at the International Coalition of Girls' Schools (ICGS) Global Forum in Toronto, Jane Danvers and Erica Thomas, two Australian Headteachers, put forward a bold vision for their girls' schools: “In a competitive environment, collaboration is not a weakness. It is strategy, stewardship and leadership.”

It was a moment in which we recognised a shared underlying belief – that girls' schools are strengthened when they look for points of connection which can accelerate and amplify individual aims and priorities. We ourselves were at the Global Forum with our colleague Linda Chui to present the findings of a three-school research collaboration on Conceptual Thinking that spanned both Australia and the UK. MLC School (Australia), Godolphin and Latymer School (UK), and Bromley High School, GDST (UK) came together in a joint project to transform girls' relationship with the process of learning through engagement with a conceptual thinking framework.

The reasons for collaborating were simple yet powerful. It extended the depth and scope of the process and enhanced the impact of its outcomes. Initial explorations revealed that different departments in different schools in different countries were responding to the same stimuli. In particular, all three schools identified the pressing

need to equip girls with enhanced thinking skills which would enable them to traverse multiple domains of knowledge in an increasingly complex informational landscape. The project focused on developing ways to enable our girls to systematically relate concrete and abstract dimensions of knowledge simultaneously. This development in their thinking meant that they gained the agility needed to interact proactively with multiple planes of knowledge at the same time. In a conceptualised lesson, students will not just absorb information but will consciously construct relationships between the world of facts and the world of ideas, concepts and arguments.

We soon came to the realisation that Conceptual Thinking is not subject-specific or restricted to the academic domain because it is driven by broader aims beyond those of curriculum demands. The efficacy of such an approach opened up an exciting range of possibilities for wider application, thereby forming a bridge between the pastoral and academic sides of a school. Our students realised that they are not just Humanities students, or students of STEM. They emerged from this experience more curious about the interconnectedness of things, and they also had the tools with which to investigate this and make their own conceptual links. Applying this way of thinking to the wider world creates a girl who is confident and resilient with a strong sense of self, in addition to

being academically successful.

The discovery that all three schools shared the same beliefs about developing girls' thinking skills in a changing world was a strong signal that collaboration was the way forward. Innovation and creativity became intuitive bi-products as practitioners experimented with pedagogical tools and initiatives. Working together also created a bigger data set, which made it possible to arrive at more nuanced and detailed conclusions. Being able to pool the results of staff and student surveys, focus groups, teacher lesson reflections, and questionnaires across the three schools provided a clear picture of patterns that are consistent across our schools in terms of how girls think and learn. It was through this process of collation and collaboration that each school was ultimately able to pursue incarnations of Conceptual Thinking in ways that preserved their unique identity, and all three schools found ways to promote their own brands and educational offerings. This therefore returns us to the idea that in a competitive environment, collaboration is strategy. As the Australian Headteachers, Jane and Erica, argued in their ICGS presentation, collaboration helps girls schools to stand out. It is not the soft approach, it is not merely decorative or trendy. A collaborative project about how girls think and learn is both hard-hitting and necessary, and is in



James Christie



Priya Christie

its own way deeply competitive in terms of establishing girls' schools as powerful, reflective sites of thought leadership and innovation.

The research emphatically tells us that girls learn better in collaborative environments. As ICGS findings argue: “collaboration can lead to better academic outcomes and a more joyful learning experience. As educators, it's essential to prioritize collaborative learning strategies to empower students and prepare them for the complex challenges of the future.” If girls do better together, then surely if we extend the logic of this belief, then girls' schools do better together. From the perspective of “strategy, stewardship and leadership,” we can see this ethos reflected in Cheryl Giovannoni's, CEO of the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) recent assertion that: “Girls thrive when their needs are placed at the centre of the educational experience.” Collaborations like these do not simply represent the education of girls, but are the epitome of girls' education by design. Given the shifting educational market, girls' schools now have a unique opportunity to redefine and model what it means to be competitive in a way that happens on girls' terms.”

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Coming together



Following agreement by the Governors and fully supported by the Headmistress, **Tudor Hall School, Oxfordshire**, is joining Mill Hill Education Group.

The announcement comes after an extended period of careful planning. This is not a commercial sale or profit-driven transaction. Tudor Hall will retain its identity, values, and its educational philosophy and character as an all girls' boarding and day school.

Headmistress of Tudor Hall School, Julie Lodrick, said: "This charitable

Pictured: Tudor Hall School

merger represents a proactive step taken from a strong position to secure our long-term vision and ambition for the future. We are delighted Tudor is joining a well-established, respected educational charity, whose values and ethos closely align with our own, underpinning our commitment to providing exceptional educational opportunities and empowering every girl to flourish."

The merger is expected to complete in Autumn 2026, following final legal and regulatory processes.

King Edward VI School, Hampshire, has announced the launch of The KES Group, bringing together King Edward VI School in Southampton, KES Preparatory School in Romsey and Prince's Mead in Winchester as a single, connected family of schools.

This milestone formally brings the three schools together and is aimed to strengthen the experience for pupils and families across the region, creating greater continuity, shared opportunity and access to collective expertise.

Head of King Edward VI School, Neal Parker, said: "This is a significant moment in the life of our schools. We are proud of the strength of each of our communities and bringing them together more formally allows us to build on that for the benefit of our families across Hampshire.

"I am also proud to continue supporting this shared future in a new capacity, as I take on the role of Executive Principal of The

Pictured: Launch of the KES Group



KES Group from September 2027, helping to guide the long-term development of our schools."

It comes as the schools look ahead to celebrating 500 years of educating children across Hampshire. Throughout launch week, representatives from across the community, past and present, alongside each Head, have contributed a time capsule to be placed at Hill Lane, Southampton. They will be opened in 2053, marking half a millennia in the school's history.

The Boards of **Downe House School, Berkshire**, and of John Lyon's Foundation, which governs **Harrow School, Middlesex**, have announced that as of this month (September) they have formed a structural partnership.

Harrow and Downe House have forged an increasingly strong connection in recent years. The relationship between the schools is underpinned by closely aligned ethos, cultures and ambitions, and a shared, belief in the value of single-sex boarding education.

It is said that the partnership will deepen academic purpose, advance innovation and support growth at Harrow and Downe House. Pupils at both schools will benefit from a programme of joint academic, co-curricular and social activities.

Additionally, the partnership will provide new opportunities for staff, further supporting the development of professional practice at the schools.

Colleagues will share knowledge, technology and assets in collaborative programmes aimed at enhancing teaching and learning across the schools and creating the best possible environments in which pupils can thrive and succeed.

It is also anticipated that parents, alumni and the wider communities of the schools will also benefit from shared experiences and opportunities in the future. An alignment of school calendars planned from 2028 onwards is also set to offer added convenience to the families with children at both schools, forming part of a shared strategy to enhance the parental experience.

The schools will retain their identities, character and traditions, and will stay on their current sites. Both schools will remain within their separate charities, under the continued governance of their respective Boards, and there will be no change to the leadership at either



school.

Chair of Foundation Governors, John Lyon's Foundation, David Eyton, said: "The Board of Governors of John Lyon's Foundation is delighted to support the announcement of this strategic step for Harrow School and the Foundation. In a changing environment for independent schools, we are excited by the opportunities of working more closely with Downe House and supporting our distinctive single sex education offers with closer collaboration

between our schools."

Chair to the Downe House Board of Governors, Sally McNair Scott, said: "The Board of Downe House is united in its wholehearted support for this partnership with Harrow. It brings together two institutions with a shared commitment to excellence and a belief in the transformative power of education. By combining our complementary strengths, we will create meaningful opportunities for both girls and boys, now and in the future."

North London Collegiate School (NLCS) and The Cavendish School, Camden, have announced that The Cavendish School has become part of the NLCS Family.

The Cavendish School will retain its name, character and local identity, while benefiting from the educational expertise, experience and long-term support of NLCS.

The partnership has been described as “a proactive step by two schools looking ahead to their long-term future.”

Headmistress of North London Collegiate School, Vicky Bingham, said: “Great schools do not stand still. They remain strong by thinking carefully about the future while holding fast to the values that made them distinctive in the first place.

“We see in Cavendish a school with warmth, purpose and a deep belief in the potential of every girl. Its motto, ‘Where Girls Dare’, speaks to a confidence and openness

Pictured: Heads Taryn Lombard and Vicky Bingham



that feel very close to our own founding purpose.

“We are delighted to welcome Cavendish into the NLCS Family and look forward to working together in a way that honours what makes the school special.”

Head of The Cavendish School, Taryn Lombard, said: “In NLCS, we see a shared belief in championing girls and placing students and families at the heart of every decision.

“The governors and I believe this partnership will allow Cavendish to remain true to itself while strengthening the values-driven culture and ethos that define our school.”

The Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle has announced the completion of its merger with **Westfield School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne**, and the official launch of RGS Newcastle Group of Schools (RGS Newcastle Group).

Head of RGS Newcastle and Executive Head of the RGS Newcastle Group, Mr Geoffrey Stanford, said: “For RGS families, this merger represents continuity and stability at a time when the sector is facing significant change.

“While other independent schools are contracting their offer, we are grateful that our longstanding history and robust financial position, enables us to take this bold step forward.

“By coming together, we are strengthening our position through the benefits of scale, while creating exciting new opportunities for our students.

“Importantly, this merger strengthens our ability to invest in facilities, partnerships and curriculum innovation,

Pictured: Mr Geoffrey Stanford, Mrs Kate Quinn, and Mr Neil Walker
Photo credit: RGS Group of Schools (Ruth Gibson)



ensuring we continue to deliver educational excellence within the group and beyond.”

Head of Westfield School, Mr Neil Walker, who retired over the summer, having stayed in his role to oversee the merger, has now handed over to his interim successor, Mrs Kate Quinn, who was Westfield’s Deputy Head.

Mr Walker, said: “For Westfield families, this merger safeguards the continuity of the nurturing environment while opening the door to new and exciting opportunities as part of a stronger, unified group.”

Oakhurst Grange School, Surrey, has confirmed it will join the **Caterham Family of Schools.** The move cements a decades-long relationship between the schools.

Oakhurst Grange School’s Headteacher, Mrs Gemma Mitchell, will continue to lead the school, which will also retain its dedicated governing body.

She said: “This is a partnership between schools that have worked closely together for many decades, with so many pupils and families connected across both communities. Joining the Caterham Family of Schools enables Oakhurst Grange School to retain its unique character, warmth and strong sense of community, while continuing to strengthen and develop our educational offer for the future...

“...Joining a family of schools brings operational benefits

Pictured: Oakhurst Head Gemma Mitchell and Caterham Head Ceri Jones

and, most importantly, exciting opportunities for our pupils and families. Parents can be confident that their children will continue to enjoy the happy, successful and well-rounded education they chose at Oakhurst, while being fully prepared and supported for whichever senior school they go on to beyond us. Pupils applying to Caterham School will also benefit from the opportunity of early offers and a smoother transition process, without the need to sit an 11+ examination, should Caterham be their chosen destination.”

Headmaster at Caterham School, Ceri Jones, also commented: “Both schools have given their wholehearted support to the new partnership, and this relationship will enable us to build on a shared educational vision and purpose, and a culture of excellence underpinned by wellbeing and



innovation. I extend a very warm welcome to pupils, families and staff at Oakhurst Grange School to the Caterham Family.”

The Caterham Family of Schools encompasses Caterham School, led by Headmaster Mr Ceri Jones, and Caterham Prep, led by Executive Headmaster Ben Purkiss. Copthorne Prep School joined

the family of schools in 2023 and The Hawthorns School in 2024. Caterham School is also the founding school of the East Surrey Learning Partnership, a group of independent and state-maintained schools working together as equal partners to further educational opportunity for young people across the local area.

Closing the hunger-engagement gap in school meals



School meals continue to be an important priority for educators, but new market research from apetito reveals a significant gap between children's appetite for school meals and their enthusiasm for what's on the menu.

The survey of children, parents and decision-makers in the sector suggests 77% of children feel hungry at mealtimes, highlighting the importance food plays in the school day, but only a third (33%) look forward to eating the dishes. In fact, the children surveyed scored their current school meal experience a 5.5 out of 10, with 32% rating it a three or below.

These findings emphasise a clear need to rethink school mealtimes – balancing meeting children's expectations while supporting their health, wellbeing and learning.

Why nutrition alone isn't enough

Nutrition and children's enjoyment go hand in hand – nutritious meals only benefit children if they're eaten. The research indicates a growing need to close the gap between hunger and enjoyment by providing meals that nourish children and that they look forward to eating.

While it's essential that children have access to balanced,

nutritious meals, research suggests this isn't enough to engage them. When asked what makes food appealing, children most strongly resonated with words such as "tasty" and "delicious," while parents placed more emphasis on balanced nutrition.

For children, flavour, enjoyment and familiarity prove to be the deciding factors. Over a third (36%) said they are hesitant to try new foods, highlighting the importance of familiar or recognisable options on the menu, alongside choices that broaden tastes and delight more adventurous eaters.

The home-school divide

With 80% of parents saying their children enjoy mealtimes at home, the research findings suggest the answer may lie in the broader dining experience,

rather than the food itself. While mealtimes at home often feature familiar favourites, and children may be more likely to have a degree of influence over what they eat and the environment they're eating in, school mealtimes can sometimes feel functional and transactional.

Enjoyment is an essential part of successful school food provision. If children feel excited by the food being served, they are more likely to eat during meal service and develop positive relationships with food. If not, they can be more likely to disengage, which can have a knock-on impact to their health and wellbeing.

The challenge for schools and food providers is therefore not just to serve food, but to create an engaging mealtime experience that children look forward to.

A menu refresh

Reflecting its biggest menu refresh to date, apetito has launched 18 new dishes, developed with children at the forefront, ready for the brand-new school year. Shaped by the views and experiences of pupils, parents and key decision makers across the sector, the new range, created with the expertise of apetito chefs and dietitians, combines great taste with balanced nutrition, bringing more enjoyment, variety and choice to school menus.

To find out more about the new range, visit: apetito.link/new-childrens-range



Rupert Weber, General Manager of Education at apetito.

To find out more about the current state of school catering, download the full market research report at apetito.link/school-meals-research

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New learning space



A new Innovation Centre has been opened at RGS Worcester. It contains a “classroom of the future,” a learning space designed to prepare pupils for the collaborative, creative and fast-changing world beyond school.

Made possible through the generosity of former pupil Fasha Mahjoor, the Centre represents a major investment in the future of learning at the school and forms part of a wider programme of developments.

Fasha Mahjoor attended RGS Worcester as a boarder in the 1960–1970s and went on to qualify as an architect before becoming an entrepreneur in the USA. Fasha and his family and friends from his school days came together for the opening ceremony which was timed to coincide with RGS Worcester hosting a global education summit.

Pictured: Fasha Mahoor cutting the ribbon

Designed as a flexible, multi-purpose space, the Innovation Centre will support collaboration, communication, creativity and problem-solving. Featuring adaptable layouts, movable furniture, contemporary design and integrated technology, it has been created to reflect the way young people will increasingly learn, work and innovate in the future. The outcome is the result of a six-year project.

The Mahjoor Innovation Centre will serve as a flagship space for lessons, project-based learning, presentations, staff development, educational partnerships and special events, making it a versatile learning environment. The Centre is part of a wider programme of investment across the school, including the refurbishment of the Sixth Form Centre, Lecture Theatre, Perrins Hall, Eld Hall and Flagge Meadow Pavilion.



Immersive classroom

Hendon Prep School, London, has unveiled an immersive classroom which has been designed to enable pupils to explore everything from outer space to Ancient Egypt as part of a major investment in future-focused learning.

Pupils are now able to step directly into the subjects they are studying thanks to a new learning environment that transforms lessons into lived experiences through interactive technology.

The immersive classroom forms part of a £400,000 investment designed to enhance the school’s approach to learning, with early feedback from staff highlighting increased engagement, stronger attainment and greater enthusiasm for learning, with pupils retaining knowledge more effectively.

As part of the investment, Hendon Prep has also just opened a dedicated STEM “FAB Lab.” The purpose-built space, which includes a mini wind tunnel, also features 3D printers, and electronics benches.

Pictured: The immersive room

Headteacher Matthew Foley said the new facilities represent a significant step forward in bridging the gap between imagination and real-world application.

“Our immersive classroom moves learning beyond traditional teaching methods, bringing the curriculum to life in exciting and meaningful ways.

“It has already proved transformational, allowing pupils to experience subjects in a far more engaging and memorable way, alongside reading about them.

“As technology continues to shape the world around us, it is vital that schools equip children with the confidence, curiosity and skills they need for the future.”

Beyond academic use, the space also supports wellbeing and pastoral provision, offering a calm, adaptable environment for reflection, small-group work and focused support.

Senior School opening

St Hugh’s School, Oxfordshire, has marked the official opening of The Hayes Centre, its new Senior School Hub, with a special launch event.

The Hayes Centre represents the expansion of St Hugh’s into senior education. The new Senior School welcomed its first Year 9 cohort this month (September).

The opening event brought together members of the St Hugh’s community, including current and prospective families, governors and key staff. Guests enjoyed welcome drinks and canapés, followed by addresses

from Headmaster, David Griffiths, Assistant Head of Seniors, Sally Ewins, and Samuel and Tilly, members of the pioneer year group.

Attendees were then invited to take a guided tour of The Hayes Centre.

The building was formally opened by Charlie Maynard MP, CEO of the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), Emilie Darwin, and Headmaster of St Hugh’s, David Griffiths.

Speaking at the event, David Griffiths said: “The Hayes Centre represents a bold and exciting



step forward for St Hugh’s. We are proud to be extending our provision into senior education. We look forward to welcoming

our first Year 9 pupils in September and to celebrating this important moment with our community.”

Pictured: Charlie Maynard and Emilie Darwin at the opening of The Hayes Centre



How modular construction is supporting specialist education at St Philip's School

Creating high-quality learning environments is about more than providing additional space. For specialist schools, buildings must be designed around the unique needs of students, staff and modern teaching methods, while minimising disruption to day-to-day learning.

At St Philip's School in Chessington, modular construction provided the ideal solution, delivering a purpose-built vocational teaching facility that supports students in developing valuable practical skills within a modern, inspiring environment.

Delivering facilities designed around students

St Philip's School is a specialist school supporting students with a range of additional learning needs. As demand for vocational education continued to grow, the school recognised the need to invest in facilities that would better prepare students for further education and future employment.

Working closely with staff and students, the school identified the subjects that would provide the greatest benefit before designing a new vocational centre tailored to those requirements.

The completed building provides seven purpose-designed teaching spaces, including:

- Construction workshop
- Animal care facilities
- Food technology classroom
- Two science laboratories
- Drama studio
- Communication space

Each area has been designed to support practical learning, helping students develop the skills and

confidence needed as they progress to college and beyond.

Why modular construction?

Having previously completed a successful modular project, St Philip's School understood the advantages of offsite construction.

With the new building required within a live school environment and delivered to a demanding programme, modular construction provided greater certainty around both quality and delivery.

Manufacturing the building off site while site preparations progressed in parallel helped reduce the overall programme, with all 22 modules delivered and installed during the school holidays to minimise disruption to staff and students.

This approach allowed construction activities to be carefully managed around the school calendar while maintaining a safe learning environment throughout the project.

Working collaboratively throughout delivery

Constructing a new building at the heart of a busy specialist school required close collaboration between the school and project team.

Maintaining clear communication throughout the programme was essential, particularly as elements of the project continued during term time.



Reflecting on the project, Principal Ben Walsh highlighted the importance of working with a team that understood the challenges of delivering construction projects within a live education environment.

"The site is a complicated one. It's right in the heart of the school. We were very reliant on a team that could embrace the challenges, communicate well with us and respond to the day-to-day challenges that occur in a school. As a team, we were able to navigate any issues and complete the project."

Supporting the future of specialist education

As schools continue to modernise their estates, modular construction is playing an increasingly important role in delivering high-quality learning environments with greater programme certainty and reduced disruption.

For specialist education settings, where continuity of learning is essential, offsite construction offers a practical solution that allows facilities to be delivered safely, efficiently and around the needs of students.

The new vocational centre at St Philip's School demonstrates how permanent modular construction can create flexible, future-ready learning environments that support both educational outcomes and long-term estate strategies.



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Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026: latest changes and their impact on independent schools

The updated Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) statutory guidance came into force on 1 September 2026. In light of that legal expert, Amara Ahmad, provides some advice on what independent schools need to think about now when facing emerging safeguarding challenges.



Amara Ahmad

The Department for Education has published Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, with the updated statutory guidance taking effect from 1 September 2026. The latest edition signals where schools should be focusing their safeguarding efforts over the coming years.

While many of the changes introduced by KCSIE 2026 appear procedural, they reflect a broader cultural shift in safeguarding expectations. Artificial Intelligence (AI) harms, harmful sexual behaviour and volunteer vetting are all in the spotlight.

The latest version of the statutory safeguarding guidance places a stronger emphasis on spotting concerns early, recognising emerging online risks and understanding harmful sexual behaviour before it escalates.

While much of KCSIE 2026 reflects existing expectations, there are several developments that governors, proprietors and senior leaders should be reviewing in the new academic year.

AI safeguarding is no longer an issue for the future

For the first time, KCSIE expressly addresses AI-generated sexual imagery, including deepfakes and so-called “deep nudes.”

The message from the Department for Education is clear: safeguarding policies can no longer focus solely on traditional online harms. Schools should be considering whether their behaviour, anti-bullying and child-on-child abuse policies adequately address AI-enabled abuse and exploitation.

A stronger focus on harmful sexual behaviour

Part Five of the guidance has been significantly revised and now begins with a dedicated section on harmful sexual behaviour.

The emphasis is no longer simply on responding to incidents. Schools are expected to identify concerning behavioural patterns at an earlier stage and consider safeguarding risks alongside disciplinary issues.

For independent schools, particularly those with boarding provision and extensive co-curricular activities, this may require closer collaboration between the boarding houses, pastoral staff, behaviour leads and safeguarding teams.

Volunteer arrangements may require immediate attention

One of the most practical implications for many independent schools will be changes to the definition of “regulated activity” following the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

Sports volunteers, CCF instructors, Duke of Edinburgh volunteers, alumni mentors and others who regularly supervise or instruct children may now fall within the scope of regulated activity, potentially requiring enhanced DBS checks with children’s barred list information, so schools that rely heavily on volunteers may wish to review these arrangements.

What should schools do now?

Although KCSIE 2026 does not fundamentally rewrite schools’ safeguarding responsibilities, it does signal a clear expectation that schools will be alert to emerging risks, identify concerns earlier and take a more preventative approach to safeguarding.

With the new academic year now upon us, independent schools should review whether their safeguarding arrangements remain fit for purpose.

In particular, schools may wish to consider the following:

- Review safeguarding policies with an AI focus. Schools should consider whether behaviour, online safety, anti-bullying and child-on-child abuse policies adequately address AI-generated harms, including deepfakes and manipulated imagery.
 - Refresh safeguarding training. Staff training should go beyond reporting routes and reinforce staff members’ ability to identify emerging safeguarding concerns, recognise harmful patterns of behaviour and understand the risks posed by new technologies.
 - Assess the impact of the expanded regulated activity provisions. Schools should review which roles may now fall within the revised definition of regulated activity and determine whether additional DBS checks will be required.
 - Review visitor and third-party arrangements. Where schools regularly host external speakers, contractors, clubs or activity providers, they should ensure safeguarding expectations are clearly documented, appropriate checks are undertaken and supervision arrangements are proportionate.
 - Ensure governors and proprietors are updated on the changes. Governing bodies should understand the increased emphasis on
- harmful sexual behaviour, emerging online risks and early intervention, and be able to demonstrate effective safeguarding oversight.
- Check information-sharing and record-keeping processes. Schools should ensure safeguarding records enable patterns of concern to be identified and that staff understand when information should be shared internally and with external agencies.

The overall direction of travel is clear. KCSIE 2026 places less emphasis on reacting to safeguarding incidents after they occur and greater emphasis on recognising warning signs and understanding emerging risks at an earlier stage.

For independent schools, the biggest challenge is unlikely to be the policy changes themselves. Rather, it will be applying those expectations consistently across often complex operating environments, including boarding provision, extensive co-curricular activities and large volunteer networks.

Ultimately, the schools best prepared for the emerging challenges will be those that view KCSIE 2026 not as a compliance exercise, but as an opportunity to strengthen safeguarding culture across the whole school community.

Amara Ahmad is a Legal Director in the administrative and public law disputes team at Birketts LLP. She specialises in education and community care law. Visit: www.birketts.co.uk/people/amara-ahmad



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“Looms and Tapestries”

With the Department of Education's 2025 curriculum and assessment review proposing a “knowledge-rich” curriculum, Religious Studies and Civics Tutor at Priory School of Our Lady of Walsingham, Isle of Wight, Jeremy Strickley, considers how an interconnected curriculum model can be achieved without massive structural change.



Jeremy Strickley

In November 2025, the Department for Education published its Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report. Entitled ‘Building a world-class curriculum for all’ and chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE, the report makes a number of recommendations. These include implementing an overall model of curriculum that is “[...] aspirational, engaging and demanding...”, takes a “[...] knowledge-rich approach...” and is fully inclusive (p180).

It is hard to deny the value of these qualities to a coherent and rigorous body of learning. Renewing today’s programmes of study to create a “[...] refreshed national curriculum...” (p46) is a laudable ambition. However, there is perhaps an irony in how these traits should arise in a system where, in secondary schools at least, teaching is largely compartmentalised, encouraging pupils to see subjects as highly distinct, if not sealed-off arrangements of knowledge and skills.

The tradition of discrete subjects is a largely practical one. Most disciplines have become so content heavy that using expert tutors to deliver discrete courses makes good sense. This approach also tends to lessen the cognitive load for pupils. It was not always so. Until the 1900s, many schools, often linked to the church and charitable in nature, referred to a limited curriculum, where a handful of tutors ran the school day in toto. All this changed with the 1944 Education Act, which restructured compulsory education, and the 1988 Education Reform Act, which set out the National Curriculum.

Since then, more interconnected curricular models have been developed. The Common Ground Collaborative (CGC), for example, aims to resolve some of the cultural and structural challenges inherent to national-level curricular building. Devised by a team of educators in the international sector, its ‘Portrait

of a Learner’ presents an endpoint that acts as the vector for a network of learning ecosystems, where matters of scope and sequence are finely contoured. However, although the CGC has been adopted by a number of schools globally, the statutory status of the National Curriculum makes the introduction of alternative models, even via some form of hybrid framing, far less likely.

Might assessment models reduce siloing? The Level 3 Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and Level 2 Higher Project Qualification (HPQ) allow pupils to research a topic of their choosing and typically involve drawing on ideas and materials from more than one subject. The International Baccalaureate (IB) has a similar cross-curricular component in the form of the Extended Essay (EE). However, the IB notwithstanding, such opportunities are usually optional and not intended to address wider curricular framing.

So, what is to be done? First, it may not be reasonable to reconfigure the National Curriculum, refreshed or otherwise, as a more holistic rendering. Put another way, the separated model, as it might termed, may simply be the most readily obtainable version. The cost of bringing about a more interactive iteration, for instance, would entail retraining tutors, adjusting teaching courses and possibly altering exam formats too, making it cost prohibitive. Second, as mentioned above, the separated model may be less intellectually stressful for pupils. Chunked learning is more digestible and allows for a “knowledge-rich” curriculum to develop without overtaxing pupils.

That being said, modest conceptual changes, which aim to soften subject boundaries and encourage awareness of the logical links between disciplines, may be possible by utilising the learning space that exists within the co-curriculum.

In so doing, subject curricula and their allotted teaching time would remain largely undisturbed. Pastoral leads could also head-up the implementation process, ensuring a consistent approach.

If there is time in the school day to promote a more interconnected curricular model, how might it be achieved? To begin answering this question, a short metaphor involving looms and tapestries may be helpful. Like most fabrics, the threads of a tapestry are distinct strands, arranged so as to form a single piece of material. In addition, the use of different coloured threads allows the tapestry to depict specific details, such as patterns or figures. A loom structures these threads in strict vertical (warp) and horizontal (weft) lines. The warp threads act as the foundation to the tapestry, while the weft threads are woven over and under the warp threads to create the aforesaid details. Curricular subjects may be understood as weft threads in a tapestry, while the warp threads are units of time (e.g. year groups). The weft threads are separate and distinct, like subject areas, yet steadily build towards a unified whole.

If we extend this metaphor, the weaver becomes the tutor, who guides the weft threads to create a finished tapestry of learning. However, unlike the weaver (or the tutor of yesteryear) who perceives the complete scene, the present-day tutor sees only a handful of threads being woven. This is a limitation, but not without a partial solution at least. Co-curriculum times give form tutors the chance to review their pupils’ academic progress. This is a routine practice in many schools and one which offers form tutors a fuller picture of their pupils’ progress.

In terms of actual steps, the following suggestions may together offer a conversation starter. Firstly, senior pupils can help to run lessons

with their younger peers to support learning, thus reinforcing topic familiarity (e.g. a GCSE Geography cohort teaching a guest lesson on river systems to a Year 7 Geography class) and discipline awareness (e.g. a GCSE History cohort teaching a guest lesson on hyperinflation to a Year 8 Maths class) across time. These sorts of learning exchanges (which have still greater purchase in schools containing both primary and secondary pupils) can give older pupils the chance to role model good learning, while also opening up intra-school links between year groups.

Next, open questioning can be adopted as a standard teaching tool, enabling subject tutors to guide their pupils to make intentional connections, perhaps beginning with the linkage that exists within broader faculties, such as the Sciences and Humanities, before reaching out to less intuitively associated subjects.

Finally, a visual aid in the classroom might go some way to alerting pupils’ learning perceptions. This could be arranged like a chessboard, with subjects running along the ranks and year groups running along the files. Here, for example, there is the option of pupils taking turns to highlight intra- and inter-subject commonalities as they encounter them. As with open questioning, this could become part of the didactic furniture.

Implementing a school-wide policy that uses such techniques would require some autonomy on the part of tutors, as well as institutional support. However, with enough time for prototyping, scaling up and bedding in, these measures could begin to establish a teaching culture, which manoeuvres subject areas towards greater connectivity. In turn, this could cascade into a broader form of curricular intentionality, which catalyses holistic learning and thins the silos.

1 Department for Education (2025). Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report. [online] GOV.UK.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-final-report> [Accessed 23 June 2026].

2 Ibid.

3 <https://www.commongroundcollaborative.org/> [Accessed 23 June 2026].



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Census: the independent sector in numbers

The annual census of schools in membership of the constituent associations of the Independent Schools Council has been published. The figures below and in the infographic provide a snapshot of key results from the survey which was carried out January 2026 and completed by all UK member schools.

For the full picture visit: www.isc.co.uk/research/annual-census

Pupil numbers

- While there has been a net increase in the number of member schools, there are now 526,611 pupils at 1,455 ISC member schools – a decrease of 19,029 (3.5%) compared with 2025. The report states that on a like-for-like basis pupil numbers have fallen 3.8%.
- The census found that reductions are evident across most year groups, typically in the range of 3% and 6% but that the largest declines have been recorded in key intake years like Reception, Year 7 and Year 12.
- The number of new pupils has also fallen with 96,828 pupils joining ISC schools in 2025/26, a decrease of 5.6% from the previous year.
- And boarding numbers have also declined more sharply than overall pupil numbers with 57,836 boarders on Census Day, representing 11.0% of all pupils and a decrease of 8.2% compared with 2025.

School size

- Most ISC schools are relatively small with a mean size of 362 pupils and a median of 246. However, a small number of larger schools increases the overall average. The largest concentration of schools falls between 100 and 200 pupils, and over half of schools have fewer than 250 pupils. The number of schools declines steadily as size increases, with relatively few schools (6.6%) enrolling more than 1,000 pupils.

SEND Provision

- A total of 123,823 pupils at ISC schools (23.5%) receive support

for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including 15,356 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This represents a substantial increase compared with the last year, driven in part by growth in the number of specialist SEND schools within ISC membership.

Fees and bursaries

- Following the introduction of VAT on independent school fees from January 2025, schools have adopted a range of approaches to fee setting.
- Across schools completing the Census in both years*, average fees increased by 4.4% between January 2025 and January 2026 (excluding VAT).
- Fee assistance supports 183,705 pupils (34.9% of all pupils), with a total value of £2.1 billion.
- Means tested bursaries remain the main form of targeted support, with over half of recipients receiving more than 50% fee remission and a significant proportion receiving full fee remission. In total, 8,934 pupils pay no fees through bursaries, scholarships or a combination of school support.

Teaching staff

- A total of 58,949 full-time equivalent teachers are employed at ISC schools.
- The pupil-teacher ratio at ISC schools is 8.5:1. This compares with an average of 18.0:1 across all state-funded schools in 2024–25 according to the DfE school workforce data.
- Full-time teaching staff coming into ISC schools included 1,946 from independent schools, 1,725 from state schools and 257

from industry. Of those leaving the equivalent figures are 1,442 going to independent schools, 895 to state-funded schools and 312 to industry.

- This year, 365 teachers from outside the UK came to teach in ISC schools.

Partnerships

- ISC schools reported 9,985 partnership activities with state funded schools in 2025, an increase from 9,248 last year.
- In addition to partnerships, 93.7% of ISC schools reported fundraising for charities, and a substantial number provide volunteering opportunities for pupils and staff.

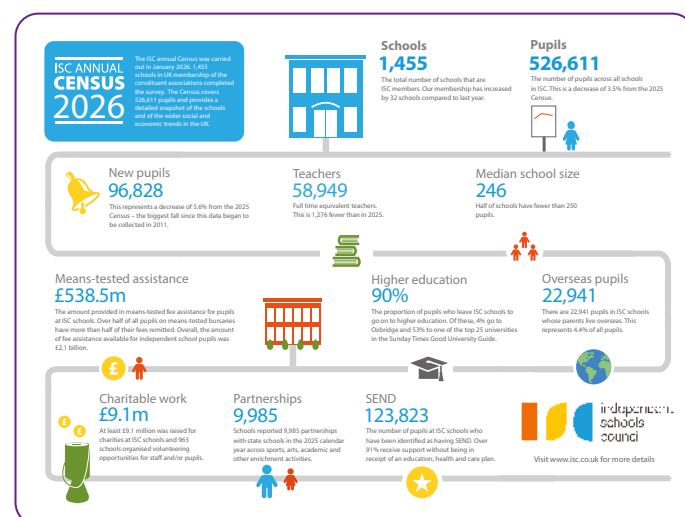
Mark Taylor, Chairman, Independent Schools Council said: “This year’s Census records a period of significant change.

“These figures reflect a sector operating in a markedly different environment from that of recent years. Schools continue to adapt to a range of financial, demographic and policy pressures, including the ongoing effects of the introduction of VAT on school fees.

“As ever, the Census tells a more nuanced story than headline figures alone can convey. Behind every percentage point are families making difficult decisions and schools working hard to maintain the breadth and quality of education for which they are known.

“The findings presented in this report are not simply a collection of statistics. They tell the story of schools, governors, teachers, support staff and families navigating a period of considerable uncertainty with determination, imagination and resilience. They also remind us that independent schools are not static institutions. They have always evolved in response to the needs of the pupils they serve, and they will continue to do so.

“As we look ahead, there will undoubtedly be further challenges. But there will also be further opportunities to broaden access, strengthen partnerships and develop innovative approaches to teaching, learning and the development of young people. This is what independent schools do; this is the value that they bring to society.”



*As fees in specialist SEND schools are typically determined by the specific needs of each pupil, often involving varying levels of specialist staffing and support, and are not usually set at a standard rate and frequently funded by local authorities through Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, specialist SEND schools were not asked to provide fee data for this Census.

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The children working hardest not to be seen

Clinical Psychologist, Dr Jenna Vyas-Lee, offers some advice around supporting pupils who may be neurodivergent especially those who could be masking.

September starts, everybody is full of renewed vigour. "This is the year I'm going to be so on top of things," thinks the teacher. "This is the year we do that extra maths practice," thinks the parent. Everyone arrives back at school with the best of intentions.

Fast forward four weeks, and a parent calls you to describe the meltdowns happening every evening at home; the tears, the shutdown, the sheer exhaustion of it. But you, the teacher, are confused. This child is fine in class. They're coping. They're one of the easy ones.

That gap is where good intentions run out of road. Because until the signs of neurodivergence are better understood, neither teachers nor parents can fully step into the roles they arrived in September so ready to play.

Seeing those signs, however, can be difficult. Because for some

neurodivergent children, being invisible can feel safer than being seen.

So how can you, as a teacher, identify which children are in most need of extra support when they are not asking for it, and when your classroom is full of new faces at the start of term? How can you reach a child who feels unable to show you exactly who they are?

From masking emotions to melting-down

Think back to the gap I mentioned earlier. The children who seem so calm and content in class, but seem to be melting-down at home.

This is masking. It's the exhausting, invisible performance of neurotypicality that many autistic and ADHD children sustain throughout the school day. It draws on every resource they have until they reach the place that they feel safe.

As a teacher, you likely know something of what it costs to perform all day. You know what it is to stand in front of a room, hold it together, be present and responsive and engaged all while running on empty. You do it because you're a professional, because the children need you, and because that's what the job is.

Now imagine doing a version of that; not for an hour or a lesson, but for every social interaction, every classroom moment, every lunchtime and corridor and lunch queue. All without any of the authority or agency that makes it manageable. Without knowing why it's so hard, or how to make it stop.

Neurodivergent children didn't choose this. They don't know why it's so hard, or that it can stop. By the time they reach the front door at the end of the school day, they have nothing left.

It is an enormous amount to hold, and it takes immense energy to mask true feelings. And that's precisely why it's the children most likely to go unnoticed in September are the ones who most need to be seen.

The signs you can spot

The child who seems to have settled can be the child who has decided their safest option is to go unnoticed. They sit still. They do what is asked of them. They don't raise their hand, because raising your hand draws attention, and attention feels dangerous.

This is not a child who is fine. This is a child who is very good at appearing fine.

What these children need is not a specialist programme. First and foremost, they need a teacher to see them. So as a teacher, what can you do?

Attachment research tells us that children don't regulate their emotions alone. They do it through relationships; through the felt experience of being seen and held steady by someone who isn't going



Dr Jenna Vyas-Lee

anywhere. As teachers, there are several things you can do to make sure all of your pupils feel seen and supported.

Consider a named adult who can check in briefly but consistently through the first fortnight. Not to assess or report, but simply to be present. This alone can shift a child's entire experience of school – not because anything dramatic has been done, but because they felt that someone was paying attention.

Trust your instincts before the evidence arrives. A child who is unusually compliant, strangely brittle, who hasn't really connected with anyone by half-term might set off a feeling that something isn't right. That feeling is clinical data. You don't need a crisis, a diagnosis or a parent to raise the concern first. You need to start a conversation: with the pupil, with their family, with your SENDCo.

And when you do, ask rather than tell. What does a hard day feel like for you? Where do you get stuck? What would help? Then listen; not to fix, but to understand. The children who find September hardest often have the most precise sense of what they need.

Independent schools have something most schools don't: the conditions that make genuine noticing possible. Smaller classes. Pastoral relationships built over years. Parents who are in close contact. September is the moment to turn this infrastructure into tools that enable to give carefully directed attention to the right children. Those are the children who need you most. They just won't show you.

Dr Jenna Vyas-Lee is Clinical Psychologist and Clinic Director at Kove Minds, a specialist practice supporting neurodivergent children, young people, their families and their school teams. Kove Minds offers assessments, therapy and school consultation. www.koveminds.com



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The bright side of education

Downe House, Berkshire, has held its annual academic conference, welcoming 150 school leaders and teachers from across the country.

With 'The Bright Side of Education' as its theme, speakers from education, business and the arts, saw a day focused on all that schools do well to deliver opportunity, build character and prepare young people for a rapidly changing workplace.

The conference featured a keynote address from actor, writer, comedian and former Downe House pupil, Miranda Hart. In her speech, Hart urged educators to embrace play, creativity and character development as essential ingredients for success and wellbeing. Reflecting on her own school experience, Hart credited the opportunities she was given to experiment, explore and participate beyond the classroom as the foundation of her future success, saying: "School, and indeed life, is about expressing, exploring and experimenting, not establishing. Play doesn't have standards. It is process-oriented, not goal-oriented, and removes burden and expectation."

Drawing on her personal journey, Hart shared how she was not an academic high achiever and experienced numerous setbacks before finding success in her career. She encouraged young people not to define themselves by grades alone, arguing that character is ultimately more important than achievement.

She also highlighted the importance of playfulness for creativity, resilience and mental health, encouraging teachers to model authenticity and joy in their own professional lives.

The conference also featured a panel discussion examining some of the most pressing issues facing education today, including changing parental expectations, employability, wellbeing and the evolving relationship between education and future success. Joining the panel were Headmistress of Downe House, Emma McKendrick; Head Master of Harrow School, Middlesex, Alastair Land; and Founder and CEO of advertising/marketing agency, The River Group, Nicola Murphy.

Discussing whether the traditional social contract linking education, hard work and career success remains intact, Alastair Land argued that while expectations may be changing, the value of education remains undiminished:

"Beyond qualifications, we seek to give young people the attitudes, dispositions and strength of character that will enable them to face whatever the future brings," he said. "That's the best gift we can possibly give them."

Nicola Murphy reinforced the continued importance of education

in developing confidence, resilience and application, qualities she values highly when recruiting future employees.

Emma McKendrick reflected on how conversations with families have evolved in recent years, commenting:

"Alongside questions about university destinations, parents are increasingly asking about employability, apprenticeship pathways, wellbeing and happiness. Families want to know that their children will be prepared not only for academic success, but for fulfilling and meaningful lives."

Other conference sessions focused on the value of Performing Arts in giving young people skills for life; the importance of political education in schools; ensuring that schools' cultures maximise



children's happiness; and equipping students with leadership skills.

The conference highlighted a growing consensus among educators that while academic achievement remains important, schools must also nurture creativity, adaptability, confidence and character if young people are to thrive in an uncertain future.



Pictured: Keynote speaker Miranda Hart (top) and Panel (l to r): Alastair Land, Nicola Murphy and Emma McKendrick

Welcoming girls for its 475th year

Bedford School has announced that it will become fully co-educational from September 2027, welcoming girls into every year group across both its Prep and Upper Schools for the first time in its nearly 475-year history. Girls will be able to join as day pupils, flexi boarders, weekly boarders and full boarders.

The move is set to be accompanied by investment in the school, including a dedicated girls' boarding house, a Sixth Form Centre and wider improvements to facilities across the campus.

School leaders have emphasised that the announcement marks the beginning of an ongoing period of engagement with parents, pupils, staff and alumni. Information events are taking place throughout September and feedback from the school community will help shape detailed implementation plans ahead of September 2027.

Headmaster, Michael Sloan, said: "As Bedford School approaches its 475th anniversary, we have the opportunity not simply to mark our history, but to shape its next chapter.

"This decision is being taken from a position of confidence and with a firm understanding of what makes Bedford distinctive. Much will evolve in the years ahead, but the qualities and values that lie at the heart of the school will remain unchanged."

Girls will participate fully in every aspect of school life, from academic study and leadership opportunities to sport, music, art, drama, societies, entrepreneurship and service. Upper School pupils will continue to belong to single-sex day and boarding houses,

providing dedicated spaces in which to relax, socialise and seek support.

Alongside the move to co-education, Bedford is also planning to introduce a new shape to the school week from September 2027. Core academic lessons will take place from Monday to Friday, while Saturdays will continue to feature sporting fixtures, performances, rehearsals, activities for boarders and a broader programme of optional enrichment, extension and support opportunities.

26/27 Minibus School Calendar: Checking off all that needs doing

The summer is well and truly over, and now we are looking towards autumn and winter's trips, matches and excursions. Now is the time to ensure that your vehicles are ready for the rigours ahead, particularly if they have sat unused this summer, and get all your vehicle maintenance and driver checks planned for the year.

Services and MOTs

A quick check of your MOT and service dates, and an update of your rolling six-month maintenance plan taking you through to next spring will ensure that nothing is missed and none of these important checks expire.

You should not rely on your garage or suppliers to remind you of these dates.

Minibuses need regular servicing and an annual MOT regardless of mileage. Vehicles with nine or more passengers require MOTs from their year of registration, unlike cars (eight passengers or less), that don't need to be tested until they are three years old and then annually thereafter.

If you operate on a full or restricted PSV licence you will need a Class 6 MOT.

Minibus Safety Inspections

Regardless of any drop in mileage since June or July, the DVSA recommends safety inspections are completed every ten weeks for vehicles under 12 years old, and every six weeks for vehicles over 12 years. The DVSA specifically states that a vehicle used very rarely should have a safety inspection before it is used, to ensure the brakes are functioning correctly.

Current DVSA guidance states that braking performance should be assessed with every inspection, so please ensure this is being completed.

A process for daily and weekly walkaround checks

Daily walkaround checks are the first line of defence against problems on the road. Drivers are personally responsible for the condition of the vehicle they are

driving, so completing a thorough walkaround check before setting off can help identify potential safety issues and reduce the risk of fines or points on their licence.

Any defects or issues should be immediately reported and rectified (if necessary) before the vehicle is used.

We recommend that as well as daily driver checks a more in-depth weekly check is completed that includes checking tyre pressures and getting under the bonnet to check oil and screen wash levels.

It is important to keep records of all checks and maintenance for up to 15 months and have processes in place to ensure daily and weekly walkarounds are being completed.

Rivvale Minibus has a free app to help you complete daily and weekly walkaround checks with 12 or 40-point checks and videos to help you. Go to myminibusmanager.com to set up your free account and invite drivers to join.

Battery condition

A minibus that has been sitting unused for several weeks may have a weak or flat battery. Check that the vehicle starts reliably and that there are no battery/charging warning lights appearing on the dashboard.

Age of minibus tyres

It is illegal for minibuses (9-16 passenger seats) to be using tyres over ten years old on the front axle, or on single rear wheel axles. The manufacturer's date code needs to be legible/visible on your tyres. It is four numbers in a box showing the week and year your tyre was manufactured (see image – this tyre was made in 07 July 2020)

Your minibus will fail its MOT if it has tyres over ten years old or the manufacturing date code is not legible, and you will be issued an immediate prohibition notice.

Tyre condition, pressure and tread

The importance of a visual check of the overall condition of your tyres is not to be underestimated. A bulge in a tyre sidewall indicates that the internal steel or fabric cords have broken, which could cause a sudden blowout. You can also see if there is any obvious wear and tear such as exposed cords.

Tyres are the number one prohibition for minibuses in the UK. Tyre treads must be a minimum of 1.6mm for cars (8 passenger seats or less) and light vans, and 1mm for passenger-carrying vehicles.

We recommend that at 3mm, you start the process of replacing the tyre, and do not wait until you are at the legal limits.

It is also important to check your tyres are correctly inflated, as it will improve your safety, increase fuel efficiency, and extend the lifespan of your tyres.



Check for Rodent Damage

Rats and mice can often make nests in minibus engines and cause damage by chewing cables and casings. Foxes are also known to chew minibus wiring.

Driver training, licences and insurance

We recommend that you check your drivers' licences annually, if not termly, to ensure they have not incurred any penalty points that may affect their driving. If you have new drivers, this is especially important.

Drivers are your biggest safety risk where minibuses are concerned. It is advisable to plan and provide regular assessments and driver training, and ask about any changes in health conditions or medication that may affect their driving.

New drivers may need to be added to your insurance policies. Even if there are no changes, it is worth checking insurance policies to ensure all your drivers are correctly covered for the vehicles they're driving.

Breakdown and emergency information

Having breakdown and emergency information in your minibuses will be invaluable in an emergency. Numbers to call and processes to follow may bring some comfort and confidence for your drivers at a time of potential high stress.

Checking that you have this in any new vehicles delivered over the summer holiday is especially important.

Displaying a valid Section 19 Permit

If you do not have a PSV Operator's Licence and are operating minibuses for reasons "beyond the bounds of mere social kindness," you need a Section 19 Permit. A valid permit needs to be displayed in every minibus.

Help with minibus management

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How to approach unpaid fees

The introduction of VAT on school fees alongside rapid cost of living increases has seen many families in the independent school sector face unprecedented financial struggles. With many schools facing real concerns over unpaid fees and debt management, Head of Debt Recovery at legal firm Schofield Sweeney, Dale Fawcett, offers some advice on the steps schools can take to protect cash flow, while also preserving important parent and student relationships in this challenging financial era.



Dale Fawcett

It's no secret that the introduction of VAT on school fees has resulted in many families being unable to meet their increased financial demands. With some 30,000 students already having been withdrawn from the sector due to higher prices, many other families have been left struggling to meet their existing payment commitments.

Unsurprisingly, we have seen a significant increase in the number of independent schools seeking assistance with the recovery of late or unpaid school fees. But there are steps organisations can put in place to protect themselves before it gets to this stage. Effective debt

management is not simply about recovering debt once it has arisen, but putting processes in place to prevent arrears from occurring and escalating in the first place.

The most crucial action schools can take to protect themselves is active account management. Finance teams must monitor their fee accounts regularly to identify those that are overdue or in arrears. Once this has been established, clear and direct communication with parents or carers is essential. It's important to establish why fees haven't been paid and get a clear understanding of the circumstances that surround missed payments.

We find that having these conversations early makes a huge difference to both levels of debt and relationships with parents. It is easy to assume that late or non-payment of fees means a family is struggling to pay, but often there are other factors at play that mean payments have been missed even when affordability is not an issue. In fact, we find that parents with late fees typically fall into one of two categories. Those that genuinely can't afford to pay due to financial difficulties, and those that are unwilling to pay, often due to financial disagreements during a divorce or separation.

This is why communication is so important. It helps schools to understand why fees have not been paid so that they can pre-empt further possible missed or late payments and take appropriate action before the level of debt increases.

Schools should try to build a clear picture of the circumstances of those families that are missing payments. Do they own their own business, and if so, is it likely to be struggling? Or has one of the parents perhaps been made redundant? Have there been any other significant life changes such as illness or divorce that may be affecting their ability to meet financial commitments?

In terms of debt recovery, it's also important to find out if parents are themselves awaiting payment of funds that will clear their outstanding balance. It may be that they are waiting for a business or property sale to complete or are awaiting funds from another source.

If not, and once circumstances are fully understood, schools will need to work with parents to put a payment framework in place to repay outstanding fees and minimise any future late payments. It's important to be realistic about what a family can afford. Offering flexible payment arrangements or structured payment plans can be a very effective solution, but only if the agreed repayments are achievable. Setting unrealistic terms simply risks further missed payments and allows the debt to continue escalating.

If informal discussions and payment plans aren't working, schools shouldn't hesitate to seek professional advice. Specialist debt recovery advisers can help assess a family's financial circumstances in more depth, determine the likelihood of recovering outstanding fees and identify the most proportionate next steps to take. They will be able to advise on the most suitable process to follow and support schools with communications to parents, all while remaining empathetic and maintaining positive relationships. The aim is to resolve matters amicably wherever possible, with formal recovery action reserved for cases where communication has broken down or there is little prospect of voluntary payment.

Schools are facing rising operational costs at the same time as many are experiencing pressure on fee income as pupil numbers reduce. Effective debt management is therefore essential if the financial sustainability of the school is to be protected in the long term. Taking a proactive but empathetic approach can help schools support families through challenging circumstances, give pupils greater continuity in their education and, at the same time, protect the income they rely on to continue delivering it.

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When the energy bill arrives, who answers the phone?

Energy is now one of the least predictable lines in an independent school's budget. Network and policy charges dominate bills few were designed to interrogate, and costs once in the background now draw scrutiny from finance committees and governors.

Boarding houses run around the clock, kitchens and pools follow their own rhythms, and term time creates consumption patterns that standard profiling misreads. Add charitable governance that demands full visibility before anything is signed, and the result is a problem an annual quote was never built to solve. Better Connected exists for schools that want their energy governed as a managed asset, not purchased and set aside.

Founded in 2009, Better Connected is an advisory led energy and carbon consultancy built on a simple principle: clarity, not noise. Its role begins where most firms withdraw: at the signing of a contract. Every school works with a named portfolio manager who understands the estate, tracks the market and remains accountable for the full life of the agreement, so the Bursar's office is not left chasing suppliers between

renewals. 90% of clients stay year after year. It is an ADR-registered third-party intermediary and a member of the Retail Energy Code Voluntary Code of Practice. The relationship is transparent by design and honest by default, including how the consultancy is paid: an all-inclusive advisory retainer, built into the unit rate and disclosed in writing. The school retains an adviser, not someone who vanishes once the contract begins.

The framework in practice: Blundell's School

The approach proved its value at Blundell's boarding school in Devon. Rather than treat the estate as one blanket renewal, Better Connected assessed 29 gas supplies and 8 electricity supplies individually, comparing each across ten suppliers and three term lengths.

Blundell's proceeded on a 24-month term, securing:

£80,470 ON GAS

with Crown Gas and Power

£60,922 ON ELECTRICITY

with Ecotricity

A combined **£141,392** in savings over the term against the previous cost base.

The scale of any saving depends on where an estate starts. There, the tender was the beginning, not the end. Every bill since has been validated against contract, metering data and network charges, and the school receives daily usage data from Better Connected, including load profiles, so anomalies are caught as they happen, not in retrospect.



Intelligence with a structure behind it

That discipline runs on a four-stage market intelligence framework.

1. THE ANCHOR REPORT

A fixed reference point showing where a school's contracts sit against the market today.

2. THE MARKET LOG

Tracks wholesale movements, policy shifts and supplier behaviour continuously.

3. THE INSIGHT BUILDER

Interprets those movements against the school's consumption profile, contract terms and renewal window.

4. THE CLIENT OUTPUT

Sets out a clear commercial decision, whether to fix, wait, restructure or challenge, with the reasoning shown.

Governors see the analysis, not only the conclusion.



ENERGY STRATEGY MANAGED BY
Better Connected

For Heads and Bursars, that is the distinction Better Connected offers, not a transaction, but a standing source of strategic intelligence. Start with an audit of your school's current position. For more on how Better Connected can bring the same clarity to your school's energy contracts, call 0161 710 2136 or visit betterconnected.biz.

Inspiring a new crop of farmers

Longridge Towers School, Northumberland, is introducing a new agriculture BTEC qualification as part of its Sixth Form curriculum. Governor at the school and local farmer, David Armstrong, outlines what it's all about and how its aim is to raise awareness of agriculture in young people and the possibilities that exist for careers in the farming world.

There is much to be concerned about in the world of farming at present and it goes beyond even the many issues that Jeremy Clarkson is raising on Amazon Prime.

At its heart across Scotland and England is a concern about the future and our next generation of farmers. In short, where are they coming from? We hear regularly that youngsters are not interested in agriculture, that they no longer wish to follow parents or grandparents into farming, something the UK Government's imposition of inheritance tax on family farms has only exacerbated.

That is why we at Longridge Towers School are launching a new BTEC course, in a bid to help more children understand the many and varied careers that now transcend the farming world, and provide them with the skills and confidence to move into a career in agriculture.

The independent school has long had a close relationship with the farming world, the estate having first been created by a farming family and the school developed by local farmers following its closure in the early 1980s as a convent school. Many current and past pupils, staff and governors are from farming families, but the number is reducing.

The Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) provide practical, work-related qualifications which focus on hands-on learning for children aged 16 years and above.

BTECs are now common across engineering, IT and health as well as agriculture and business, and have become popular alternatives to GCSEs and A Levels for allowing direct entry to university and employment.

We are fortunate at Longridge to be close to the border with Scotland in that the north of England and south of Scotland is rich in farms and agricultural careers, but it also means the worries farmers hold about the future are a major talking point here.

It also means that we have a plethora of farmers queuing up to help us teach and enthuse pupils and the new BTEC course will have a wide variety of businesses involved providing hands-on study for our youngsters.

David Baird of Lurdenlaw is a local farmer and a parent, and he is one of several local farmers working with us to develop the course in a way that blends the theoretical study with practical work that ensures students leaving Longridge are attractive and

employable to the agricultural world. He told pupils on a recent field trip that the new course will involve the whole supply chain from agronomy, machinery and engineering to research, marketing and communications, social media and AI, and many aspects of diversification that we are seeing highlighted again on Clarkson's Farm.

This BTEC course will be unique because its blend of class and on-site study will allow one to explore areas that many children will potentially have little or no idea about, but where we need skills developed.

Longridge Towers School is right in the middle of a big agricultural region, but we're finding now that that doesn't mean they themselves necessarily have an understanding of how the land around them is used, or how relevant it may be to them, or indeed how well suited they might be to a career in agriculture.

I think we can change that with the BTEC and by taking them out onto farms, we can educate the youngsters about what farming means in the 21st Century, and perhaps open their eyes to the fact that it may not be what they think.

Mr Baird said to the pupils we took for an introductory class that he



often takes his tractor up the top of the fields and just stops for a minute and looks as far as he can. He can see south down across the north of England, the Cheviots and Romand roads, and turn and look north all the way to East Lothian and the Firth of Forth on a clear day. His point was that that was a pretty decent office window, and you could see the pupils thinking.

That is the point of the new BTEC in agriculture – to open eyes and help our next generation to think. By doing that I am hopeful that we can help to tackle the major concern across farming right now – where are our next farmers coming from?

Certainly, Britain's most well-known farmer has given the area the thumbs up. On a July visit to the Scottish Borders, Jeremy Clarkson commented on his social media: "I've always never been able to decide which is Britain's most beautiful bit: North Devon or the Yorkshire Dales? But I've just spent the last three days in the Scottish Borders and how I have an answer. God almighty, they're beautiful. Also, I bought some cows there."



Pictured: Farmer David Baird giving a talk to students



Pictured: Students with Highland Cows

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CHANGING FACES... CHANGING PLACES...



Bryanston School, Dorset, has announced the appointment of Titus Edge as the first Executive Head of Bryanston starting in January 2027.

Titus brings with him nearly 30 years' experience of leadership in independent schools in the UK and overseas. For the past six years, he has been Headmaster of St Paul's in São Paulo. He began his career at City of London School for Boys, was then Head of History at Dulwich College, London, before moving to Gordonstoun, Moray, where he was first Deputy Head and then Head. He is married to Marina, and they have three grown-up children.

His appointment comes as Bryanston moves into a new group structure. As Executive Head, Titus will have responsibility across the Bryanston Group, currently comprising Bryanston, Bryanston Prep and Thorngrove School, which joined the Group in June, subject to the necessary approvals. The Group is also exploring further opportunities for growth, both in the UK and internationally, as it looks to share the Bryanston ethos with more pupils and families.

Titus will succeed Richard Jones, who will leave Bryanston at the end of next term before taking up his new role in Dubai in January 2027.



Wycliffe College Prep, Gloucestershire, has announced the appointment of Becky Hanson as its new headteacher as of this month (September).

A familiar member of the Wycliffe community, Becky has worked with the school for 15 years in key leadership roles including Head of Year and Head of English, and has supported pupils as they prepare for the transition to Senior School.

Her appointment comes as the school will see Years 7 and 8 moving to the Senior School from

September 2027.

Christian San José, Head of Wycliffe College, said: "I am delighted to announce Becky's appointment as the next Head of Wycliffe College Prep.

"This is a particularly exciting time for Wycliffe as we continue to evolve our educational offering and strengthen the journey from Prep School through to Senior School. Becky has already made a significant contribution to our community over the last 15 years and brings a unique perspective, having worked closely with pupils at this important stage of their education."



Ms Laura Rodgers has been appointed as the next Head of Francis Holland Preparatory School, London, from January 2027.

Ms Rodgers joins the school from Glendower Preparatory School, London, where she has spent the last five years on the Senior Leadership Team as Deputy Head Academic and, for the last year, as Senior Deputy.

Prior to her time at Glendower, Ms Rodgers was Head of Year 6 and Future Schools at Fulham Prep.

Her academic background includes a LLB (Hons) Law from Newcastle University, a PGCE in Primary Education from Oxford Brookes University and a Master's in Educational Leadership and Management from the University of Buckingham. She is also a governor at Bousfield Primary School, London.



Kingswood Prep School, Somerset, has announced the appointment of Helen Worrall as Head from September 2027, as Mark Brearey retires at the end of the next academic year.

Now in her eighth year at Kingswood Prep, Helen is already a well-known member of the school community. In her current role as

Deputy Head, she has led the day-to-day life of the school overseeing pastoral care, safeguarding and teaching and learning.

Helen graduated with an Honours degree in Russian Studies from Nottingham University, holds a Master's degree in Education, and has also completed the National Professional Qualification for Headship.



Rugby School and Khai Sang Corporation, have announced the appointment of Dr Simon Watson as Founding Principal of Rugby School Hanoi from August 2027.

Dr Watson is currently Principal of St Christopher's School in Bahrain. He has also been the Chair of FOBISIA (Federation of British International Schools in Asia) as well as, more

recently, Chair of the group of HMC Headteachers in its International Division in the Middle East.

Dr Watson has a PhD in Pure Mathematics from Bristol University; his teaching qualification is from Keele University. Before becoming the Principal of St Christopher's, he was Secondary School Principal of Copenhagen International School in Denmark before taking on the role of Principal of Kolej Tuanku Ja'afa, a boarding school in Malaysia.



Gayhurst School, Buckinghamshire, has welcomed new head, Mrs Amanda McKnight at the start of this academic year.

Mrs McKnight, who is Gayhurst's first female head in its 118-year history, joins the school from Somerhill Prep School in Tonbridge, Kent, where she was Head of Pre-Prep.

She began her career in PR and marketing before training as a teacher, and her career has taken her through both the UK and US education systems.

Amanda has worked in both state and independent schools and has also helped establish a Reggio Emilia-inspired Early Childhood Centre in Chicago.



Liz Free has been announced as the new principal at Oxford International College Brighton (OIC Brighton), East Sussex.

Liz has experience across UK and international education. Most recently she served as CEO and Director of the International School Rheintal in Switzerland and she has also held senior leadership roles at

the British School in the Netherlands and Oxford University Press.

Liz is also a Trustee of WomenEd and her leadership has been recognised through the IFIP Global Inclusion Award and as a finalist for the Tes International Headteacher of the Year.

OIC Brighton is part of the Nord Anglia Education family which has more than 90 international schools in the UK and across the world.



Magdalen College School (MCS), Oxford, has announced the appointment of

Alan Bird – currently Head of City of London School – to succeed Helen Pike as the next Master of MCS when she reaches the end of her 11 years at the helm in August next year.

Alan read Economics at Cambridge University, graduating with a Prize First, and subsequently gained a Master's degree at the London

School of Economics, undertaken as an Economic and Social Research Council Scholar, for which he was awarded Distinction.

Alan's previous teaching experience includes leadership roles at both Tonbridge School, Kent, and Brighton College, East Sussex.

Alan will take up his role at a key moment in the history of MCS, as they start to welcome the first cohort of girls into the Junior School and plan the timetable for the new Science and Partnerships Building.

CHANGING FACES... CHANGING PLACES...



Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation has announced the appointment of Ms Jane Leithead as the new Head of Chorister School.

Jane joins the Foundation from La Côte International School, part of Nord Anglia Education in Switzerland, where she is currently Assistant Headteacher.

With more than 20 years' experience across UK and international education, Jane has previously held positions as Acting Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and Assistant Headteacher.

Originally from Morpeth, Jane studied Education at Durham University and holds a BA (Hons) with Qualified Teacher Status, an MA in International Development and Education, awarded with Distinction by Newcastle University, and the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

Jane's professional interests include creating opportunities for teachers to learn from one another through coaching, observation and professional inquiry.

Chorister School is the preparatory school within Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation, educating children aged 3 to 11.



St George's School, Edinburgh has appointed Niamh Green, who currently leads the girls' school Roedean, East Sussex, as its next Head.

She will take up the role next year, succeeding Carol Chandler-Thompson, who has led St George's since August 2022 and is leaving to take up a Director of Education role with a global schools group. Mrs Chandler-Thompson will remain connected to the school as a Member of Council.

Niamh Green joined Roedean as Head in 2023. Previously, she was Acting Head at Mayfield School, East Sussex, Deputy Head (Pastoral) at Godolphin School, Wiltshire, and

a Housemistress at Sherborne Girls, Dorset. Prior to that, she was Head of Upper School at Woldingham School, Surrey, and a teacher at the International School Luxembourg. She is a serving Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) inspector, sits on committees at both the Heads' Conference (HMC) and the Girls' Schools Association (GSA), and is a Governor at Marymount School in London.

She holds an MBA in Educational Leadership from UCL, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education from the University of Cambridge, a Certificate in Boarding Education from the University of Roehampton and an MA in International Relations.



St Martin's Preparatory School, Grimsby, Lincolnshire, has appointed

Elizabeth Cullen-White as its new Headteacher as of this month (September). She succeeds Joel Jackson and steps into the role after serving as the school's

Deputy Headteacher for the past two years.

Having grown up in Cambridge, Elizabeth completed a PGCE in General Primary Education and a Master's degree in Researching Practice at the University of Cambridge before beginning her career in local schools.

Have a new head you would like mentioned?

Please email:
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How purposeful outdoor learning helps young people grow

Adventure is most powerful when built around purpose. Matt Healey, Adventure Growth Lead at Field Studies Council, explores how outdoor learning can develop confidence, resilience and life skills that stay with young people long after they return to the classroom.

Adventure is about far more than excitement and exploration. At its best, it gives young people the chance to discover strengths they never knew they possessed. Whether navigating a canoe across a lake, tackling a challenging hill walk or working together to overcome obstacles, these experiences

encourage pupils to step beyond their comfort zones and embrace new ways of thinking, learning and growing.

In a world where young people face increasing academic, social and digital pressures, opportunities to build character and adaptability

through real-life experiences have never been more valuable. Matt believes adventure is most effective when it is paired with clear educational purpose. While academic achievement remains essential, he argues that qualities such as independence, perseverance and self-belief are equally important in preparing young people for the future.

This focus on outcomes is helping to reshape perceptions of outdoor education. Adventure is no longer viewed simply as an enjoyable break from the classroom. Carefully planned experiences can help develop teamwork, communication, leadership and resilience, ensuring that every challenge contributes to meaningful personal development.

Nature plays a powerful role in this process. Rivers, lakes, forests and hills become living classrooms, creating opportunities for reflection,

curiosity and growth. Away from everyday distractions, pupils can connect more deeply with the world around them while developing stronger relationships with their peers.

The impact often extends well beyond the experience itself. Teachers frequently report improved confidence, stronger teamwork and a greater willingness to embrace challenge when pupils return to school. Many leave with a renewed sense of achievement and a stronger belief in their own potential.

Perhaps most importantly, outdoor learning has the power to enrich every child. By combining adventure, challenge and purpose, it helps nurture confident, resilient and well-rounded young people, proving that some of education's most valuable lessons are learned not within four walls but out in the world itself.



To find out more about Field Studies Council +Adventure programmes, visit: www.field-studies-council.org/adventure

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purposeful, built around
outcomes that last.**



Explore our trips

Designed to help every pupil thrive

+Adventure brings enrichment to life through outdoor experiences, meaningful challenges and carefully designed programmes that help pupils develop self-belief, independence and adaptability.

How elite sport can transform education and lives

Headmaster of Rossall School, Lancashire, Andrew McBride discusses how elite sport can help change all children's lives and provide them with valuable life skills that will benefit them wherever life takes them.



Andrew McBride

At its best, education does far more than prepare young people for examinations. It gives them the confidence to understand who they are, the resilience to navigate adversity and the ambition to discover what they might become.

I have spent much of my career working in high performing environments, both within education and sport, and in different parts of the world. I have seen first-hand what happens when talented people are given the right combination of challenge, expertise, opportunity and support. I have also seen something equally important: performance rarely flourishes in isolation. People perform at their best when they feel known, valued and that they genuinely belong.

That is one of the reasons I believe so strongly in the role of elite sport within education.

At Rossall, we are rightly proud of our sporting provision. Our partnerships with organisations and individuals at the very highest levels of their fields, including Manchester City and Tommy Fleetwood, have enabled us to create opportunities and expertise that would be difficult to replicate elsewhere. But the purpose of that investment is not simply to produce the next professional footballer or golfer. It is to use the extraordinary power of sport to help young people become extraordinary people.

Sport is about far more than performance

The language of elite sport can sometimes suggest that its purpose is simply to identify the most talented and help them reach the highest possible level but I see it differently.

Elite sport, when delivered properly within an educational environment, is a powerful vehicle for character development. It teaches young people how to respond when things do not go according to plan. It teaches accountability, discipline and humility. It teaches them to

accept responsibility for their own performance while understanding the contribution of those around them. It teaches them how to handle pressure, how to recover from disappointment and how to keep working when immediate success is not guaranteed.

These are not merely sporting attributes. They are life attributes.

Sport also provides something increasingly important in modern education: a genuine sense of belonging. A team, a squad, a training group or even a shared pursuit can give a young person an identity within a community. They learn that their contribution matters. They experience the satisfaction of helping others and being helped in return.

That sense of connection can be transformative.

My experience of high performance

My own belief in this has been shaped by experience.

Through my work in education and as a national football coach, I have had the privilege of working alongside high performing individuals and organisations and seeing the cultures that enable sustained excellence.

The most successful environments are rarely defined simply by talent. They are defined by standards, relationships and culture.

The best coaches know when to challenge and when to encourage. The best leaders create environments where people feel safe enough to fail, but ambitious enough to demand more of themselves. And the strongest teams develop a collective belief that they belong to something bigger than themselves.

Those lessons have influenced the way I think about education.

Indeed, my earliest experiences coaching football at grassroots level played an important role in my decision to enter teaching. I saw

how quickly sport could change a young person's confidence, relationships and sense of possibility.

Years later, I remain convinced that some of the most important lessons a school can teach are not necessarily delivered from behind a desk. They happen in the moments before a big fixture. In the conversation after a disappointing performance. In the decision to stay behind and help a teammate. In the courage to try again after failure.

Bringing expertise into education

If we are serious about giving young people access to world class opportunities, then expertise matters.

At Rossall, we deliberately seek out people who have operated at the highest levels of their profession. That might mean elite coaches, international performers, professional sportspeople or specialists with extraordinary technical expertise.

But expertise alone is not enough.

Someone does not become an outstanding educator simply because they have won trophies or competed at the highest level. We look for people who understand young people. People with integrity. People who can inspire without intimidating. People who can challenge without diminishing. People who understand that development is rarely linear and that every child needs something slightly different from the adults around them.

In other words, we are not simply looking for specialists. We are looking for special people. That distinction matters enormously. The greatest educators combine expertise with humanity.

Excellence and inclusion are not opposites

There is sometimes an assumption that elite sporting programmes are inherently exclusive; that they exist principally for the exceptionally

talented. I believe the best educational sporting programmes should challenge that assumption.

At Rossall, our ambition is to provide access to high-quality sporting education for every child, while also creating genuine pathways for those who want to pursue their sport at the highest level. Those two objectives are not contradictory.

A child does not need to become a professional athlete for elite coaching to change their life. They simply need to be given the opportunity to experience what excellence looks and feels like.

For one pupil, that may mean representing the school at the highest level. For another, it may mean discovering a sport they had never previously considered. For another, it may simply mean finding a place where they feel confident, connected and valued.

All three outcomes matter.

What really defines success?

Of course, we celebrate results. We celebrate outstanding examination grades, national sporting titles, performances on stage, musical achievements and the many individual successes our pupils experience. We should. Excellence deserves to be recognised.

But after working in high performing environments, I have become increasingly convinced that the ultimate measure of an educational institution is not simply what its pupils achieve while they are there.

The scoreboard matters. The trophies matter. The destinations matter. But the person standing behind them matters infinitely more. When we create environments built around high standards, outstanding expertise, strong relationships and a genuine sense of belonging, we do more than develop better athletes. We help young people discover what they are capable of. And that, ultimately, is what education should be about.

New fitness suite

Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, has opened a brand-new fitness suite within the Roger Peel Sports Centre at its Senior School, creating a facility that will benefit both pupils and the wider local community.

Over the summer holidays, the school undertook a major redevelopment of the spaces surrounding the main sports hall to create The Ian Knapp Fitness Suite, in a move designed to support health, wellbeing and active lifestyles for people of all ages.

The new facilities include a dedicated weights room on the ground floor and an aerobic fitness room on the first floor. Like the school's swimming pool, the fitness suite will primarily be used by students during the school day, but will also be open to staff, parents and members of the local community throughout the year.

Pictured: Artist impressions of The Ian Knapp Fitness Suite

Commenting on the project, Will Chuter, Headteacher at Kimbolton School, said: "We are excited to open this new fitness suite, not only for the benefit of our pupils but for the wider community. We know how important accessible, high-quality fitness facilities are in supporting both physical and mental wellbeing, and we are proud to be able to offer this resource to our pupils, local residents, parents and staff."

The new fitness suite is named after Ian Knapp – a former Kimbolton School pupil.

The project also attracted support from other Old Kimboltonians, who donated £88,000 towards development costs. In parallel, Kimbolton School Parents' Association (KSPA) pledged funding for a glass wall that will enclose the cardio-vascular machines on the upper floor.



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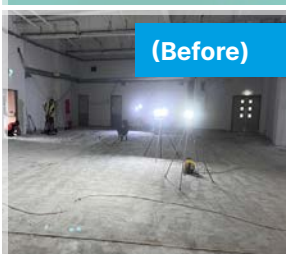
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**Headingley Cricket Club
(After)**



(Before)



Blundell's School marks six years with ISEKI Machinery

At Blundell's School in Devon, reliability isn't a luxury, it's a necessity. With 50 acres of sports pitches and an additional 70 acres of landscaped parkland and campus grounds to maintain year-round, the grounds team needs equipment that performs without fail. That's why, for the past five years, they've placed their trust in ISEKI UK and Ireland.

Their fleet now includes two TG6507 50hp tractors, a TXG sub-compact tractor, a TH5370 35hp tractor and two SXG ride-on cut-and-collect mowers, each serving a distinct purpose across the 120-acre site, from fine turf management to heavy-duty renovation work.

"We've had our ISEKI fleet for six years now, and they've been reliable, trustworthy, and always ready when we need them," says Head Groundsman Josh Allen. "That kind of performance, year after year, really matters in a school environment where there's no margin for downtime."

Based in Tiverton, Blundell's is a day and boarding school with around 650 pupils and a site rich in sporting heritage and formal presentation. The demands placed on machinery are high,

with frequent mowing, seasonal renovations, heavy towing and tight working spaces. Yet, Josh and his team know their ISEKI tractors and mowers will handle it all.

The two TG6507 tractors, fitted with IQ gearboxes, form the backbone of the operation. One is fitted with a loader for garden work such as shifting mulch and aggregates, while the other supports the sports turf team with tasks like towing a batwing mower, verti-draining and scarifying.

"The IQ gearbox is ideal for us," Josh says. "When using the loader, the clutchless shuttle saves time and effort. On the sports side, lifting the arms and having the PTO shut off, then restart automatically, is a feature that works smoothly every time."



In five years, ISEKI's reliability has been matched by its dealer support. Local dealer, ABA Groundcare, also in Tiverton, is a trusted partner. "ABA has been fantastic. Parts are easy to get, though we rarely need them, and the relationship, service and support have all been spot on."

The fleet has continued to grow, with the recent addition of a TH5370 35hp tractor for winter pitch maintenance and sprayer work, alongside a compact TXG sub-compact for dragmatting on astro-turf pitches and light towing. Two SXG ride-on mowers round out the lineup, used extensively for cut-and-collect work in formal areas and around buildings.

"The SXGs are brilliant during wet conditions," adds Josh. "There are times we still need to mow even when it's damp, and the SXGs don't leave a mess or clippings

behind. That's important when you're working around boarding houses and main entrances because the site still needs to look sharp regardless of the weather.

"It's not just that the machines perform well, it's that they keep doing it, year after year. In our line of work, that's the difference between being confident in your plan or constantly reacting to breakdowns. ISEKI gives us that confidence."

At a school where presentation matters daily, reliability under pressure is key to upholding the grounds team's standards. Whether maintaining turf or renovating pitches, the ISEKI fleet meets the challenge. For Blundell's, six years of dependable service have built more than a machinery fleet; it's built trust, and in any setting, that's worth investing in.



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UK Tetrathlon Championships

Two brothers have both become a UK champion in tetrathlon in the same weekend.

Oliver Loud, 18, and Ben Francis, 12, both came first in their respective competitions at the 2026 PC UK Tetrathlon Championships in Warwickshire.

After three days of competition the pair, who are both students at Ellesmere College, Shropshire, triumphed in the competition that combines equestrian cross-country riding with swimming, running and air-pistol shooting.

Oliver took the UK Open Boys Championship winning the

Wilkinson Sword trophy, first awarded in 1968, while Ben took the UK Stepping Stones Boys Championship title.

In the competition Oliver rode his horse Arko's Lad (Archie) and achieved the second best shoot score and ran 10.29 in the 3000m cross country run. He also won the UK Senior Regional Championships the previous weekend in Somerset, just after he returned from competing on the UK tetrathlon team in Australia where he was the first placed UK boy.

He has just finished Sixth Form at Ellesmere, having been a pupil at the school since 2019, and is working for the racehorse trainer Donald McCain.

Ben, who goes into Year 8 at Ellesmere next month, has been at the school since 2022 and won his title with a clear round on his horse Timmy, a personal best in the swim phase, an overall win in the 1000m run in 3.15 and the third best shooting score. He was also part of the Wales & Borders regional team which took second place overall in the mixed team competition.



Pictured: Oliver Loud and Ben Francis



Medals and UK Top 20 Rankings

A team of six swimmers from Haberdashers' Monmouth School have claimed national medals, reached championship finals and recorded a collection of personal bests during the five-day Swim Wales Summer Championships.

The performances from Year 8 pupils Oscar H and Caroline M, also saw them ranked among the top 20 swimmers in the UK for their age groups in the 50m freestyle and 50m butterfly respectively.

Oscar, competing in the 13-year-old category, qualified for nine events and reached the final in all seven races he contested. He secured silver in the 50m butterfly and bronze in the 50m freestyle and recorded personal bests in every event.

Pictured (l to r): Oscar, Morgan, Caroline Photo credit: Haberdashers' Monmouth School

Caroline enjoyed an equally successful weekend in the 12-year-old age group. She reached five finals from seven events and achieved personal bests across the board, winning gold in the 50m butterfly, silver in the 50m backstroke and 50m freestyle and bronze in the 100m backstroke.

The championships also marked a breakthrough moment for para-swimmer Morgan F, competing at the event for the first time. Despite racing against older athletes, she won a gold medal, silver medal and two bronze medals while achieving personal bests in five of her six events. One bronze medal came in the 100m freestyle, where she secured a podium finish on para points despite being the youngest swimmer in the race.

Advertorial Feature

Why padel belongs at your school

Padel is the UK's fastest growing sport – but it isn't new. It's been played across Spain, Argentina and the rest of Latin America for more than 50 years, and in that time, it's become a fixture of community life there in a way few racket sports manage.

What's happening in the UK now is that same story: courts filling up, waiting lists forming, and a generation of players discovering a sport built for exactly this moment.

Part of padel's appeal is how easy it is to pick up. The court is enclosed, the racket has no strings to master, and rallies stay alive far longer than in tennis – so a beginner can have a real game within minutes. That makes it one of the most inclusive and confidence boosting sports around, and a genuine gateway for pupils who've never thought of themselves as "sporty." For a school, that's a rare kind of facility: one that pulls in pupils your existing sports offer doesn't quite reach.

It's also a social sport by design. Padel is almost always played as doubles, in a space small enough that you're never far from your opponents or your partner – it

invites conversation, not just competition. That's exactly the kind of activity that builds community, on a school site as much as anywhere else.

Game4Padel is the partner best placed to bring this to your school. We operate 28 clubs across the UK, plus a club in Spain and four in Melbourne, and we're backed by investors who know sport at the highest level – Andy Murray, Annabel Croft, Virgil van Dijk, Jamie Vardy among them, as well as the rapper Aitch. We've done this before, at scale, and we know how to make it work.

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Cricket venture

Langley School, Norfolk, has announced a new five-year partnership with Great Witchingham Cricket Club (GWCC).

The venture, based at Langley's Taverham Prep School site, will bring together two organisations with a shared passion for nurturing talent and strengthening community sport.

Over the next five years, Langley Prep School and Great Witchingham Cricket Club will work collaboratively to develop and enhance the school's cricket facilities, ensuring that current and future generations of young cricketers can enjoy playing on high-quality pitches and in an environment where they can flourish.



Pictured: County Champions Under 13 Boys and Under 13 Girls

As part of the partnership, the club will provide professional support in the ongoing development of the cricket squares, invest in specialist equipment including sight screens, and make coach Jim Clarke available to support cricket coaching at the school. The club will also fund annual professional pitch inspections and carry out recommended improvement works.

The partnership will see the club utilise these facilities for selected fixtures during the season, drawing a new audience from the local area. Together, the two organisations plan to explore opportunities to host competitive fixtures with schools across the state and independent sector. Extending the scope of the partnership to community cricket events, there is even an ambition to host an annual tournament celebrating youth cricket across the region.

Commenting on the partnership, Chief Operating Officer at Langley School, Lisa Green, said: "We are excited to be embarking on this partnership with Great Witchingham Cricket Club. By combining the strengths of Langley and the club, we can create something truly special for our pupils, for local families and for the wider community. Our aim is to increase participation, giving both girls and boys the opportunity to train with a great coaching team and enjoy the very best in facilities."

Lawn Tennis Association 10U Performance Network

Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire, has been selected as part of the LTA 10U Performance Network for 2026–2028.

Following a national application and interview process, the school has been recognised as one of just 32 programmes across England and Wales, one of only three venues in the Midlands and one of only two schools nationally.

The new network has been created to identify and support programmes that are best placed to develop the next generation of young players within the LTA Player Pathway.



Pictured: Tennis at Bromsgrove School



Partnership formalised

Rugby School, Warwickshire, has confirmed it has formalised its partnership with Warwickshire County Cricket Club until the end of the 2028 season.

The partnership has been designed to create a long-term relationship that will benefit students, players, supporters as well as the wider cricket community.

Rugby's Head of Cricket is Michael

Powell, said: "This partnership will provide opportunities for young players across Warwickshire to enjoy our facilities throughout the winter and during cricket festivals in the summer. By opening our doors to more young cricketers, we hope to support their development, inspire a lifelong love of the game, and strengthen the pathway for cricket across the county."

Pictured: Warwickshire v Gloucestershire Men's Metro Bank One Day Cup at Rugby School

New padel courts



Exeter School, Devon, has been granted planning permission for the construction of new padel courts. Located adjacent to the school's astro pitches and Pavilion car park, the new facility will comprise two open-air courts. Construction is expected to be completed by early October 2026.

Padel is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world, with more than 35 million players across 150 countries and participation in Britain now exceeding one million players.

The courts will be used by Exeter School pupils as part of the school's sporting and co-curricular programme. Outside school hours, the facility will also be available for community hire during evenings and weekends, broadening access to the sport and strengthening Exeter School's commitment to

Pictured: The current outdoor facilities at Exeter School

serving the wider community.

Bursar at Exeter School, Miles MacEacharn, said: "We are thrilled to have received planning permission for this exciting development. Padel is an inclusive and rapidly growing sport that brings people together, and these new courts will enhance the sporting experience for our pupils while also creating opportunities for members of the wider community to enjoy the game. We are proud to continue investing in facilities that benefit both the school and the city of Exeter."

The development has been designed to complement the school's existing facilities and will make use of the ample parking already available on site, ensuring convenient access for pupils, staff and visitors.

District Athletics Champs



Before the summer break, Ursuline Preparatory School, Warley, Essex, hosted the Small Schools District Athletics Competition at Brentwood School. The day was filled with track and field events covering everything from relays to long jump.

It saw the school crowned District Champions for the 12th year running.

Pictured: The winning team

Following on from this achievement, the school also welcomed Freya Godfrey to speak to Lower Two and Upper Two pupils. Freya is a young professional footballer with the London Lionesses and trains with the England team. She gave a great insight into what the life of a professional footballer is like, the training involved and how important it is to keep up the academic studies.



Commercial collaboration

Bede's School, Sussex has announced a commercial partnership with Premier League club Brighton & Hove Albion FC.

The collaboration will unite the two South East institutions to establish a partnership alignment rooted in shared values, community engagement and focus on developing excellence.

Headmaster and CEO of Bede's School, Peter Goodyer, commented: "We are thrilled to officially partner with Brighton & Hove Albion. This partnership will offer our pupils opportunities, both on and off the pitch, while continuing our proud tradition of producing world-class athletes."

Pictured: Celebrating the partnership

Head of Partnerships at Brighton & Hove Albion, Jo Brooks, added:

"We are delighted to partner with Bede's School. This collaboration presents an opportunity to create impactful experiences for the next generation, providing students with deeper insights into the sports industry and actively supporting their personal and professional development both on and off the pitch."

The collaboration will see closer integration between the club and the school, featuring shared expertise, coaching insights and exclusive opportunities for Bede's pupils.

New all-weather sports pitch approved

George Heriot's School Edinburgh, has received planning approval from the City of Edinburgh Council's Development Management Sub-Committee for a new full-size all-weather pitch at Goldenacre.

The new facility will provide increased year-round opportunities for children and young people to take part in sport and create additional capacity for local clubs and community users.

Demand for hockey and other sports has increased significantly and the existing all-weather provision at Goldenacre is operating at capacity. The new development will include a full-size all-weather pitch and smaller practice area, helping more pupils participate in

sport while increasing the amount of sporting provision available for community use outside core school requirements.

Goldenacre is already used by nine community clubs and organisations, with the existing all-weather pitch fully utilised outside core school use.

The approved design incorporates retractable safety netting and telescopic floodlighting to minimise the visual impact when the facility is not in use.

The project also includes a range of landscaping and biodiversity measures, including new trees and hedgerows, wildflower meadow planting, rain gardens and bird and bat boxes.



Pictured: George Heriot's School students Rufus and Andrew at the pre-season hockey training at Goldenacre

England Badminton Pathway

Two pupils, Harry and Ibthiha, from Loughborough Grammar School, Leicestershire, were selected to attend an England Junior Performance Pathway training session at the National Badminton Centre in Milton Keynes.

The invitation placed the boys, who are key members of the Loughborough Grammar School's badminton team, and players for Leicestershire County, among just 12 players from across the country chosen to take part in the programme.

The Junior Performance Pathway, run by Badminton England, has been designed to identify and develop the next generation of elite badminton talent, and provides a structured route for talented young athletes to progress towards international level competition.

Pictured (l to r): Ibthiha Oli and Harry Yang



The training session gave the boys the opportunity to work with national coaches, experience high-performance environments and benchmark themselves against some of the best junior players in England.



Fencing

The fencing partnership between Truro School, Cornwall and Truro Fencing Club has been renewed.

Truro Fencing Club has recently been taken over by the UK Fencing Project Ltd, a non-profit company spearheaded by former Truro Head Coach, GB international and Team GB Olympic Coach, Jon Salfield.

The revitalised partnership between Truro School and Truro Fencing Club aims to not only support increased participation, but to provide structured coaching programmes and shared use of facilities, helping to grow the sport both within the school and the wider community.

Truro School Deputy Head (Co-curricular and Partnerships), Zoe Jobling, said: "Truro School has a long and proud history of supporting fencing, and we are delighted to see this next chapter for Truro Fencing Club. This strengthened partnership will

provide even greater opportunities for our pupils and the wider community, helping young people to develop confidence, discipline and ambition through sport. We are excited to work alongside the UK Fencing Project to build on an already exceptional legacy and ensure fencing continues to thrive in Cornwall."

The club's new Head Coach, Marius Dobel-Ober, commented: "As a young fencer, Truro Fencing Club was always held up to me as the absolute Gold Standard in British Fencing, and to have the opportunity now to lead the club is a dream come true. Our partnership with Truro School is essential to us in developing and growing both the participation and performance aspects of fencing, and to be able to work as part of the UK Fencing Project gives us access to additional expertise and resources which will secure our future as a high-performance centre."

Pictured: Truro School Director of External Relations, Poppy Naylor, Truro School Deputy Head (Co-Curricular and Partnerships), Zoe Jobling and Jon Salfield from UK Fencing Project



Football partnership

Bryanston School, Dorset, has agreed a new partnership with Premier League club AFC Bournemouth. It is hoped it will create an opportunity to further strengthen the club's academy pathway and support the development of young players both on and off the pitch.

Under the agreement, Bryanston will become a Regional Partner of AFC Bournemouth, supporting the club as it develops its academy structure and development of youth players. Bryanston will be working closely with AFC Bournemouth within the partnership, creating a pathway to provide the academic and pastoral framework needed to support young players as they balance football development with education.

As the relationship develops, both organisations will look to share expertise across player development, performance and education, while exploring opportunities for closer alignment between Bryanston's football programme and AFC Bournemouth's long-term academy ambitions.

Head of Bryanston, Richard Jones, welcomed the agreement saying:

Pictured: AFC Bournemouth Academy player Photo credit: AFC Bournemouth

"We are delighted to be partnering with AFC Bournemouth at such an exciting time in the club's development. This is a significant moment for Bryanston and for our football programme. We believe strongly that the future of football development must combine elite sporting opportunity with an outstanding all-round education, and this partnership is a powerful expression of that vision."

Bryanston's Head of Football and a UEFA A-licensed coach, Mark Foster, believes the collaboration will create further opportunities for aspiring players, commenting:

"This is an exciting opportunity to build a close relationship between Bryanston and AFC Bournemouth. For us as a school, it is another important step in establishing Bryanston as one of the leading football schools in the country. Our football programme is growing rapidly, and this partnership will help us create even stronger pathways and support for pupils, benefiting both our male and female players as they develop academically, personally and athletically."

National tennis champs

The U14 boys tennis team from Brentwood School, Essex, have made history by winning the School Sport Magazine National Schools U14 Boys' Tennis Cup, securing the school's first-ever national tennis title at the National Finals held at Repton School, Derbyshire in July.

The team consisting of Brandon P, Mayr B-D and Oscar V (Year 9), alongside Alexander L (Year 8), all earned their place at the National Finals after a run through the knockout stages, defeating Bedford School, Coopers'

Company & Coborn School, Essex, Northampton School, King's Ely, Cambridgeshire and Solihull School, West Midlands.

In the semi-final against Collegiate School, Bristol, Brandon and Mayr both delivered singles victories before Alex and Oscar followed with wins of their own, giving the team a 4-0 lead after the singles rubbers. The momentum continued into the doubles, where both Brentwood pairings completed victories to seal a 6-0 win and book their place in the National Final against

Merchant Taylors', Middlesex who had overcome hosts Repton School in the other semi-final.

In the final, Brandon claimed a 6-0 victory. Mayr also rose to the occasion to secure a 6-2 win and give Brentwood a 2-0 advantage.

Merchant Taylors' fought back in the remaining singles seeing the scores level at 2-2 meaning the national title would be decided by the doubles.

Brandon and Mayr recorded a 6-1 victory, leaving Brentwood just one win away from history.



Despite their earlier singles defeats, Alex and Oscar responded with resilience to earn themselves a 6-4 victory, sealing a 4-2 overall triumph, crowning Brentwood School National Champions.

Pictured: The successful U14s team

The lesson every young sportsperson should hear

Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh, has launched a specialist rugby programme where pupils are being taught breathwork, emotional regulation and mindset coaching alongside lineouts, tackling and speed drills. Their Director of Sport and Activities and former Scotland International, Nick De Luca, reflects on why mental resilience, recovery and performance psychology are just as important as physical strength.



Nick De Luca

One of the biggest lessons I learned during my rugby career had nothing to do with the sport. I'd have loved to understand, when I was younger, that one bad performance didn't define me. That getting dropped wasn't the end of the world, that one mistake wasn't the end of my career. Instead, I spent years believing every selection, every performance and every result somehow defined who I was.

Pulling on a Scotland jersey was everything I'd worked for. From the outside it probably looked like I'd made it, but elite sport has a funny way of convincing you that you've never truly arrived, as you strive to get better and better.

Looking back, I realise I never really felt I belonged. My worth to the team and to myself always felt dependent on each performance, mistake and selection. Every post-match review felt like another judgement on whether I was good enough, not as a player but often as a person.

Moving into education and performance coaching ten years ago, and now working at Merchiston Castle School, forced me to reflect on my career, what I was missing as a player and what the coaches around me could have done. That reflection is a large part of what has shaped the rugby programme we have built here.

Merchiston has a strong track record of developing players who have gone on to play professional rugby, and the technical coaching the boys receive is as good as anything they will find at academy level. To go to the next level, we have been exploring

the impact that mindset, emotional regulation, recovery and understanding how the body responds under pressure have on performance.

My time in professional rugby, and now talent development, has confirmed my belief in how much performance is shaped by the mind. When something doesn't feel right, boys can be quick to assume something is wrong with them, rather than recognising a normal response to pressure. But sometimes it's just human experience, and we help the boys understand that thoughts like these are expected in a high-pressure environment, and that's okay.

We talk openly about self-talk, breathing techniques and learning not to believe every thought that pops into your head. Thoughts aren't facts, they're just thoughts.

That's one of the reasons I love working in schools. We have strong relationships with the boys, which allow us to have conversations I wish I could have heard as a 15-year-old. Professional clubs do excellent work developing young players, but they operate to different timescales and different pressures. A school can take a longer view – and care about the person the boy becomes, whether or not he makes it as a player. We can give them forever belonging and the safe space to thrive alongside their peers.

Changing my response to disappointing results or bad plays during my career definitely took time, it is so easy to live in a fantasy world full of your

own demons. Having open conversations with the Merchiston boys has given me the opportunity to share a different way of thinking, one I found too late.

The relationship I have with the pupils is probably the biggest difference between my life now and my life then. I can look a boy in the eye after a disappointing match and tell him something I wish I had been able to hear – the world hasn't ended. One result doesn't define you, one mistake doesn't define you, one selection doesn't define you.

Sport is your platform to express your identity, not define it.

The message I come back to again and again is this: sport is what you do. It isn't who you are. Rugby gave me incredible experiences and friendships I'll always treasure, but if the only thing a young person takes from sport is a medal, we've missed the point. If they leave believing in themselves, understanding how to respond to setbacks and knowing their worth isn't defined by a scoreboard, then we've done something much more important.

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