

Summer 2025

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In this issue...



Cyber Security award

Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire, has been recognised by the National Cyber Security Centre's CyberFirst Schools Recognition Scheme as a CyberFirst – Gold school.

The goal of the CyberFirst Schools Recognition Scheme is to recognise, promote and support best practice in schools delivering computer science and cyber security-related education.

The school was awarded the highest level of recognition in part due to its work supporting other schools, and also for the opportunities it offers teachers to network, learn and share best practice. This July, the school is hosting the 'Festival of Computing', an event that will bring together over 250 secondary computing educators from across the country and beyond – the largest such event in the UK.

Computing Hub Lead, Johnny Palmer, said: "For many years now, we have been working with and supporting schools across the UK to review and extend their computing provision, and I would strongly encourage others to engage with the CyberFirst Schools Recognition Scheme to help them on this important journey. As a first step, schools should visit www.ncsc.gov.uk/cyberfirst/cyberfirst-schools to find out more."

Head, Michael Punt, commented: "CyberFirst Schools is a superb initiative. A high-quality computing education is vital for the next generation. Being a CyberFirst school – Gold has allowed us to gain vital external validation of our ambitions in this area for all our students."

Pictured: Head of Computer Science at Bromsgrove, Fran Round, and Computing Hub Lead, Johnny Palmer

Cover background

Sports variety

Why is it important to offer a range of different sports in school? To find out more and to see what school sporting activities have been going on across the country see our sports feature on pages 48 to 53.

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

Please email:

editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

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Is your school mentioned?

Schools featured in this issue include:

Blundell's School; Bromley High School; Bromsgrove School; Bryanston School; Claremont School; The Croft Preparatory School; Croydon High School; Dorset House; Downe House School; Ellesmere College; Finborough School; Francis Holland Prep School; Francis Holland, Regent's Park; Fulneck School; George Watson's College; Haberdashers' Elstree Schools; Kimbolton School; King's College, Taunton; King Edward VI School, Hampshire; Lancing College; Leighton Park School; Leweston Prep School; Leweston School; Lochinver House School; Lomond School; Lord Wandsworth College; LVS Ascot; Moulshford Prep School; Mount Kelly School; Newcastle High School for Girls; The Oratory Prep; Palmers Green High School; The Pilgrims' School; Priory School of Our Lady of Walsingham; The Purcell School; Radley College; Rossall School; Solihull Senior School; St Alban's School; St Christopher's Prep and Nursery; St. Helen's College Prep; St Gerard's School; St Mary's School, Cambridge; St Piran's School; Surbiton High School; Taunton School; Thomas's Battersea; Trinity College, Croydon; The Unicorn School; Ursuline Prep School, Warley; Westminster School; Westminster Under School; Winchester College; Woodbridge School; Wrekin College; Wycombe Abbey

Bitcoin payments

In last month's issue of The Independent Schools Magazine (May p15) we reported on the news that Lomond School, Argyll and Bute, will be starting to accept bitcoin payments for school fees later this year. Here, Head of the School, Claire Chisholm, answers some questions around that decision and offers some insight into how it is going to work in practice.



Claire Chisholm

Q: As of the Autumn term this year Lomond School will start to accept bitcoin payments in respect of fees. Can you explain the background to this? How and why has this move come about?

A: At Lomond School, we value the voices of our parents! We have built a strong relationship with them and actively consider all suggestions that can help our school progress. Recently, a parent shared their expertise on bitcoin and presented its benefits to our board. After careful deliberation, we collectively agreed that adopting this payment method would be advantageous for our school. Following our due diligence and collaboration with reputable companies, we informed our school community and are now pleased to accept bitcoin as a payment option for fees.

Q: What has been the reaction to this news? Has the school seen any wider knock-ons/benefits to the news that you are introducing bitcoin payments?

A: Genuinely uplifting. While it may not impact every parent, those with an interest in bitcoin are particularly supportive. Following the announcement, we received new inquiries from parents around the globe who are now interested in our school.

Q: Thinking now more about the practicalities of setting up bitcoin, what research have you done in advance of launching this as a form of payment? Why, for instance, did you opt for bitcoin over other crypto currencies?

A: I've become a significant member of the bitcoin community. In fact, it's almost

like I've returned to school myself to deepen my knowledge of all things bitcoin. I've had the opportunity to speak at bitcoin conferences and be featured on various bitcoin podcasts. Daily, I engage with the most respected members within the bitcoin community who are providing guidance and insight for our school regarding this topic. Bitcoin is undoubtedly the most trusted and recognisable digital currency, and its values and philosophy align closely with what we already practise at Lomond School, making it an obvious choice.

Q: And how are these payments going to work in practice? What processes have you needed to consider and set up to manage? How are you going to mitigate risks associated with market fluctuations to make sure you don't lose value?

A: Risk is meticulously controlled through a phased implementation process, various conversion options, and collaborations with reliable service providers. Our financial operations are strong and well-organised. We manage volatility by instantly converting to GBP, ensuring that there is no risk associated with annual fees.

Q: And as bitcoin is not yet regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) do you have any concerns about this? How are you ensuring that all legal and financial requirements are met?

A: Bitcoin is not yet directly overseen by the FCA; however, the platforms that facilitate its transactions are subject to regulation. Lomond collaborates exclusively with FCA-registered or compliant providers, such as Musket and CoinCorner, to

guarantee that all transactions are both secure and legal.

Although Lomond is not a financial institution, we adhere to best practices. There is a well-defined regulatory pathway leading to full FCA registration by 2026 for the service providers we engage with. Our commitment is to maintain transparency and accountability at every stage, ensuring we stay ahead of the curve.

Q: Outside of just accepting bitcoin payments for fees, Lomond is also thinking about other bitcoin uses. One of those is the possibility of paying staff salaries in bitcoin as a voluntary option within a future scheme. Is there an appetite for this?

A: Absolutely! At Lomond, we only pursue initiatives when there is genuine interest. This was the case when we introduced the International Baccalaureate in 2021, as there was a recognised need for change in our existing offerings. Regarding bitcoin as a salary option, that decision would rest with the staff members. However, I can share that several employees and members of our school community have started acquiring bitcoin since we began our involvement.

Q: Another development is the Satoshi Scholarship initiative that will sponsor 21 two-year day student scholarships, and 21 two-year boarding scholarships, via bitcoin donations. Can you explain more about the idea behind these scholarships and how they will work?

A: Once again, numerous individuals from the bitcoin community have shown interest in our school and are sharing valuable suggestions and support.

Any donations received from bitcoin enthusiasts will be utilised to enhance the experience for both new and current students.

Q: And you are also developing a new economics curriculum that will educate around the values associated with bitcoin design. How is that going? What are your plans for this and how will this benefit students?

A: It's very exciting! I've recently returned from the Middle East where I met with the globally renowned economist and author Dr Saifedean Ammous at his home to develop a new curriculum initiative centred on Austrian economics.

Dr Ammous will support the development of a tailored economics curriculum for Lomond students, rooted in the principles of sound money and individual liberty to complement the existing economics offering.

The future of freedom and prosperity depends on the next generation understanding sound economics. With this partnership, we aim to plant the seeds of long-term thinking and financial literacy early in life.

Q: And finally, using your experience to date, if other schools were thinking about exploring bitcoin as a future option for themselves, what would your advice to them be? Do you have any top tips?

A: I've received many calls from headteachers eager to learn more about it! During these challenging times for our industry, I'm thrilled to offer support to those in our sector to help them branch out. My recommendation for them is to reach out to me, and I'll gladly discuss our journey.

Planning for co-education

Preparations for going co-ed at Westminster and Westminster Under School, London, are in full swing. But what has this involved? Westminster Under School's Director of Expansion and Co-education, Benedict Dunhill, takes a look and discusses some of the key areas of consideration.

It may sound obvious – but it's the obvious things that sometimes escape us: sitting down and talking to our current Sixth Form girl pupils about Westminster's move to full co-education revealed so much.

These girls proved a valuable sounding board. Some of their insights were gender-specific, but many were universal to any new joiner. A strong induction programme is essential, but welcoming girls alongside our boys highlights the need to be proactive and responsive.

At Westminster there have been girls in the Sixth Form for over 50 years. Our move to co-education in other years will commence from September 2026 when girls will join the Under School at three entry points, becoming fully co-educational by 2030.

Our learning has come from many sources, including the experiences of other schools that have recently transitioned to co-education. One prep school noted that the boys became noticeably less fidgety after a week of mixed-gender learning. Another found their 'girls only' space unused, a small but telling sign of successful integration.

The advice on preparing documentation for the 'material change' submissions has been especially helpful. From day one, we plan to listen, adapt, and support the evolving needs of each cohort. This is no different from welcoming any new pupil, but with added attentiveness.

Building and planning

New buildings are certainly exciting new areas of the school and are a visible part of the change, but practical steps like planning permission shouldn't be underestimated. Architects, costing, planning consultants, and local authority submissions all come into play. Pre-application advice can help flag issues early, but delays are common, and approval may require

committee sign-off. Once planning is granted, another tender process follows for building contractor and for interior designers. Throughout the process, budget reviews are inevitable and may lead to 'value engineering', a euphemism which basically means 'cost-cutting' – inevitable in any project of this scale, but which if well-planned and implemented does nothing to reduce quality or make the outcome less exciting.

Curriculum

The curriculum area is an interesting one because, in a sense, why should there be any change to the curriculum for boys and girls? Upon closer consideration, small adaptations do matter. In PSHE, for example, some schools opt to introduce certain topics in single-gender settings initially. Sports fixture planning will need to reflect interests and numbers. With smaller groups of girls at first, it's important to carefully gauge preferences – lacrosse, netball, or mixed football? Local schools' fixtures need proactive planning and early dialogue for planning these with thought and consideration. Extracurricular choices are already showing provision flexibility. At Westminster Under School, boys are already choosing dance and cookery as popular extras, and we expect to build activities dynamically, around pupil interest.

Academic staff are already expanding representation further in subject content, something we have always actively strived to do. For instance, they include the study of more female artists and a wider cultural perspective in art.

Our librarian is diversifying book stock to include titles with a broader appeal, including those more likely to engage girls.

The SEN department have led staff training on gender-specific challenges, particularly around the research on how girls may mask

additional learning needs. This has helped us to identify possibly hidden barriers to integration.

Language and culture

Our staff are also taking the lead in preparing what we might call 'school culture' for the arrival of girls. With more than a year until first entry, we are already beginning to phase out the use of 'boy' in general correspondence, preferring 'child' or 'pupil'.

We are also regularly talking to our current boy pupils about co-education. While many will have previously learned in co-educational classrooms, we have put in place a series of assemblies, PSHE lessons and visiting speakers on the importance of our school values of inclusion and diversity and continue to work on this.

Uniform

This is a very compelling area and can be one of the more emotionally charged topics. Even well-liked designs can provoke resistance. Eventually though, the school community is likely to come around – but this is an area that risks causing some upset. As is good practice from time to time, this might be a moment to assess suppliers – are they offering value and good service for both the school and parents? Is stock available? What will happen to old stock? If you are simply adding a new range for a new gender this might be slightly simpler but there is much to consider. We certainly think that offering some flexibility in the choice of uniform available to pupils will help smooth the way with the changes in uniform that we have planned.

Communal spaces and play areas

Playground design is another area where girls and boys may differ in how they use space. Inspired by Make Space for Girls, which has shown how boys and girls use space in playgrounds differently, and examples like Vienna's



gender-inclusive park planning, we're rethinking outdoor space to suit the needs of everyone. We are considering research carefully and we have also joined the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme for this purpose. Play areas, other communal spaces and, of course, classrooms are all areas we are giving great thought to, with the key goal of ensuring our girls feel they have as great a sense of 'ownership' of these spaces as boys.

Marketing and admissions

With a broader audience, marketing to new feeders will take time and presence. Staff visits and building relationships are crucial. Schools will absolutely wish to see what the transition will look like. Admissions activity will increase. Additional tours and open days, and potentially expanded admissions staffing, are considerations from at least a year before the proposed launch.

Staffing

We certainly benefit from all our teaching staff having taught in co-educational environments at some point in their careers, and co-education is at the centre of our thoughts as we continue to appoint new staff. We are thinking particularly tactically around sport and games, as well as increasing the number of female first aiders, recognising the importance of representation and comfort for all pupils.

Going co-educational isn't about doing something revolutionary. It's about thoughtfully expanding what already works and being open to evolving needs. There is no blueprint that fits all, but shared insights and careful planning can help smooth the journey.

Planning for the future: how to best achieve a merger

With merger activity in the sector on the rise, Solicitor, Joanna Blackman, offers some thoughts on what to consider in order to realise a successful merger.



Joanna Blackman

Schools have had their fair share of challenges over the past few years, with the pandemic, high inflation, and an escalating cost of living putting additional pressure on school budgets and the families of students and staff.

Budgets have been squeezed with the introduction of VAT on school fees, and business rates charitable relief also being removed from private schools. National Insurance contributions for employers are also increasing, with the small comfort that the Employment Allowance is increasing, too.

Why are schools exploring mergers?

Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that there has been a noticeable rise in merger activity within the independent school sector. Schools are increasingly entering into partnerships and merger discussions as a reaction to financial pressure, as a strategic decision to future-proof their operations, and to improve their long-term sustainability.

Mergers can also assist schools in retaining and attracting talent, investing in development projects, and offering broader curriculum options – all vital for remaining competitive in a changing educational landscape.

These conversations must be approached from a broad perspective. Beyond immediate financial concerns, governing

bodies must consider what is truly in the best interests of the school, its pupils, and its wider community. Regulatory considerations also come into play when an independent school is a charity.

More than just crisis management

It is essential to recognise that discussions need not be purely about crisis management. Many independent schools are pursuing mergers from a position of strength, using these arrangements to plan for leadership succession, expand their geographic reach, or invest in new specialisms.

Future-proofing is at the heart of these moves. For instance, schools with strong reputations but ageing infrastructure may seek partnerships to finance necessary upgrades. Others may look to expand their brand through enhancing their national or even international profile.

Prioritising due diligence

A successful merger hinges on finding a suitable merger partner and thorough preparation and due diligence. The process typically begins with a period of strategic evaluation, during which each party carefully assesses the compatibility of their objectives and the merger's cultural fit and strategic value. This stage should not be rushed.

From a legal perspective, due diligence should encompass a

thorough review of all aspects of the school's operations – financial, employment, property, legal compliance, regulation, and governance. Schools must closely examine contracts and documents, such as employment contracts, supplier agreements, and third-party service agreements, to ensure that everything they want to transfer can be transferred without issue. Consultation with stakeholders may be necessary.

Confidentiality is key, and protections may need to be put in place to prevent the wider disclosure of information being exchanged at the early stages of merger discussions.

Key challenges and considerations

Certain contracts and obligations, such as long-term maintenance contracts, outstanding loans, and pension obligations, can all complicate a merger. Employment considerations must be identified and managed, including potential TUPE – Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) – implications.

Property issues can be particularly knotty, as many independent schools occupy historic estates involving complex ownership structures. Title investigations, planning permissions, restrictive covenants, and listed building consents may all come into play.

Where a school is a charity, the

ultimate responsibility lies with the governors as charity trustees. They must ensure that the merger is in the school's best interests and in furtherance of the school's purposes. They must have the appropriate power to merge, and their objectives must be compatible with those of their merger partner; expert charity law advice may be needed where the objectives of one merger partner are narrower or wider than the other, as assets may need to transfer on a restricted basis.

For charitable independent schools, any decisions must be thorough, well-documented, and aligned with the charity's governing document and applicable charity law.

Governors must demonstrate that they have considered all reasonable options, risks, and potential conflicts of interest. Stakeholder consultation may be necessary, and Charity Commission consent could be required in certain circumstances.

A strategic step forward

For many independent schools, mergers may offer the potential to protect and enhance the educational provision for future generations of students. However, to navigate the many challenges they must be approached with thorough due diligence, robust governance, and specialist legal advice.

Joanna Blackman is partner in the charities and social economy team at Wrigleys Solicitors LLP. For help with governance or if considering collaborating or merging with another educational establishment email joanna.blackman@wrigleys.co.uk www.wrigleys.co.uk

The Governing Bodies of Winchester College, Hampshire, and The Pilgrims' School, Hampshire, and the Chapter of Winchester Cathedral have announced the merger of The Pilgrims' School with Winchester College, due to come into full effect by 1 September 2025.

Additional information on the merger can be found at: www.winchestercollege.org/assets/files/uploads/supporting-document-winchester-college-the-pilgrims-school.pdf

The Headmaster of The Pilgrims' School, Mr Tim Butcher, will continue to have day-to-day responsibility for leadership of the Pilgrims' community, alongside his Senior Leadership Team. Overarching governance responsibility will sit with Winchester College's Warden

and Fellows, with arrangements in place to reflect the interests of The Pilgrims' School and the relationship with Winchester Cathedral.

The historic role of the Quiristers, who have played a key part in Winchester College's Chapel

Choir, will remain unchanged, as they continue their education at the school. Pilgrims' will also maintain its strong relationship with Winchester Cathedral by providing the education of the Cathedral Choristers who are central to the heritage of the Choral Foundation.

Radley College, Oxfordshire, and Prep Schools Trust (PST) have announced that Radley College and all the seven Prep Schools Trust schools will, from September, come together to form Radley Schools Group.

Prep Schools Trust currently educates 1,600 pupils from ages two to 13 across the UK in its seven schools: Barfield School, Surrey; Beeston Hall School, Norfolk; Chandlings Prep School, Oxfordshire; Cothill House, Oxfordshire; Kitebrook Preparatory School, Gloucestershire; Mowden Hall School, Northumberland; and West Hill Park School, Hampshire.

Radley College – one of three remaining all boys, all boarding schools – is situated just outside

the city of Oxford and numbers 770 boys from ages 13 to 18.

The Council of Radley College will take on the governance responsibility for the Group. The Warden (Headmaster) of Radley College, John Moule, will oversee its strategic development while retaining his day-to-day responsibilities at Radley. The Chief Executive of Prep Schools Trust, Tom Beardmore-Gray, who had already announced his decision to retire this summer after serving PST for the last seven years, will be succeeded as Chief Executive by Andrew Ashton, currently Radley's Bursar.

Following the merger, each school will continue to retain their independent identities and markets.



It has been announced that Dorset House, West Sussex, will be joining the Lancing College family of schools from September 2025.

Lancing College and Dorset House already have a long-standing relationship which sees Dorset House pupils attend the College for science, music, drama and scholarship days.

In joining Lancing College, Dorset House, a co-ed day and boarding prep school that caters from Reception to Year 8, will complement Lancing's existing prep schools in Hove and Worthing.

Each prep school will remain independent with its own identity, preparing young children for a wide range of senior schools, and at the same time will collaborate for the benefit of all. Where families choose to transfer to

Pictured: Dorset House School

Lancing College in Year 9, there will be a new pathway enabling greater opportunities to focus on learning and leadership.

Also, with Dorset House as part of Lancing College, families further afield will be able to join Lancing as a boarding option from Year 5 at Dorset House.

Chair of Lancing College, Martin Slumbers, said: "I am delighted that the Lancing College family of schools will be joined by Dorset House. Our shared values and commitment to the care, inspiration, and individual all-round development of young children from prep school through to young adults in senior school is inspiring. This partnership will offer a wider range of families across Sussex and beyond a new and exciting choice for their children's education."



Haberdashers' Elstree Schools, Hertfordshire, has announced that from September 2025, Lochinver House School – an independent prep school in Potters Bar – will join Haberdashers' Elstree Schools (Haberdashers' Boys' School and Haberdashers' Girls' School).

The Governors of Lochinver House and Haberdashers' were unanimous in their decision to move ahead with this opportunity.

Haberdashers' Elstree Schools currently educate nearly 2,600 boys and girls, aged 4 to 18, and also form part of the nationwide Haberdashers' family which includes 15 schools.

Executive Principal, Haberdashers' Elstree Schools, Gus Lock, said, "I am delighted that we are

Pictured: Jonathan Wadge and Gus Lock

merging with Lochinver House and growing as a family of schools. I am enormously excited to be working closely with Jonathan and strengthening the partnership between our schools."

Headmaster, Lochinver House School, Jonathan Wadge, said, "This is an exciting new chapter for Lochinver House. United by a shared commitment to academic excellence, exceptional pastoral care and a vibrant co-curricular offer, this merger strengthens our school by enhancing our ability to offer the very best opportunities and outcomes for our pupils, to ensure the long-term success of Lochinver House at a time of challenge for many standalone schools in the independent sector."

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Fulneck School – lessons from a unique chapter and a vision for the future of small schools

With the recent announcement that Fulneck School, West Yorkshire, is set to shut in July, School Principal, Devin Cassidy, reflects on the closure and some of the wider insights that could help smaller schools as they look ahead in these challenging times.

As Fulneck School prepares to close its doors, I find myself reflecting not just on my personal and professional journey here, but also on the broader lessons that small schools must take to heart as they look to the future. My time at Fulneck has been rich with meaning, full of challenge, and ultimately transformative. Leading a small, close-knit school community is vastly different from leadership in larger institutions, and as we mark the end of this chapter, it is clear that the insights gained must inform how smaller schools adapt and thrive going forward.

One of the most distinctive aspects of working in a small school is the depth of relationships. At Fulneck, every pupil is known by name, every staff member's voice matters, and leadership is about being present and involved in the daily rhythm of school life. The family feel is not just a slogan – it is lived, felt, and relied upon. Staff are more than colleagues; they are collaborators, problem-solvers, and, often, emotional anchors for one another. In an environment with fewer personnel, everyone carries a wider range of responsibilities, and leaders must be hands-on, offering not just direction but also daily support.

This relational culture has had a profound impact on our pupils, particularly those with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. In many cases, these pupils find large, impersonal school environments overwhelming. The supportive, community-based ethos at Fulneck offered them the space and trust needed to grow. In smaller settings, staff can build strong, consistent relationships with students, and it is through these relationships that real progress, academic and emotional, is made. There is less of the

relentless pressure to push pupils through exams as if on a conveyor belt, and more room to focus on holistic development.

Yet, while small schools like Fulneck can offer incredible benefits, they face a unique and growing set of challenges that cannot be ignored. To remain viable in the years ahead, small schools must adopt a proactive and adaptive mindset. The educational landscape is changing rapidly, and survival will depend on a willingness to embrace change, diversify income streams, and invest smartly in infrastructure and innovation.

Financial sustainability must be front and centre. Smaller schools often operate with tighter margins, meaning that every investment decision carries weight. Diversification of income, through community partnerships, expanded use of school facilities, or new ventures such as international collaborations, will be key. Simultaneously, schools must remain accessible and affordable to families, ensuring that fees do not become a barrier to entry. Balancing quality, affordability, and sustainability is no small task, but it is one that must be addressed head-on.

Political headwinds are also likely to intensify. Government policy has not always been favourable to independent or smaller schools, and we must prepare to respond to future regulatory and funding changes. Advocacy, collaboration across the sector, and a shared voice are critical. Smaller schools must come together to protect their interests, share best practices, and present a united front when engaging with policymakers.

Another key pillar for future success is embracing digital innovation. The role of technology, particularly artificial

intelligence, is already reshaping how we teach and how pupils learn. Small schools cannot afford to lag behind. Investing in digital tools, training staff to use them effectively, and understanding the role AI can play in supporting adaptive teaching and personalised learning are all essential. Done well, this kind of innovation enhances teaching, frees up time, and improves student outcomes.

Moreover, SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) provision must become a strength, not a challenge. Schools that place SEND and inclusion at the heart of their ethos do more than support a subset of pupils, they improve the educational experience for all. Inclusive practices, when embedded school-wide, enrich teaching, promote empathy, and drive better academic and personal outcomes. It requires training, a shift in mindset, and commitment from every level of leadership, but the rewards are transformative. And taking the time to understand behaviour as communication and the benefits of trauma-informed practice would benefit all teachers in every school.

Staff recruitment and retention also remains a significant concern. Attracting talented, passionate educators to a small setting, and giving them the professional development and opportunities they deserve, is critical. Investing in people, through mentorship, leadership pathways, and genuine collaboration, must be a priority. Staff who feel valued and supported are more likely to stay, contribute, and lead the next phase of a school's journey.

As Fulneck closes its doors, I have a deep sense of pride in all that we have accomplished, and in the grace and dignity with which we brought this chapter to a



close. I am profoundly thankful to my colleagues across local independent schools – both large and small – who offered kind words, welcomed our pupils, and extended opportunities to our staff. Your support has meant more than I can express, and I will remain forever grateful.

At the same time, I look ahead with a clear-eyed understanding of the challenges that remain for others in similar settings. Small schools offer something truly special – a depth of care, a personal touch, a community that nurtures and uplifts. But to continue delivering that, they must be resilient, adaptive, and firmly focused on the future.

Fulneck has shown me that education is at its most powerful when it is grounded in strong relationships and guided by a clear moral purpose. As I prepare to take on my third headship, this time in a specialist SEMH school, I do so with more excitement than ever for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Fulneck has been the stepping stone to this next chapter, not just for me, but for many of my colleagues who will continue to make a meaningful impact across the educational landscape. Whether working with the most advantaged or helping to close the gap for the disadvantaged, they carry with them the spirit and values of this remarkable place.

In that sense, Fulneck lives on – through the lives it has touched, the memories it has created, and the exceptional teachers who will go on to enrich other schools with their passion and expertise.



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Building quality into education

Assistant Head (Teaching and Learning) at Mount Kelly School, Devon, Alan Johnson, takes a look at embedding quality in the curriculum, with a focus on R. M. Pirsig's 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance', and considers how business concepts of quality control and quality assurance can compare with educational concepts of assessment of learning vs assessment for learning.

In the world of business, the issue of quality, especially when linked to customer needs and customer satisfaction, leads to the concepts of quality control and quality assurance.

Quality control (QC): is about *inspecting* a product or service to ensure it meets specified standards after it has been produced or delivered. Ergo, it is often reactive, identifying defects and errors at the end of a process. Think of it as a final inspection before shipping. In manufacturing, this might be testing a batch of products at the end of the production line.

Quality assurance (QA): is a proactive process focusing on *preventing* defects from occurring in the first place. It involves setting up systems, processes, and standards to ensure quality is built into every stage of production or service delivery: a system that produces quality consistently. An example would be establishing clear protocols for how raw materials are sourced and handled in a bid to prevent issues later on.

Let us now link these concepts to educational assessment:

Assessment of learning (AoL) / summative assessment (analogy to quality control):

This is assessment at the end of a learning unit, course, or period. Its primary purpose is to evaluate what pupils have learned, and often to assign grades or certifications in recognition of perceived achievement. It is often a snapshot of achievement. So, just like QC checks the final product, AoL checks the final learning product after instruction has largely concluded. If a pupil performs poorly on a summative assessment, it reveals a defect in their learning, much like a product failing a final inspection. The implication is often that

the learning process needs to be repeated, or significant remediation is required.

If significant misunderstandings are only discovered at the end, it means much time and effort has been invested in a learning pathway that was ultimately flawed for that pupil. Correcting these issues then requires reworking the learning, which can be inefficient, time-consuming and demoralising (both for the pupil and for the teacher).

Assessment for learning (AfL) / formative assessment (analogy to quality assurance):

This is ongoing assessment during the learning process. Its purpose is to provide feedback to pupils and teachers to adjust teaching and learning activities to best improve understanding. It is about monitoring progress, making real-time adjustments. AfL is analogous to QA because it is proactive and embedded throughout the process. Instead of waiting for a final 'product' (the pupil's complete understanding), AfL continually checks the 'production line' of learning. This allows for immediate interventions, clarifications, and adjustments to teaching strategies before major 'defects' (misunderstandings) solidify.

By continually assessing and addressing faults/misunderstandings as part of an ongoing process (AfL), you build quality into the learning from the ground up. This is far more efficient than waiting until the end (AoL), discovering systemic issues, and then having to restart or repeat significant parts of the process.

Robert M. Pirsig, writing in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, grapples with the fundamental question of what "Quality" (with a capital Q) truly is,

which we might attempt to apply to the quality of both teaching and learning. He finds that we tend to divide the world into subject and object, leading to a view where Quality is seen as either a subjective opinion ("I like this") or an objective attribute ("This has good engineering"). Pirsig argues that Quality is neither purely subjective nor objective, rather an a priori immediate awareness of value.

Quality, possessing a meta essence in its own right, is the very force that drives us towards better understanding and creation. It is the Buddha-nature of awareness, the inherent goodness we intuitively recognise before we can even articulate it. We experience Quality directly before we analyse and categorise it. Pirsig also develops his *Metaphysics of Quality*, suggesting that reality itself is fundamentally composed of Quality, suggesting a hierarchy of values: biological, social, intellectual, and metaphysical. For me there is a connection here to the Hindu concept of *maya* (मया), expressing the idea that the true nature of reality (Brahman) is veiled by a cosmic illusion (*maya*), creating a false sense of separation of the self from the nature of reality. Quality may be seen as the dynamic force that moves through these levels or perception.

Pirsig also highlights two ways of seeing the world. The classical mode emphasises reason, logic, and underlying forms. The romantic mode focuses on immediate sensory experience and feeling. He argues that our modern focus on the classical has led us to overlook the importance of Quality as a direct experience, hindering our ability to truly understand and appreciate the world. This encapsulates those things we might pursue in our schools, which



when questioned about we can only say: "I do not know how to quantify [that thing], I only know we would be diminished without it."

Pirsig also emphasises the importance of caring in achieving quality. When we truly care about what we are doing, whether it is fixing a motorbike or writing a philosophical treatise, we are more attuned to Quality and more likely to produce it. Ken Robinson spoke about this in terms of finding your 'element', and most of us are familiar with the current zeitgeist promoting the concept of flow. What happens when we lose sight of quality? 'Stuckness', a state of anxiety and frustration that arises when we are unable to engage with the world in a meaningful and Quality-oriented way.

In essence, Pirsig's argumentation of Quality is a profound exploration of how we perceive value and our relationship with the world around us. It is about paying attention, caring deeply, and being open to the immediate, pre-intellectual experience of value. He would strongly advocate for the assessment for learning (AfL) / quality assurance (QA) approach for the simple reason that it embodies his philosophy of Quality as an ongoing, engaged, and integrated process. This is illustrated in the four following concluding statements:

1. Direct engagement and "gumption": a mechanic working on a motorcycle is not just following a checklist; they are feeling, listening, observing, intuitively understanding the machine. Similarly, AfL

encourages pupils to directly engage with the learning, receiving immediate feedback allowing them to develop metacognitive strategies, to adjust and improve. This builds “gumption” – the enthusiasm and motivation to overcome obstacles.

2. Integrated Quality: Quality is not something you add at the end; it is something inherent in the process of creation. AfL builds quality learning by continually checking, adjusting, and refining understanding throughout the educational journey, rather than just inspecting the final outcome.
3. No separation of subject/object: true quality emerges when the craftsman and the work become one. In education, this means teaching and learning are not just about passively delivering/receiving information; they are an active, iterative process wherein pupil and teacher are in constant interaction. AfL fosters this by providing frequent opportunities for pupils to peer/self-assess understanding,

thereby allowing teachers to respond to their needs via ipsative assessment.

4. Beyond mere standards: true Quality also goes beyond simply meeting pre-set criteria. It involves an aesthetic appreciation, a sense of rightness, a deep understanding coming from engaged interaction. AfL, rather than AoL, allows for this deeper, more holistic understanding in providing the space for iterative learning and refinement, with ipsative assessment consequently moving beyond simply checking boxes for a final grade.

In summary, Pirsig’s philosophy of Quality aligns with the idea that excellence is forged in the ongoing, attentive process of creation and refinement. This directly supports the argument that continual assessment (AfL) and proactive quality assurance (QA) are superior to end-of-process assessment (AoL) and reactive quality control (QC). It is about building quality in, rather than trying to inspect or measure it.



Beekeeping visit

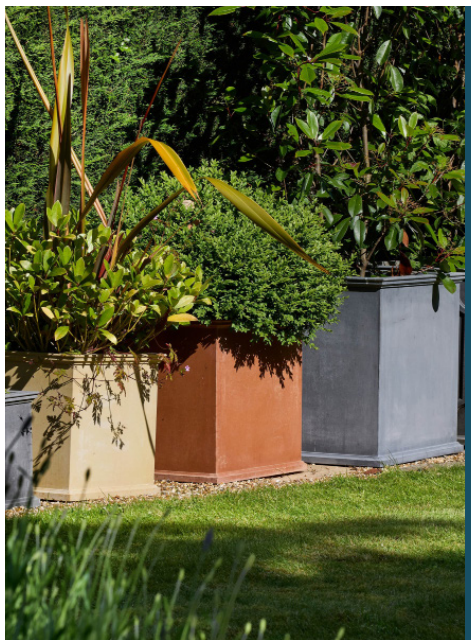
Reception class from Ursuline Prep School, Warley, Essex, have had a visit from a beekeeper, learning lots of new vocabulary to support their topic work on minibests, as well as raise awareness about the importance of bees.

Beekeeper Jeff, who is a Grandad to one of the children in the school, came to see the children in the forest area of the school – St Angela’s

Pictured: Beekeeper Jeff with the children

Garden. The children were read a story and then were given an informative talk and demonstration from Jeff about the life cycle of a bee, the roles of the various bees, and the parts of a hive.

Pupils then had the opportunity to try on Jeff’s beekeeper hat and taste some honey which the bees had produced in Jeff’s hive, which was delicious!



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Navigating the ups and downs of friendship

Francis Holland Prep School, London, have developed a Friendology programme which aims to give pupils the tools and knowledge of how to make good friendships in school and beyond. Head of the school, Suzy Dixon, outlines what the programme is all about.

“Having healthy relationships is so crucial to character development and creating essential skills for children to thrive. As adults, our caring mechanisms are often instinctive to help children when they have fallen out with a friend, and we can gain effective results relatively fast, seeing children playing again and the problem solved. However, this tends not to be a lasting solution, and a few days or weeks later the same children return to be ‘fixed’, each time becoming a little less confident that this was quite the solution they believed in. Turn this on its head by giving the children themselves the tools to manage their own friendships and instead of sticking plaster solutions from adults, you have deeper understanding from within the child who can then manage her relationships more independently. These are skills for life.

At Francis Holland Prep we are committed to creating a warm and caring environment in which our pupils feel inspired and valued, and where their natural curiosity will be transformed into a love of learning that will last a lifetime. It is essential that our pupils feel a strong sense of belonging and develop happy, healthy relationships with their friends and teachers, as we know that when girls feel truly known, loved and valued for who they are, they go on to achieve extraordinary things.

As teachers, we found that conflicts in the playground could not be left at the door of the classroom and pupils’ learning was impacted as they were so consumed by their friendship issue. To investigate further, we consulted ‘Thrivers’, a book by Dr Michele Borba that talks to educators and parents about the difference between a ‘thriver’ who succeeds, and a ‘striver’ who always feels that they are trying to keep up with their peers.

Dr Borba’s research emphasises that nurturing children’s character traits is essential. Rather than solely focusing on academic achievement, parents and educators should adopt a more balanced approach – one that develops the whole child, emphasising emotional and moral intelligence. This equips children with character strengths including self-confidence, empathy, self-control, integrity, curiosity, perseverance, and optimism.

Next came the discovery of ‘Friendology 101’, which provides teachers with a curriculum to empower girls with friendship skills. It has been curated for different age groups to help children establish and maintain healthy relationships, manage conflict with kindness, and increase overall resilience. We have dedicated time to teach this curriculum to every year group in the school, knowing

that a common language around friendship would be hugely beneficial.

It has given us the avenue through which to develop social-emotional skills like empathy, collaboration and resilience with our pupils so that they can most positively interact with all those around them. Friendology’s language gives our pupils clear ways to openly discuss relationship situations.

Enabling younger children to recognise and name their emotions assists them with self-regulation skills to manage big feelings and those initial growing friendships. This builds to older pupils having the tools for conflict resolution, collaboration and perseverance, for healthy friendships. They can analyse their ‘friendship fire’ and use different skills from their toolbox to understand why it has occurred, and how to put it out. There is a measure of how healthy their friendship is on a ‘friend-o-meter’ to help them judge the next steps. They recognise and express if they or others have been ‘mean on purpose’ to create an open honesty about why something in their relationship has gone wrong, to bring it back to being a health relationship.

Last year, after we had been running this programme for a while, I walked across the playground at breaktime and noticed a young girl of seven



sitting on her own. I asked her if there was anything she needed, and she replied that she wanted to go to the library so I offered to accompany her. As we walked, I asked her if she was okay and her reply was, “I have had a friendship fire with my friend, but it is okay because we have them occasionally and I know that she just needs some time out, and then we will be friends again. I was just a little sad because I usually go to the library with her.” I was astonished at her eloquence, understanding and ability to express her emotions, her friendship, and how she was managing them both.

As adults teaching this curriculum, we have learnt how harnessing our pupils’ (and our own!) emotional superpowers of empathy, sensitivity, resilience and compassion helps strengthen our collaborative community. A school full of healthy, positive relationships, taught through the importance of kindness, how to support their friends and navigate social challenges with confidence, is a happy school. And as we all know so well, a happy school enables the pupils to focus well on their lessons, empowering the girls to thrive academically too.”

Tribute

A stained-glass window has been installed at Ellesmere College, Shropshire, in tribute to their Headmaster, Brendan Wignall, who passed away last year. The window is the final panel in a corridor of stained-glass designs.

The idea came from the Ellesmere College Parents’ Society (ECPS) which raised £1,600 to complete the project.

Helena Hepburn, who is Co-Chair of ECPS alongside Sadie Norris,

said: “We were aware that both he and his daughter Catherine enjoyed creating stained-glass art so having a piece specially made and installed at the college seemed fitting.

“It incorporates a raven soaring skywards and has been designed in more muted and gentle colours to denote a more restful and reflective piece.”

This is just one of a number of tributes to Brendan, who was

Headmaster at the college for 27 years. A portrait of Brendan now hangs on the wall in Big School and a new seating area and a quiet space for students and visitors to the college has also been created. An evergreen oak is also set to be planted along the boundary to the First XV Rugby Pitch, an area where he spent much time supporting the many players and teams that played throughout his Headship, including his son Hugh.



Pictured: Members of ECPS, as well as Catherine Wignall, Anne Wignall and EC Headmaster Vicky Pritt Roberts, by the stained-glass window in memory of Brendan Wignall

VAT and independent schools: claiming VAT on building costs

VAT registered independent schools will be preparing for VAT year end. As part of this process, schools must turn their attention to the VAT Capital Goods Scheme (CGS).

What is the CGS?

The CGS is a mechanism that considers VAT recovery on certain capital assets, over the 'economic life' of that asset, rather than only looking at the asset when the VAT is initially incurred.

Capital Item	Value (excl VAT)	Adjustment Period
Land and buildings Civil engineering works	£250,000 or greater	10 intervals
Computers and computer equipment Aircraft, ships and other vessels	£50,000 or greater	5 intervals

[N.B. As part of the government's tax simplification agenda, the value of land and buildings for the purposes of CGS will increase to £600,000 and computers and computer equipment will be removed from the CGS entirely. However, the implementation date and specifics of how such changes will work in practice are as yet unknown.]



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COMMITMENTS TO NET ZERO. E.G. SOLAR PANELS, HEAT PUMPS, AND ENERGY EFFICIENT MATERIALS

Applying the CGS in practice

Unless an alternative method is agreed with HMRC, the annual VAT adjustment is 1/10 of the initial VAT incurred multiplied by the Partial Exemption ('PE') percentage adopted that VAT year.

The adjustment is accounted for, at the latest, on the second VAT return following VAT year end e.g. schools with an August VAT year end would adjust for CGS on the February return.

Important: If you have not requested an alternative VAT year end from HMRC, the default is the quarter that includes March,

meaning your VAT year end compliance obligations (CGS and Annual Adjustment) may be due now!

Complexities

If your school has any of the following, it should take advice before undertaking CGS calculations, as these areas can be complicated:

- Capital Item purchased pre-registration
- Phased/rolling developments
- Projects where costs incurred over multiple 'VAT years'
- Change in ownership of the school
- Capital expenditure that is 'mixed' use
- Qualifying and non-qualifying cost
- Buildings which are also used by the community

Common errors

The CGS is a complicated area of VAT, and mistakes are common, making this an area of scrutiny by HMRC. Common errors include:

Incorrect date for 'first use' of the asset

A VAT interval isn't always a year

Using incorrect date for VAT year end (i.e. aligning with Accounting year end without approval from HMRC)

Errors calculating first interval

Claiming VAT due from HMRC prematurely

Valuation of capital items includes VAT, zero-rated or non-qualifying expenditure

Top tips

- The adjustment must be undertaken by the second VAT return following VAT year end, but can be done earlier – especially relevant if a repayment is due from HMRC!
- Keep appropriate VAT records to evidence VAT expenditure.
- Ensure that CGS data and calculations are kept for the relevant period (i.e. beyond the statutory 6 years).
- Take advice if the position is unclear (i.e. any of the complexities apply to you!).
- Document all of your decisions – including any supporting guidance used to arrive at the decision.

How can BBVAT help?

We are experts in VAT and independent schools and can work with your school to implement the CGS, undertake a mock HMRC visit and provide general VAT support.

Contact us



Please contact us for a no-obligation chat to understand how we can help you: info@bbvat.co.uk, call us on 01732 868266, or submit an enquiry on our website www.bbvat.co.uk/free-vat-helpline

Designing the future of girls' education: the importance of curriculum and co-curriculum – it's not just what you do, it's how you do it!

Last year the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) published its Insights Report on 'Designing the Future of Girls' Education'¹. The report focused on three core principles for educating girls to realise their ambitions: Classroom, Curriculum and Culture. In this article, Head of Croydon High School, Surrey, Annabel Davies, takes a closer look at the second principle exploring the importance of delivering a forward-focused curriculum and co-curriculum that removes barriers, breaks stereotypes and develops essential skills for girls.



Annabel Davies

The findings of the GDST's 'Designing the Future of Girls' Education' Insights Report, published in autumn 2024, reported the clear needs of girls in education settings and how empowering them in schools is a different task from that of boys. This article focuses on the curriculum and co-curriculum and how educators need to be aware of the nuances of their practice and school cultures to ensure that girls have all the tools and opportunities to be able to thrive both at school and, crucially, in the 'real' world. Girls learn differently to boys, think differently to boys and, very importantly, have different lived experiences to those of boys. The world has been reflected to them through a different lens, an unequal lens, and this can be magnified depending on the experience of each individual girl.

The curricular 'diet' of any school is its lifeblood with the experiences and opportunities offered being the area we mostly talk about. As independent schools we rightly shout loud and proud about our educational offering, but do we ever focus enough on how we do this? What the research in this report demonstrates is the need to have a deeper focus on how these experiences are delivered and how

we shape our education so that it enables girls to not only be part of it, but believe they have skills and talents to be leaders of it.

When looking at the curriculum and co-curriculum, the research in this area focuses on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), financial literacy and entrepreneurial intention and, finally, redefining leadership – all with the aim of giving young women the building blocks to go out into the world and live fulfilled, successful and full lives. The research is clear – girls will not approach tasks or situations in the same ways as boys and the crucial piece here is that we as educators do not encourage them of the need to do so. Female success is often achieved in a different way and schools need to break down stereotypes and barriers to ensure that girls find their own way and have the confidence to travel this path.

A thread that runs clearly through this area of the report is that girls' schools enable their pupils to believe they can achieve anything. For example, the report states that the Institute of Physics found that fewer than 2% of girls studying A Level Physics in UK schools go on to study it at university, compared to 6.5% of boys. Additionally, girls

in single sex independent schools taking A Level Physics is at 7.5% which is higher than that of boys and girls nationally. So, why this difference?

The simple answer in my mind is girls in independent settings such as Croydon High School are not fighting to be heard in the classroom. Their voice is being drawn out by the teacher and each time that happens another building block of self-belief is added. They have the confidence that it is okay not to understand something the first time and the culture of the learning environment can be shaped to embrace success and failure with potentially a greater feeling of safety. This feeling of safety grows confidence and, again, that crucial attribute, self-belief.

A bit like a secret ingredient in any award-winning recipe, self-belief is definitely that differentiator for women. The media, films and books are full of images of men leading and leading in a particular way; the GDST research shows that this is not what girls in our schools want to be. They want to be collaborative in their approach and to draw others in, often leading with empathy. This does not make them any less of a leader than

their male counterparts but it does mean female leadership will feel different. At this point, we get the understandable question – but surely it is better for girls to therefore be in a co-ed environment so that they are ready for the reality of life? The world is co-ed after all. Interestingly, the research shows that with a tailored environment and their voices being more readily heard they will be further equipped to be effective, confident and strong leaders. They will move beyond their comfort zone. They will show grit in difficult situations. They will know their worth.

So how can we, as educators, make a difference to young women in all our settings when we consider our curricular diet? Firstly, by training staff on how to tailor for girls. Secondly, by highlighting active stereotypes and breaking these down. And thirdly, by advocating and showcasing female role models to both inspire and empower. For girls, seeing female success in all areas of school life allows them to further develop their confidence, believe they can achieve their goals, and ultimately it all feeds into that one magic ingredient for their growth – self-belief.

¹ Designing the Future of Girls' Education, GDST, <https://www.gdst.net/gdst-insights-report>

Seamless school catering: the easy switch to apetito

School meals should be all about providing pupils with nutritious meals. However, far too often catering is simply causing significant headaches. Many schools are experiencing inconsistent meal quality, rising costs, labour challenges, poor menu variety and low uptake.

To offer pupils the best meals possible, we know many schools want to make a change when it comes to their catering services. However, switching catering suppliers ready for the new academic year may feel like too big a challenge.

This is understandable as when it comes to moving to a new catering provider there is always uncertainty and logistical elements to consider. Questions will rightly be asked about whether a new provider will be able to deliver on the quality of meals and if the dishes will be enjoyed by pupils.

We know that change can be daunting, but there is a simple solution available that delivers outstanding quality, simplified operations and serious cost savings in every bite. With apetito's revolutionary premium pre-prepared meals service, switching is truly simple.

We're already providing nutritious meals loved by over 25,000 pupils each day, so you can trust us that your school is in safe hands. With our premium pre-prepared meals, lunchtimes will swiftly become one of the key highlights of every pupil's day. But don't just take our word for it: here is what some pupils at Ursuline School had to say about our meals.

When speaking about apetito, pupil Amber, age nine, said: *"My favourite part of the school day is eating lunch because I know it will always be very tasty. There are also lots of options to choose from, which means our lunches are varied and not the same thing every day. That's what I like about apetito. My favourite dishes are either the vegetable quiche or the chicken goujons as they're both tasty and flavourful. It always makes me feel good that I'm eating a balanced lunch and makes a real difference to my day because I get filled up from the lunches and I'm not hungry for the rest of the day until I get home."*

Aria, age six, is also a big fan of our chicken goujons.

"I like that with apetito we can eat lunch at our school. Before

apetito we had to go over to the high school and eat with the really big kids, which I didn't like. I prefer it now and like the apetito food. The chicken goujons are my favourite. They're perfect. I just love them. The food gives me loads of energy and it's really delicious."

And it's not just pupils who benefit, but schools as well. Headteacher, Natasha Boyce, has seen a real difference since introducing apetito.

"Our school has never ever historically served hot food and with apetito, in the space of a few weeks, we were serving hot food, nutritional food. The quality can't be compared, it's more affordable and the variety is really second to none."

Switching made simple with apetito

Kitchen or no kitchen, our premium pre-prepared meals system works in any kitchen setup. As our meals come frozen, schools simply need enough freezer space and ovens to store

and cook the food and a place to serve up our meals. This is because, at apetito, we do the heavy lifting for you. Our expert chefs, dietitians and nutritionists have developed a huge range of delicious, nutritious meals so that schools don't need these specialist skills in-house. Kitchen staff simply need to take the meals out of the freezer, cook and then serve our meals to pupils.

It doesn't stop there, as our dedicated team are on hand to guide you through each and every step of getting set up with apetito, from menu planning to staff training. You can be assured of a smooth rollout in just 3-4 weeks.

As one of the fastest growing school meal providers, we're committed to revolutionising school catering and are delivering outstanding quality, simplified operations and serious cost savings in every bite.

To learn more about apetito's service, please visit:
www.apetito.link/switching-made-simple



Promoting independent learning – focus on an Academic Poster Conference

Now in its fifth year, Wrekin College, Shropshire, holds an annual Academic Poster Conference aimed at fostering independent learning within the school community. Deputy Head (Academic) at the school, and person behind the conference, Benjamin Smith, shares how the initiative came about and how it works.

Rarely does the inspiration for an initiative to promote independent learning come from a hospital waiting room. Yet several years ago on an NHS noticeboard, surrounded by posters extolling the virtues of handwashing and the importance of the flu jab, I noticed a flyer inviting entrists to the 'Royal College of Physicians Poster Competition'. This offered practising doctors and medical students the opportunity to showcase their research by condensing it into an 'academic poster', a visually engaging, A1-sized summary of their work designed to facilitate its discussion with other medics. Contributors' work would form the basis of a conference where they would stand next to their poster, delivering a synopsis of their projects to their peers as they circulated around an exhibition of the latest medical research. Prizes would be awarded by a team of judges for the posters and presentations deemed to deserve the greatest merit. Such events, I later discovered, form an integral part of medical training and doctors' ongoing professional development. I was immediately struck by the potential benefits of transposing such a competition into a secondary school setting. Could

there be a more creative way of fostering students' intellectual curiosity and independent learning skills than challenging them to create their own academic poster that they would be required to present in front of the school community? Could a school-based poster conference offer a helpful corrective to students' natural preference, often bemoaned by my colleagues, for being 'spoon-fed' the right answer rather than seeking it out for themselves? Despite not all of our students aspiring to the medical profession, such an initiative seemed worth pursuing further.

In the December of 2021 I therefore decided to challenge our Fourth and Upper Sixth Form students to select one topic from any area of either their studies or personal interests that could form the basis of a detailed piece of independent learning. Granting students free rein over their choice of subject matter proved crucial in ensuring their continued engagement in this initiative. It gave them a much greater sense of ownership over their work than would have been possible had topics been prescribed. Once they had decided on a topic, students were required to come up with

the title of their academic poster, which had to be expressed in the form of a research question and submitted for approval to ensure its viability as a project that could be completed within a 10-week timeframe. The range of questions proposed was impressively eclectic, encompassing everything from contemporary societal issues such as 'Is transgender sport a level playing field?' to more traditional academic enquiries like 'How does the shape of a rocket affect its aerodynamics?' The enthusiasm shown by students in defining their own area of research was palpable and reflected a commendable intellectual ambition not always discernible when they study the conventional curriculum. The next step of this initiative was the research phase, during which students were given six weeks to explore their question completely independently, without the support of teaching staff. My colleagues were explicitly instructed to refrain from offering any assistance or guidance to students, who had to rely solely on their own resourcefulness and ingenuity to obtain the information they required.

After their research had been completed, students faced the most demanding aspect of creating an academic poster – summarising the main findings of their research on a large piece of foamboard in a way that would engage the interest of a general audience. Students had to reflect carefully on how to present a synopsis of their work in a visually stimulating manner that appealed to the layperson, while still communicating with rigour the intricacies of the research process and the conclusions they had reached. They also had to plan how to curate their poster



effectively in front of an audience of teaching staff, governors, parents and fellow pupils at a poster conference that was held in the school's Memorial Hall. This proved a popular and highly interactive evening which gave those in attendance a real sense of the breadth of pupils' interests and their genuine intellectual curiosity for their chosen subjects. A visiting academic judged each of the posters on display while the general audience had the opportunity to vote for the student whose poster and spoken presentation merited the 'People's Choice' award.

The impact of this initiative within the pupil body was clear. A Lower Sixth student, who produced a poster on whether Braille is becoming obsolete, commented that: "Wrekin's Academic Poster Conference gave me the freedom to explore a topic that genuinely interested me. It allowed me to develop not only academic independence but academic creativity. I was able to channel my curiosity into a project that was both intellectually rigorous and personally rewarding." Not only did the poster conference help to refine students' independent research skills, it also raised the profile of academic enquiry throughout both the pupil body and the wider school community. At a time when the ready-made answers provided by artificial intelligence threaten to obscure the value of individual academic endeavour, an initiative of this nature has never been more important.

Wrekin's annual Academic Poster Conference takes place every February and is now in its fifth year.



Poster Conference



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The evolution of STEM: Preparing young people for the workplace

Head of STEM at Downe House School, Berkshire, Rick Hollingworth, looks at how the world of STEM in schools is flexing and evolving to support young people in the future workplace; how teachers are having to adapt; and what new techniques are being considered to ensure education in the field continues to be relevant in a fast-moving climate.

If we consider the technology-driven workplace that lies ahead for our students, it is not hard to see why a well-rounded STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education is crucial in preparing young people for the challenges and opportunities they will likely face in the future. With the role of generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) also at the forefront of our minds, schools are tasked with ensuring that students join the workplace or move on to higher education with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in demanding and fast-paced environments. As such, STEM education continues to evolve in schools with more adaptation being required from teachers as we explore new learning approaches in a bid to keep STEM education as relevant and impactful as possible.

The significance of STEM education cannot be underestimated. As industries such as AI, cyber security, renewable energy, and biotechnology expand, there is arguably an increasing need for a young workforce equipped with robust STEM skills. Yet STEM subjects not only foster technical competencies, they also enhance skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity – skills that are essential in any career.

One of the most notable ways STEM education is evolving is through curriculum innovation. Traditional methods of teaching STEM subjects often focused on repetitive and isolated theoretical concepts. However, schools are now shifting more towards project-based and enquiry-based learning. These approaches emphasise real-world applications of STEM knowledge, encouraging our students to engage with complex problems that resonate, while developing solutions that have practical implications.

Connecting classroom learning to real-world scenarios

For example, students might work on projects that require them to design a sustainable energy solution for their school. This not only engages them in environmental science and engineering but also instils a sense of responsibility and relevance. By connecting classroom learning to real-world scenarios, students are more likely to retain information and understand how the work they are doing applies beyond the school environment.

Collaboration has also become a cornerstone of effective STEM education in school. In today's workplace, most projects require teamwork, and schools are adjusting their teaching strategies to reflect this reality. Championing collaborative learning experiences and encouraging students to work together on projects and share their ideas is something that is happening more and more in classrooms today.

Activities such as group projects and STEM-themed competitions enable students to develop essential soft skills including communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. These experiences also nurture a sense of community and belonging amongst students, helping them to grow and thrive as well-rounded individuals. Many schools are also making use of tools like online collaboration platforms and apps, which help students work together more effectively, even in remote or hybrid learning environments.

Bridging the gap with industry partnerships

Probably one of the most talked-about changes, as STEM education rapidly evolves, is the traditional role of teachers and what that might look like in the next five to ten years. While the traditional model of the teacher as the sole source of classroom knowledge will become more obsolete, they will

likely be transformed into expert facilitators of learning, guiding students at a more focused and personalised level as they explore and investigate. That said, teachers are increasingly encouraged to pursue CPD (Continuous Professional Development) opportunities that enhance their understanding of STEM fields, technology integration, and pedagogical methods. This continual learning process equips educators with the knowledge and skills they need to inspire and engage students.

For schools, it is also useful to look at partnering with local industry professionals and organisations within the field of STEM, with the objective of bringing real-world experiences into the classroom and further bridging the gap between education and the workplace. These experiential learning opportunities and collaborations can provide students with access to work experience, internships, networking, mentorship programmes, and other hands-on experiences that directly relate to their studies. Industry professionals can also offer insights into current trends, challenges, and innovations, which will enhance the educational experience schools provide.

The integration of technology in STEM education plays a critical role in making learning more engaging and relevant. Digital tools, coding software, virtual labs, and simulations allow students to explore complex concepts and experiment with ideas in ways that were previously unfeasible. Likewise, online resources and platforms provide access to a wealth of information and interactive content for students. As technology continues to advance, schools will be expected to remain adaptable, continually seeking innovative ways to incorporate new tools and resources into their curriculum.



Rick Hollingworth

Value of soft skills in the future workplace

While technical skills are essential for many job roles today, soft skills are increasingly recognised as vital components of workplace readiness. Employers are seeking candidates who can effectively communicate, work well in teams, and demonstrate agility and flexibility. Incorporating training for soft skills into STEM subjects is certainly something that all schools should be pushing for to ensure their students hone those key skills that are equally valuable in the job market.

With this in mind, schools could consider integrating activities that enhance public speaking and presentation skills. For example, students might be required to present their projects to peers, other members of the community, or a panel of judges in competitions. This type of exposure encourages confidence and clarity in communication, which is empowering for students who are navigating the complexities of a dynamic future workplace.

As we look to the future, it is clear that the evolution of STEM education is not just about teaching students mathematical concepts or scientific theories; it is about nurturing the innovators, problem solvers, and thinkers who will shape the industries of tomorrow. By ensuring that STEM education remains dynamic and relevant, schools play a vital role in preparing young people for a world where adaptability, creativity, and technical expertise will be in high demand. In this way, they are not merely educating students but also empowering the next generation to succeed in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.



STEAMfest

Leighton Park School, Berkshire, has hosted its annual STEAMfest event, welcoming 300 Year 5 pupils from seven local primary and prep schools, St Piran's, The Oratory Prep School (OPS), Farley Hill Primary, Sonning CoFe Primary, Emmer Green Primary, Whiteknights Primary, and New Christchurch Primary.

Pupils, organised into teams of five, tackled three distinct activities mirroring real-world humanitarian challenges: constructing storm-proof shelters, designing rafts to transport essential aid across water, and devising systems to move clean water efficiently.

Science teacher and STEAM Co-ordinator at Leighton Park, Rachel Milhofer, who co-organised the event, said: "It was great to

welcome local primary school students to the Park and share the joy that is STEAM. Our own students who supported the activities were delighted to help guide the younger pupils and point out how Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, alongside the creativity of the Arts, can be applicable in real-world scenarios, such as in a humanitarian aid crisis. The visiting pupils loved the challenges, assessing how well they completed the tasks, and what they could do to improve if they repeated it."

The event is part of Leighton Park's 'Be Inspired Programme', which offers local schools free events and activities designed to extend and enrich the curriculum for Key Stage 2 pupils and beyond.

Pictured: Pupils enjoying STEAMfest

Recode the Curriculum event

Francis Holland, Regent's Park, has held an event designed to inspire secondary school girls to see themselves as future tech leaders. It saw female founders from biotech, fashion, and beauty tech industries lead interactive workshops aimed to empower girls aged 11-18 and tackle the widening tech gender gap with creativity, confidence, and real-world skills.

The event was the brainchild of Head, Katharine Woodcock, and Louise Laing, founder of Recode the Curriculum and mother of two teenage daughters. Louise launched the project after confronting the stark reality of the tech gender divide. "The data was staggering – only 3% of UK venture capital goes to women founders, and just 0.3% of AI investment reaches all-female teams," Laing said. "But the root of the problem starts much earlier – in the classroom. That's why we partnered with Francis Holland, Regent's Park, to ignite a mindset shift among girls before they even choose their subjects."

In offering advice on 'Why your voice matters' and emphasising that 'Tech needs you even if you're not techy', this live event acted as a pilot for a wider movement to reshape tech education in the UK, introducing a creative, applied approach to digital literacy, emphasising design, storytelling, ethics, and entrepreneurship alongside coding.

At the event, pupils from both Francis Holland, Regent's Park and partner school St Marylebone Church of England school, heard from five women reshaping tech across industries, including biotech innovator Dr Stasa Stankovic, Co-founder of OvartiX, who is pioneering therapeutics to extend fertility and delay menopause. The panel also featured Dr Alex Box, Founder of V-Metics Beauty; Simone Oloman, Co-founder of NIFT; Nona Dimitrova, Content & Community Manager at Whering; and Louise Laing, Founder of Phygen and Phygitaltwin.io.



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'Adolescence': the empathy gap writ large – and how we close it

With the recent Netflix drama sparking conversation about online safety, misogyny, and the impact of social media on young people, in particular boys, Deputy Head Pastoral and DSL at Lord Wandsworth College, Hampshire, Ali Cocksworth, considers how the generational empathy gap can complicate safeguarding and offers some practical solutions for educators looking to protect students in a digital-first world.

Hypnotic and horrifying in equal measure, Netflix's drama 'Adolescence' struck a nerve with educators and parents everywhere. This is, in part, because it is very, very good TV. As a cultural artefact, it combines electric writing with some astounding performances to deliver a beautiful, terrifying work of art. Artistic merit aside though, the show has started a long overdue national conversation about what our children, and particularly our boys, are being exposed to online. In doing so, 'Adolescence' has given visceral form to our worst nightmare: that ordinary teenagers are being invisibly radicalised by mainstream online content, in plain sight, while we, the responsible, well-meaning adults in the room, remain powerless to stop it.

It has also starkly reframed what we understand by the term 'radicalisation': at a time when the Prevent pathway is under real scrutiny following the horrendous killings in Stockport, the drama has helped throw into sharp relief that the threat of radicalisation exists in increasingly mainstream spaces and, crucially, how ill-equipped the grown-ups are to combat it. The show is patterned with well-meaning adults who are utterly lost in the waters that their children swim in, and that such bewilderment renders them desperately, tragically culpable.

It is important, though, to understand 'Adolescence' for what it is: a phenomenal piece of drama that excavates and tests current preoccupations and fears. Just as Shakespeare spoke to contemporary anxieties around kingship, for example, so really good drama of the 21st century plays with the anxieties

of our day. In the era of Trump and Musk, an almost entirely unregulated online world and some troubling trends suggestive of rising misogyny among young people, 'Adolescence' rings terribly true. But it isn't. It is not documentary but a scarily realist fiction, and a fiction that should certainly be ringing alarm bells but we in schools need to ensure that they are the right alarm bells. 'Adolescence' offers a desolate world in which all of our safeguards, our PSHE provision, and parental advice programmes seem laughably inadequate against the sheer volume and persuasive power of toxic online content. It highlights the worst-possible-case-scenario for young people adrift in this new brand of extremism but it also underscores the urgency of action. The boys we teach are not foregone conclusions incapable of critical thought; they are brilliant individuals full of potential, in need of empathy and support making it all the more crucial that we create meaningful human connections that proactively counteract the tidal pull of online alienation.

I see first-hand how hard it is for adults to grasp the lived reality of pupils' online experiences. How can parents and teachers possibly empathise with the importance of a streak on Snapchat? It feels trivial and alien, trapping us into trivialising and alienating the experiences of our pupils. It is a truism that children are two or perhaps twelve steps ahead of their parents in their grasp of technology; how can we be expected to keep up and what does that mean for our efforts to safeguard them?

As educators, it is our job to work in partnership with parents

to avoid a rising sense of panic. We cannot simply demonise the internet – it is important to young people; research from the UK Safer Internet Centre identifies that 65% of young people say they would feel disconnected from the world if they couldn't be online. Helping them to make sense of their daily lives and wider society – 70% say being online helps them understand what's happening in the world and 60% only know about certain issues or news because of the internet. Instead of lecturing children about the dangers of social media, it is incumbent upon adults to work together to prevent the children in our care being so lost that they become vulnerable to the more malevolent forces at work on the internet. The antidote to digital alienation lies in prioritising and championing what TikTok cannot replicate: meaningful human connection. Parents and teachers will quite simply not be able to match our children's digital fluency and that's okay, as long as we are able to offer compelling alternatives that speak to those most fundamental human needs: to be seen, to be heard, to be loved.

It is in our gift as the responsible adults in the room to create deliberate analogue spaces – whether a simple device-free dinner table or a wellbeing walk in the woods – to carve out room for in-person conversation and space away from the screen. It is the job of parents and teachers to weave these spaces into the natural rhythm of everyday family and school life: role-modelling and supporting young people to step back from their phones and to find the joy in each other, IRL (in real life). Getting outside,

whether paddling a kayak on the river or toasting marshmallows on a campout, enables children to connect with their own bodies again. Mud under the fingernails, leaves in hair – the outdoors is able to engage young people fully: brain, body and senses all at once in a way that makes scrolling seem that little bit emptier.

At a time when many of the boys we teach risk being set adrift by identity politics, perhaps the most powerful tool we have is to continue to approach our boys with unconditional positive regard. If we assume the best of them and reach out to them with empathy first, connecting before we correct, we stand a much better chance of counteracting the toxicity that is targeting them online. If we provide our boys with outstanding role models and build their trust in our faith in them, they will be far less vulnerable to the advances of the Andrew Tates of this world.

It is also worth noting that the gap between childhood and adult experience has always existed. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry puts it in 'Le Petit Prince': "Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them." The experience gap is the foundation for some of the greatest adventures in children's literature, from Peter Pan to Lyra Belacqua, each fraught with its own dangers. The key is to empower the young people in our care to navigate those risks, the Captain Hooks and Mrs Coulters of the internet, with critical thought and a sense of security that their offline relationships will always be more meaningful, that the adults are not here to lecture them but to teach them how to keep themselves safe.



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Shared Parental Leave: a wonderful wellbeing opportunity?

Parental leave policies are evolving to reflect the changing needs of today's families. One increasingly common approach is Shared Parental Leave (SPL), which allows parents to divide the traditional maternity leave period more flexibly – enabling fathers or partners to take on a greater caregiving role from the start. But what are the benefits this option has to offer? Assistant Head (Common Room) at King's College Taunton, Somerset, Emma Gregory, shares her experience.



You may already be familiar with Shared Parental Leave which means that the father or co-partner takes up some of the leave that would usually be automatically taken by the mother.

When we found out that we were expecting a baby last year, it was my husband's love of reading the small print that brought us to the realisation that not only could we choose the shared parental leave option but actually take the time together, concurrently. This meant that we could both take six months off work and spend an incredibly special period of time being a brand new family. What an opportunity!

My starting point was that I knew I wanted to return to work after six months and would have done so regardless. I didn't want to be away for too long from a job I enjoy so much, and felt that too long a break would be disadvantageous both for the school and for my own mental health. So the potential disadvantage that it would reduce my period of maternity leave was not a factor for me. I enjoyed sharing the excitement when my husband realised that he would

be able to take a stint of time off work in a way that he had never before expected would be available to him. Even better, we could share it together. Of course, his employer had to factor in a six-month absence from work, but he was able to give them plenty of notice and set up arrangements to minimise disruption.

In order to get the numbers and dates to work, I must admit to some accidentally fortunate timing on my part. With a due date of 2 July I knew that I would already be on school summer holiday for the first few weeks of my baby's life. Following on from that, we calculated that I would be able to request my periods of maternity leave to take place in term time, suspend the leave during school holidays and thereby take advantage of as long a period of unbroken leave as possible.

The outcome was that my experience of maternity leave was quite different from most. Usually, the father is able to be at home for those intense first two weeks and then, by necessity, has to get back into the swing of their job as soon as their statutory paternity leave is over. For us, that pressure

was removed and it meant that we could share the load in a way that suited us.

Firstly, it meant that my husband was able to enjoy a full school summer holiday with me in a way that he has not been able to do since he left education. We spent valuable time with friends and family, including catching up with some people we haven't seen for years. Within a few weeks we felt we could venture out: we started with some local day trips, then went for an overnight stay in Oxford, and we went to London twice.

Then, realising that we'd been blessed with a baby with good health who didn't mind travelling, we realised that we could take things to the next level. So, we planned to spend six weeks in Portugal. The lead-up was not without its worry and strain, as we had to fit in our baby's first few rounds of vaccinations. Personally, I was worried about what our health visitor would think or say. But when I tentatively outlined the idea to her, expecting to be told that it isn't possible, she simply looked at us wide eyed and said, "Why not?"

And we made it. Having been in

education my entire life, I couldn't believe that in the middle of November we were on the beach in the sunshine. With great restraint I did not post this on social media to rub it in to everyone back at work! OK, the journey home in December was fraught, thanks in part to a cancelled ferry. But that's a story for another day. I returned to work in January refreshed with a shedload of new memories, photos, experiences and stories. As did my husband.

So, what can independent schools learn from this? Firstly, don't be surprised if new fathers on your staff body ask to be away from work for longer than the statutory paternity leave; but on the other hand, the pregnant mother may return quicker than you expect. And, of course, keep in mind the massive wellbeing benefits for staff. It is possible to take up that opportunity of family time away from work with less impact on the woman's work than you might think. I would encourage new parents to have open conversations with their managers and HR departments and in general to take any opportunity that comes your way.

Life Skills Day

St. Helen's College Prep School, Middlesex, has hosted a Life Skills Day to support pupil personal growth and development.

Designed to teach (or allow children to practise) some essential life skills which are not always taught in school, every child across the school from Nursery through to Year 6 participated.

Age-appropriate activities were provided for all of the children,

Pictured: Den building on the Life Skills Day

to teach a wide range of skills such as financial planning, sandwich making, shoelace tying, tent pitching, den building, clothes hanging and folding, gift wrapping, car washing, recycling, making a bed, Muay Thai mindset and different ways of looking after our bodies. Parents volunteered to share their skills and expertise with the children at timetabled sessions throughout the day.

St. Helen's College Head, Ms Drummond, said: "The children thoroughly enjoyed the day and were so enthusiastic about attempting new activities and consolidating existing knowledge and skills. We are delighted that they made the most of the opportunities on the day and hope they will put to good use the wonderful experiences they had."



Co-ed extension

Trinity School, Croydon, has announced it will be extending co-education from its Sixth Form only to students of all ages. The school will welcome its first co-educational intake in Year 6 and Year 7 in September 2027 and will be fully co-educational by 2031.

Trinity School was founded in 1882 by the John Whitgift Foundation and moved from central Croydon to its current site in Shirley Park in 1965. The school continued its evolution with the introduction of girls to the Sixth Form in 2011.

Headmaster, Alasdair Kennedy, said, "This is a really exciting new chapter for our school and the

wider community. By expanding what we have been doing for older students since 2011, we are building an even more diverse learning environment that benefits everyone. From cognitive skills and critical thinking to creativity and cultures, the greater the range of perspectives and experiences that students are exposed to, the better their learning and personal development outcomes. We are proud of our socio-economic and culturally diverse student population and look forward to extending diversity through co-education across all year groups."

The decision is fully supported by the Senior Management Team, School Governors, and the John Whitgift Foundation.

The school's transition and expansion will take place gradually. With support from the Foundation, Trinity will make significant investments in its facilities for the benefit of all current and future generations of students.



Pictured: Trinity School

Move to co-ed brought forward

Moulsford Prep School, Oxfordshire, which recently announced plans for its Prep School to begin welcoming girls into Year 3 in 2026, has brought the move forward by a year.

Since announcing the phased move to co-education, the school has been working hard in anticipation of girls joining the Prep School, focusing on areas such as pastoral welfare, staff training, the academic curriculum, sport and extracurricular activities, facilities and uniform. Having made good progress on all fronts the school is now ready to welcome the first cohort of girls in September 2025.

The Pre-Prep has already successfully transitioned to co-education and by September 2030 (when girls currently in Year 2 will naturally progress into Year 8), the school will have girls in every year group.

Headmaster Ben Beardmore-Gray commented, "Societal changes form the background to this

decision, with families, including many Moulsford families, increasingly seeking to educate their children together and in a co-educational environment. This is reflected across the independent sector which is seeing a clear shift towards co-education and the recent political and economic changes are accelerating this direction of travel. Moulsford is currently in a position of strength, from which we are able to make well considered and long-term strategic decisions."

Moulsford is able to draw upon in-house co-educational expertise. Prior to leading Moulsford, Ben Beardmore-Gray jointly ran a co-ed school for seven years with his wife Sarah. Similarly, Deputy Head, Tiffany Squire; Assistant Head - Pastoral, Vicki Rae; Assistant Head - Academic, Caroline Scriven; and Director of Sport, Lee Chaffey have many years of co-educational leadership and teaching experience between them.



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Electric minibuses can now be driven on a standard car licence

From the 10 June 2025 the UK government has changed the driving licence regulations for electric minibuses. Previously, electric minibuses could only be driven with D1 entitlement, because anything above the 9-seaters were over 3,500 kg. The change in regulations means drivers with B1 car licences can now drive the heavier 12-16 seat electric minibuses.



John Peterson

Key changes to driving licence regulations

Drivers holding a standard Category B licence, a car licence, will now be able to drive ZEV (zero emission vehicles) with a GVW of up to 4,250 kg; the previous limit was 3,500 kg. This change is in acknowledgment of the additional weight of the battery in an electric vehicle.

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

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

Weights of electric minibuses

9-seat electric minibuses, technically classed as cars, could always be driven on a standard car licence as their GVW was under 3,500 kg. The popular choices for 9-seat electric vehicles for UK schools and organisations are the Toyota Proace Verso electric, Vauxhall Vivaro Life and Citroën ë-SpaceTourer with GVW ranging between 2,800 and 3,100 kgs.

The 9-seat MAXUS eDeliver 9 WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle) could also be included in this category, as it could (and can still) be driven on a standard B1 car licence.

12- to 16-seat electric minibuses

Larger electric minibuses, including the MAXUS eDeliver 9 14-seat minibus or the 15-seat Ford eTransit with a GVW of 3500-4250 kg, depending on configurations, can now also be driven on a B1 car licence.

Additional driver training for heavier vehicles

Even though D1 entitlement is no longer required for these heavier electric minibuses, Rivervale will always recommend additional practical driver training (whether it is D1 or MiDAS) for anyone driving a minibus, diesel or electric, because the sizes and weights of minibuses are significantly different from those of a car. Even 9-seat minibuses, classed as cars, can be significantly larger than the average hatchback. Electric minibuses also have additional features drivers of petrol/diesel vehicles may not be aware of.

As well as addressing driver confidence with these larger vehicles, driver training can cover other considerations before they are taken out on the road, including:

- **Appreciating the dimensions of the larger vehicle**

A Ford Transit 17-seat minibus is 54% longer, 37% wider (including wing mirrors) and 82% higher than your average hatchback. If you're used to

driving a car, it is easy to forget how much heavier, wider and taller the minibus you are driving is, leading to common damage such as roof strikes and wing mirror damage.

- **Reduced manoeuvrability**

The extra weight of the vehicle will shift the minibus' centre of gravity, making it harder to handle, especially in tight turns and small spaces. For those not used to reversing, turning and parking larger vehicles, this can present an issue and can hamper journeys and lead to dents and scrapes.

- **Greater stopping distances**

Heavier vehicles require more time and distance to stop due to increased friction and momentum. Understanding stopping distances is an important part of road safety.

- **Regenerative braking**

Many electric minibuses have regenerative braking, to recharge the battery during deceleration and braking. Drivers need to know this should be turned off on motorways or fast/busy roads.

- **Rapid acceleration**

Some electric minibuses accelerate faster than many of their petrol and diesel equivalents. It's recommended that you become familiar with this difference in driving

before going out on the public highway.

- **Silent operation**

Electric vehicles are generally quieter than their diesel counterparts. Drivers need to appreciate that pedestrians and other road users may not hear their approach as easily.

- **Increased risks in collisions**

Heavier vehicles are more likely to cause serious injuries or fatalities in collisions, especially with lighter third-party vehicles.

- **Visibility issues**

Larger vehicles have increased blind spots and can obstruct the view of other drivers, making it challenging to safely pass and manoeuvre around them.

Rivervale recommend that anyone planning to drive a minibus on a regular basis undertakes some form of training, ideally both theory and practical, so that they are aware of the issues and challenges of driving larger vehicles, whether this is MiDAS or a practical driving assessment with Rivervale.

Driving electric minibuses on a car licence

The change in licensing regulations for ZEVs is particularly good news for schools operating under a Section 19 Permit, who want to reduce their carbon footprint and increase their environmental credentials, but whose drivers do not have D1 entitlement.

John Peterson is Director of Minibus Services, Rivervale. If you'd like a quote for an electric minibus or to discuss driver training options please give the Rivervale Minibus team a call on 01869 253744 or email minibus@rivervale.co.uk.



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ISC Census 2025

The annual Census of schools in membership of the constituent associations of the Independent Schools Council has been published. The figures below provide a snapshot of key results from the survey, which was carried out January 2025 and completed by all UK member schools.

Changing membership

- Since last year's Census, where 1,411 schools were in membership of the constituent associations: 17 schools left, 34 schools joined, and 10 schools consolidated records with other ISC member schools to form 5 schools for Census reporting. There are therefore 1,423 schools in membership this year, 1,389 of which participated in both the 2024 and 2025 Census.

Pupil numbers

- Pupil numbers have declined 2.0%. There are now 545,640 pupils at 1,423 ISC member schools, a reduction of nearly 11,000 compared with 2024 and despite a net increase of 12 in the number of schools in membership.
- At the 1,380 schools completing the Census in both 2024 and 2025, pupil numbers have decreased 13,363 or 2.4%. Breaking this down by year group, three of the main intake years for independent schools – Reception, Year 3, and Year 7 – recorded decreases of over 5%.
- 102,544 pupils are new to their school in the current academic year, a decrease of 5,578 or 5.2% from 108,122 in 2024.

Looking just at schools who completed the Census in both 2024 and 2025, new pupils have decreased by 5,714 or 5.3%.

Fees and bursaries

With all UK independent schools now required to add 20% VAT on fees from January 1st there have been two fee change points since the 2024 Census. The first change was in September 2024 when schools implemented fee changes decided upon earlier in the year. The second change was in January 2025, when some schools adjusted their underlying fees so that the full 20% VAT rise was not passed on to parents.

- 584 schools or 67.7% reduced their underlying day fees in January 2025 to prevent passing the full 20% VAT to parents.
- The average day school fee has increased 1.8%, with the majority of day schools charging between £4,000 and £7,000 per term excluding VAT.
- Fee assistance worth over £1.5bn was provided this year, an increase of 11.4% from 2024. Nearly three quarters of this assistance (£1.1bn) comes from the school.

- Over a third of all ISC pupils receive some type of fee assistance.
- The average means-tested bursary was worth £13,852 a year, an increase of 7.3% compared with last year.
- For the first time this year, government assistance to military families was collected separately; 1,419 pupils received this type of fee support, which totalled £38m.

Boarding

- There were 63,035 pupils boarding on the day of the Census in January. This represents 11.6% of all pupils in ISC schools and a decrease of 2,614 boarders or 4.0% compared with 2024.

Partnerships

- Partnership work with state schools has increased, with 9,301 partnerships reported in the calendar year 2024 in areas such as mental health support, improving access to the arts, exam preparation, sharing facilities and oracy.
- 1,079 ISC schools reported operating at least one partnership with a local state school, an increase from 1,068 last year.

Teaching staff

- A total of 60,225 full-time equivalent teachers are employed at ISC schools.
- The pupil-teacher ratio at ISC schools is 8.6:1. This compares with an average of 18.1:1 across all state-funded schools in 2024.
- A total of 11,395 full-time equivalent teaching assistants are employed at ISC schools, making up 16% of classroom staff. The equivalent proportion at state-funded schools is 38%.

CEO of the Independent Schools Council, Julie Robinson, said: "The rise in bursary funds and partnership work shows that improving education for all continues to be at the heart of our schools' purpose, even as political decisions affect their work. However, given the decline in pupil numbers and the associated fall in revenue, it is unclear whether the past few years of rises in fee assistance will be sustainable in the future. We urge the government to work with us to ensure independent education remains an option for as many families as possible over the coming years."

To see the full Census report visit www.isc.co.uk/research/annual-census

VAT – High Court judgment

The legal challenge to the government's policy to place VAT on independent school fees has been rejected in the High Court.

Several families supported by the Independent Schools Council (ISC) were represented in the case, which was heard alongside other claimants.

Responding to the news, CEO of the ISC, Julie Robinson, said: "This is an unprecedented tax on education and it was right that its compatibility with human rights law was tested.

"We would like to thank the claimants who shared their stories on key issues: SEND, faith schools, bilingual provision and girls-only education. It showcased how vital independent schools are for many families and the broad, diverse community choosing what they feel is the right education for their child.

"The ISC is carefully considering the court's judgment and next steps. Our focus remains on supporting schools, families and children. We will continue to work to ensure the government is held to account over the negative impact this tax on education is having across independent and state schools."

Partner and Head of Public Law at Kingsley Napley, who represented the claimants supported by the ISC, Sophie Kemp, said: "This is a disappointing decision for the claimants, who are carefully considering the court's judgment. It was important to challenge VAT on school fees, which both the government and the court recognised had a discriminatory impact on children at religious schools as well as significant impact on children with SEN. The court felt that it was not able to interfere because of the leeway it must give to Parliament. Unfortunately, this doesn't help the claimants, who must now weigh their options."



Password for schools: The key to multilingual learner success

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Profile

In conversation with Sean Morgan

Born: 1968

Married: To Rachel.

Children:
Harry (29), Charlie (27).

Schools and universities attended: Yarm School followed by Leeds Carnegie.

First job:
Ice cream seller on Praia Da Rocha Beach, Portugal.

First job in independent education: PE and Games Teacher at Solihull School.

Appointed to the current job:
September 2019.

Favourite piece of music:
Dire Straits – Telegraph Road.

Favourite food: Spicy prawn and chorizo pasta.

Favourite drink:
Sparkling water and rosé wine (separately!).

Favourite holiday destination:
Skiathos, Greece.

Favourite leisure pastime:
Travelling and watching live sport. Playing golf, running, and cycling.

Favourite TV or radio programme/series:
'High Performance' radio podcast series.

Suggested epitaph:
I would aspire to it being something like: He listened with care, led with kindness and lived with honour.

Q Was teaching always your intended career path? Who or what inspired you into the profession?

A In truth, it was not until my final teaching placement at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, that I was convinced that teaching was for me. The Head of Department, John Cholewa, very much encouraged me to take the leap. Of course, I have never looked back or regretted it for a moment. Teaching is a truly wonderful profession. Each day brings numerous opportunities and challenges. I cannot conceive there to be a more rewarding profession or one that affords such incredible variety in any given day!

Q Part of your role at Solihull is to create an environment to retain staff. What's the key reason that you have stayed for nearly 34 years?

A In short, the community. This is a very special place; all stakeholders – pupils, staff, parents, former pupils and governors – pull together to ensure that we are constantly striving for collective, healthy improvement and it is a joy to be a part of.

Q Solihull School has created a bursary recognising your significant contribution. What criteria does The Sean Morgan Sports Bursary Fund adopt in the selection of recipients?

A Yes, a real honour! As the title of the bursary suggests, recipients need to excel in sport (while reaching the academic requirements too) but of great importance is that the young people enrich our environment fully. They must be role models on and off the field of play and be true ambassadors of the school and its values. The four young people that have received the bursary to date have met the brief perfectly and are flourishing in our environment.

Q You stress the importance of sport and games to pupils, and Solihull participates in a number of overseas sports tours. How do you weigh the benefits of these with concerns over their environmental impact? Is there not sufficient opportunity within the UK?

A Interesting. It is true that we have continued to offer sporting opportunities abroad, ever since I launched the very first trip to Canada in 2000. That said, we are very mindful of our carbon footprint and have worked hard with the school's Sustainability Co-ordinator to minimise it in whatever ways we can. Playing sport overseas and experiencing all that different cultures have to offer is priceless. Of course, this should represent the pinnacle of a pupil's sporting school journey and be underpinned with both regional and national touring opportunities. To note, also, is our school's appetite to support each community we travel to; our contribution to projects in the Langa Township, Cape Town, South Africa, has made a huge difference to young people there and it is crucial that our own young sportspeople learn about the importance of giving back and supporting those less fortunate.

Q You coached the England U16 rugby team. In such a high profile setting it must be tough to strike the right balance between instilling a will to win and avoiding undue pressure on young players. How would you score yourself on that criterion?

A There is always a balance to be struck, whether coaching national standard rugby players or teaching Lower School Latin. As educators (and coaches) it is our responsibility to stretch and to challenge but to do so in a very safe and supportive environment. It is true that each team and each classroom is made up of individuals. Each individual should be treated that little bit differently to get the very best out of them, while not compromising the ethos and values of the group.

Q You recently hosted an assembly, 'What it means to be a champion', where you talked not only about how to become a champion but also the importance of championing a cause or community. If you could choose one cause to champion, what would it be and why?

A There are many I could choose. Perhaps, I will stick to education. Most people in developed nations take education for granted but for millions of children throughout

Sean Morgan is Head of Solihull Senior School, West Midlands. He has been at the school since 1991 in a variety of roles including Director of Sport, Deputy Head and Senior Deputy Headmaster.



the rest of the world, this is not the reality. Improving access to education across the globe would positively impact the lives of countless children and help to make the world an even better place.

Q Solihull and Saint Martin's Girls' School merged in 2020. This involved the establishment of a new structure and identity for the school. VAT on fees is currently prompting a wave of mergers. With hindsight, what is your key piece of advice to heads trying to navigate that process?

A Interesting. There is no doubt that in 2025, it is right that schools look to 'strengthen' wherever they can. If a school is to embark on a merger, my advice would be to commit to extensive research, make the decision and then... 'hold your nerve!' There may well be resistance from some quarters and there will almost certainly be difficulties along the way with assimilation, staffing and brand identity to name but three but if the vision is set fair, the course should continue!

Q The use of AI in education is still high on the agenda. What is the Solihull approach?

A Well, I guess our approach is to embrace and celebrate rather than demonise. We spend a lot of time in school extolling the benefits of it but also the pitfalls. Our AI Working Party works hard to keep us abreast of developments and a recently produced poster ('The Dos and Don'ts of AI') has proved to be a very helpful guide for students, staff and parents alike.

At Solihull, we have quickly garnered a tradition and reputation for hosting festivals, attracting both national and international interest. In the last 18 months, we have hosted a Shakespeare Festival, a Festival of Languages, an Engineering Festival and... an Artificial Intelligence Festival. The AI Festival attracted experts from all over the country and our pupil, staff, and parent bodies benefitted enormously from the excellent guest speakers, all of whom left us with many practical tips as to how to maximise the effectiveness of AI in our environment. We firmly believe that

investing time in the understanding of AI and in the space for it to enhance our pupil/staff/parent experience is extremely important.

Q One of your interests is following world affairs and events, especially in relation to the impact of these upon independent education here and abroad. What gives you most concern at present?

A That is a good question. Clearly the impact of VAT, National Insurance and business rates on the sector is debilitating for many and devastating for some. Fortunately, at Solihull, we are 'bucking the trend' and have enjoyed a particularly pleasing recruitment season and numbers are up on the 2024 figures.

Of course, our TES Senior School of the Year award may well have helped, as might our 'Value Added' accolade – most schools these days measure the progress made by their pupils in comparison to other independent and maintained schools both locally and nationally. Solihull School ranks in the top 5% for 'value added' and we are proud of this metric as a demonstration of our care for each child as an individual – a strength which was singled out for praise by the Independent School Inspectorate in 2024. That said, we are certainly not complacent and continue to work tirelessly to ensure an optimal pupil experience both inside and outside the classroom. Ensuring that your offer in 2025 really is 'value for money'

is key to looking forward to a healthy and prosperous future for a school and all of its pupils.

Q Heads have to broach sensitive issues and have difficult conversations. You have said that having a coaching qualification has helped you to deal with these. How so?

A I don't think anyone looks forward to having difficult conversations or has a secret recipe as to how to make them go well (for both parties). Of course, they are occasionally necessary and I have definitely found that my recent 'coaching' experience has helped markedly. Inviting colleagues to unpick matters and issues themselves and then facilitating a supportive dialogue is the winning formula, I'd say!

Q You are a keen traveller. Where's next on your bucket list and why?

A Travelling has always been very important to me. Most recently we have enjoyed everything that Hong Kong has to offer, having visited our youngest and his wife there a couple of times. On the horizon – Seattle! Our eldest has recently moved there and we look forward to getting to know Seattle and the West Coast of America, this summer.



Improving the mental health and wellbeing of pupils

One in five children and young people in England has a probable mental health disorder¹, and the number of children and young people in contact with mental health services has more than doubled since 2018^{2,3}. Director of Schools at the mental health charity Anna Freud, Jaime Smith MBE, takes a look at the role schools can play in helping to tackle problems before they escalate, and offers some tips on how to do this.



We hear from school staff every day about the mental health and wellbeing difficulties affecting their students. Each generation faces a unique set of challenges and, for young people today, the lasting impacts of Covid-19 lockdowns, climate anxiety and the rapid evolution of the digital world are just some of the issues reshaping lives.

The impact of these difficulties is reflected in a sharp increase in mental health difficulties.

It's clear that we need to think differently about the mental health and wellbeing of young people and find new approaches to help them thrive. We believe a renewed focus on early intervention and prevention is needed to turn the tide. And as the place young people spend most of their time, schools have a vital role to play in this.

Here are some ways school staff can tackle – or even prevent – mental health problems before they become entrenched.

Embed a whole-school approach

Developing a positive ethos and culture, where everyone feels that they belong, is essential for building positive mental health in your setting. It involves working with everyone, including parents and carers, to promote a foundation of good mental health and wellbeing.

Having a designated Senior Mental Health Lead (SMHL) – essentially a school's lynchpin for mental health and wellbeing – can really support this. The role involves developing, implementing, and evaluating a whole-school approach, placing good mental health at the heart of the school community, including through policy, leadership and student voice.

Part of an SMHL's role is supporting staff to look for ways to integrate mental health and wellbeing across the curriculum. This provides students with regular opportunities to talk openly about mental health across all areas of school life. This could be promoting awareness moments across the academic year (e.g. World Mental Health Day on 10 October), through learning opportunities for parents and carers or during particularly stressful moments in the year such as during entrance or other exams.

Train staff

While an SMHL is key, one person can't build the mental health and wellbeing of school alone. A whole-school approach can only be achieved if all staff feel confident and empowered. Education staff are not mental health professionals and nor should they be expected to be, but there is a huge amount that teachers and school leaders can do to build positive mental health in their classrooms. Training can play an important role in this, helping staff understand how to support

their own wellbeing and the needs of their students.

Mental health and wellbeing awareness training should be prioritised for all staff and those with specific responsibilities. Look at courses that offer training to help school leaders boost staff wellbeing, along with options for all school staff, as well as courses to increase understanding of neurodiversity.

With more children being identified as neurodivergent (there was a 787% rise⁴ in autism diagnoses between 1998 and 2018 in the UK) and at increased risk of mental health problems (70% of autistic young people experience mental health issues⁵), it's vital school staff are supported to meet their needs.

To give staff these tools at the earliest possible stage, we want initial teacher training to be strengthened with content on how to build good mental wellbeing across the school community.

Measure wellbeing

We can only understand young people's needs by listening to them. Gathering data on the wellbeing of students can help schools build a better picture of the challenges they're facing and more effectively tailor the support on offer. This can involve using standardised surveys, focus groups, and other measurement tools to find out more about the wellbeing needs of students (and staff too).

The Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) offers the Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF)⁶. This helps schools and colleges assess a range of mental health indices, from wellbeing and emotional and social skills to feelings about relationships and school itself.

This type of data can really help to identify groups of students at risk of mental health issues and allow schools to put interventions in place as early as possible, while also helping to evaluate whether existing forms of support are working.

Spot early warning signs

Recognising early signs that a young person is struggling can help ensure they get the right support at the right time. School staff who see students every day should be supported to spot these warning signals, which are often changes in behaviour like low mood or energy, anger or irritability, excessive worrying, or even physical symptoms, like headaches and stomach aches.

The next step may be referring the student for specialist NHS help, or additional support available in the school. However, with increasing need from students, we know schools' in-house mental health support teams lack capacity, and NHS waiting lists are lengthy. To ease these pressures, schools should look to enrol external support.

1 Newlove-Delgado T, Marcheselli F, Williams T, Mandalia D, Dennes M, McManus S, Savic M, Treloar W, Croft K, Ford T. (2023) Mental health of children and young people in England, 2023 – Wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey. NHS England. <https://tinyurl.com/yckde7w7>

2 NHS Digital. (2024, October 10). Mental health services monthly statistics, performance August 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/4j5vv3df>

3 NHS Digital. (2018, October 11). Mental health services monthly statistics – Final July, provisional August 2018. <https://tinyurl.com/3rnk6vap>

4 Russell G, Stapley S, Newlove-Delgado T, Salmon A, White R, Warren F, Pearson A, Ford T. Time trends in autism diagnosis over 20 years: a UK population-based cohort study. <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.13505>

5 Mental health in young autistic adults June 2017, https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/youth-participation/toolkit/Ambitious-about_autism-know-your-normal-full-report.pdf

6 Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF), <https://www.corc.uk.net/resource-hub/wellbeing-measurement-framework-wmf>

Anna Freud offers training, resources and clinical support to help schools become mentally healthy.

Find out more at <https://www.annafreud.org/services/services-for-professionals/school-and-college-services>

Educating and empowering girls about women's health

Bromley High School GDST has launched a new initiative to educate girls about the complexities of women's health. With academic and pastoral care curriculums covering everything from menopause to mammograms (and lots more), Head of Biology and Women's Health Lead at the school, Lindsay Garlick, outlines the approach the school is taking.



Lindsay Garlick

“We believe in equipping girls with the knowledge and confidence to thrive, not just academically, but in every aspect of their lives. Traditional education often falls short in addressing the complexities of women's health, leaving many women feeling uninformed and hesitant to seek support. We want to change that.

‘Women's Health by Bromley High School’ began a couple of years ago when I was at a conference listening to a presentation about women's health and, despite reflecting on my own experiences and those that friends had shared with me, I was still blown away by the stories and statistics I heard.

There are plenty of studies out there. Twenty-four per cent of women feel unable to seek care because of embarrassment about their body image, according to a report from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists¹. It takes an average of around eight years for a woman to get a diagnosis for endometriosis². One in three women in the UK experience a reproductive or gynaecological health issue³, but less than 2.5% of publicly funded research is dedicated solely to reproductive health. Traditionally this was justified by the idea that women's bodies were seen to be too complex due to fluctuating hormones, so clinical trials often excluded them.

What struck me was that there is so much more we can do to educate and empower girls to take charge in this area, reversing the trend of young women leaving school uninformed about women's health and hesitant to seek support in later life. Our new initiative

is about breaking down taboos; demystifying the body, health conditions and life stages of a woman; and instilling confidence in pupils to have important conversations and support others.

This is a forward-thinking curriculum designed for girls – spanning Biology, PE, PSHE and a range of other subjects. Going far beyond traditional Biology lessons, the curriculum is built around three key pillars each encompassing a range of learning experiences.

Building girls' confidence and identity

This includes empowering girls with knowledge of their own anatomy and providing the vocabulary and content to help them address concerns and overcome barriers. It also includes raising the profile of women's health within a broad range of subjects, for example the importance of strength training in PE and period poverty in PSHE. We are also offering body confidence workshops and introducing a Sixth Form buddy system for younger students.

A holistic approach with wellness at its core

We believe that provision goes beyond the classroom and includes co-curricular activities. We have successfully launched a Women's Health Society where age-appropriate subjects are introduced and discussed, with topics ranging from cervical screening to endometriosis, mammograms to PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome), and many more. This society is aimed at giving our girls a broader view of women's health outside of the classroom and helping to prepare them for

life as a woman beyond school. We are also dedicated to educating pupils about sports and training around their hormonal cycle and providing gym sessions to girls who prefer working out individually to team sports. Every girl who wants to play in a sports team has the opportunity here to do so, no matter their ability.

Helping girls cope with change

This pillar is about ensuring girls are prepared for major changes that may affect them or those around them throughout their lives, such as puberty, childbirth, perimenopause and menopause. It seeks to help them understand the changes that happen to their

bodies over time and signpost support, should they need it today or later in life.

For tomorrow's decision makers

There has never been a better time to empower girls with knowledge and confidence about their bodies, health, and wellbeing. Our mission is that every girl can step confidently into the world as a resilient and self-assured young woman. Not only will they be able to take charge of their own personal health, but as tomorrow's decision-makers they can trailblaze the way for others and help shape the future direction of healthcare for women.

1 Better for Women – improving the health and wellbeing of girls and women, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2019, <https://www.rcog.org.uk/media/h3smwohw/better-for-women-full-report.pdf>

2 Endometriosis Facts and Figures, Endometriosis UK, <https://tinyurl.com/46r2m9nv>

3 Survey reveals, women experience severe reproductive health issues, Public Health England, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/survey-reveals-women-experience-severe-reproductive-health-issues>

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1992-93: Michaela Morris

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1988-89: Sara Chapman
1989-90: Rachel Wilson
1990-91: Michelle Clark
1991-92: Sarah King
1992-93: Michaela Morris

Steyning Grammar School
Boarding

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Head Girl: Victoria Newman

2007-2008: Kaitlin Maltby
2008-2009: Matthew Northcott
2009-2010: James McKeown
2010-2011: George Phillips
2011-2012: Rachel McKeown
2012-2013: David McKeown
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Ask the expert:

Why should your school complete the Greener Schools Index survey?

Developed by Zenergi and the UK Schools Sustainability Network (UKSSN) Ops Group, the Greener Schools Index (GSI) is a free self-assessment tool designed to help schools track their sustainability progress, providing a starting point and actionable insights.

Helen Burge, Co-Chair of the UKSSN Ops Group, explains why now is the time for schools to complete the GSI survey, and how it can make a real difference.



Helen Burge

Q: Why is it important for schools to complete the GSI survey?

Completing the GSI gives schools a clear picture of where they stand, and that's exactly what's needed to start or strengthen a Climate Action Plan. Many schools are working hard, but without a baseline, it's difficult to know where efforts are landing or where to go next. The GSI helps answer that.

It helps schools:

- Benchmark themselves against others
- Identify sustainability strengths and gaps
- Engage senior leadership and wider staff
- Align with the DfE's expectations

Schools can track their progress and identify new opportunities – many of which may already align with existing priorities like reducing energy bills or water costs. Sustainability doesn't have to be separate from the wider school strategy; often, it complements and strengthens it.

Q: What have schools learnt so far?

The first GSI report provided powerful insights:

- 62% of schools had appointed a Sustainability Lead.
- But only 24% had developed a full Climate Action Plan.
- While a further 53% were still working towards it.

These numbers tell us schools are trying but need more support and clarity to move forward. The GSI

helps schools see where they sit in this wider landscape. It's the difference between "We think we're doing okay" and "We know what we've achieved, and what comes next."

Q: What are some of the most useful learnings for schools from the GSI?

One of the most valuable things about the GSI is that it shows progress and possibility. For example:

- You might discover that you're already doing more than you thought, and that's worth celebrating.
- You might uncover gaps in areas like waste or water, which gives you something tangible to work on.

You get a report to share with leadership, governors or

stakeholders, making it easier to bring others on board and secure support.

Q: For busy schools, what's the incentive to make time for this?

The GSI saves time in the long run. By completing it, you can:

- Start building your Climate Action Plan using real data and actionable insights.
- Avoid duplicating efforts and focus on what matters most.
- Give your Sustainability Lead a clearer role and roadmap.

So, whether you're just starting out, or already on your way, I'd encourage every school to complete the GSI. It will make the process easier, help you go further and you will join a wider movement for change.

About the expert

Helen is a Consultant School Business Leader, ISBL Fellow and Trustee, as well as Co-Chair of the UKSSN Ops Group and one of the architects of the Greener Schools Index.

Zenergi supports more than 300 independent schools with their net zero journey, offering everything from energy and water procurement, audits and Heat Decarbonisation Plans (HDPs) to carbon reduction strategies, regulatory compliance and more. Find out more at zenergi.co.uk.

The Greener Schools Index



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How sustainable is your school?

Use the Greener Schools Index for free, relevant benchmarking.

The Greener Schools Index is a key tool for education leaders who want to put their own sustainability efforts into a sector context. Our survey showed that:

- ⊕ 62% of schools have designated sustainability teams
- ⊕ But only 24% have a Climate Action Plan
- ⊕ And most organisations are "working towards" implementation

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National ISA Band Competition



Leweston School, Dorset, is celebrating after its rock band 'The Lites' has been crowned winner of the Key Stage 3 category in the 2025 National ISA Band Competition – for the second consecutive year.

The group of young musicians secured their place at the top among a highly competitive field of school bands from across the UK.

The event's judge, Greg Mudd, praised the overall standard of entries in this year's competition:

"The 2025 ISA Band Competition showcased an astonishing range of

Pictured: 'The Lites'

submissions. From contemporary styles to classical influences, the vast array of genres and musical approaches highlighted the richness and diversity of collaborative music-making. It was truly inspiring to see so many students deeply engaged in group performance, demonstrating not only technical skill but a shared love for creating music together. Special recognition goes to the dedicated teachers and music staff whose guidance and encouragement were evident in every entry."

Watch The Lites' performing at <https://tinyurl.com/223tu65n>



Joint Schools' Choral Society Concert

More than 200 musicians, comprised of students, parents, staff and friends of St Albans School and St Albans High School, Hertfordshire, have gathered for the annual Joint Schools' Choral Society Concert at St Albans Cathedral and Abbey Church. The Joint Schools' Choral Society and Orchestra, which has been running for 55 years, saw a choir of 150 and an orchestra of 55 sing and play in the concert, which was dedicated to the memory of Mick Stout, former long standing Director of Music at St Albans School, who sadly passed away last year.

The concert, which was largely comprised of repertoire that Mick himself enjoyed, featured Brahms' 'Song of Destiny', Vaughan Williams' 'Serenade to Music', Parry's 'I Was Glad', and concluded

with the finale from Beethoven's 'Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, op.125'. Emily Stout, widow of Mick Stout, sang as solo soprano in her husband's memory.

Conductor of the concert and Director of Music at St Albans School, Tom Young, said: "This year has been particularly poignant for our school community in celebrating and commemorating the life of Mick Stout, and that was evident in the number of staff, parents, students, alumnae and friends of Mick's that came to pay their respects. It was a challenging programme, and I am delighted by the way the chorus, orchestra, and in particular the students, rose to the occasion. We hope that the concert paid tribute to Mick's humour, optimism and love of vocal music."

Pictured: The Joint Schools' Choral Society Concert

GSA Junior Choir of the Year



St Mary's School, Cambridge, is celebrating after the Bella Voce Junior School Choir has been named Girls' Schools Association (GSA) Junior Choir of the Year 2025.

The competition, held at Warwick School in March, brought together six junior choirs from across the UK. With just eight minutes to impress the judges, Bella Voce

performed 'Jabberwocky' by Carolyn Jennings, an interpretation of Lewis Carroll's classic poem, followed by 'How Can You Catch the Wind' by Dan Walker.

The competition concluded with a joint performance of 'I Wish I Knew How It Feels to Be Free', uniting all choirs in a shared celebration of freedom, equality and the joy of music.

Pictured: The Bella Voce Junior School Choir

New Head of Strings

The Purcell School, Hertfordshire, has announced the appointment of violinist and educator Alex Redington as its new Head of Strings, beginning September 2025.

Alex has spent 27 years as first violinist and founding member of the Doric String Quartet.

Alongside his performing career, Alex has held faculty positions at the Royal Academy of Music, the Yehudi Menuhin School and the University of Cambridge.

He has also collaborated with artists such as Benjamin Grosvenor, Jonathan Biss, Elisabeth Leonskaja and Marc-André Hamelin, and appeared on stages including Carnegie Hall, the Vienna Konzerthaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw and Wigmore Hall. As a soloist, Alex



Alex Redington

has performed with orchestras including the Vienna Symphony and the BBC Symphony Orchestra under conductors such as John Adams and Edward Gardner.

Alex succeeds Charles Sewart, who will step down at the end of this academic year after 18 years of service.



Temporary power for learning

Power outages disrupt more than just lessons – stay switched on

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Power cuts are more common than you might think. With over 820,000 km of electricity infrastructure across the UK, outages happen every day, and schools are not immune.

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The hidden costs of outages

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Places of learning

Following on from his article 'A sense of belonging' published in the January 2025 issue of this magazine, Religious Studies and Civics Tutor at Priory School of Our Lady of Walsingham, Isle of Wight, Jeremy Strickley, considers how a sense of place contributes to the act of learning.



It may seem perfectly obvious, but the places where children are taught really do matter. As if this point needed emphasising, a recent report on UK schools finds that state sector pupils typically spend around 32.5 hours per week in school (p8)¹. This number probably draws closer to 40 hours per week in the case of independent day school pupils. These figures highlight the critical importance, not only of the professionals who guide these efforts, but also the spaces in which they unfold.

The style and structure of learning environments, from classrooms and campuses to wider surroundings, are the subject of some research. The influence of temperature, for instance, is the focus of a 2019 study². Elsewhere, matters such as light, colour and air quality are points of concern³, marking out the significance of “space and materials to the total educational experience” (p4)⁴. These sorts of observations may help to inform some of today’s more innovative classroom designs⁵.

The influence of historical framings may also be a factor here. The education reformer Kurt Hahn, who founded Gordonstoun and later created the United World Colleges movement, based his first such institution, Atlantic College – now titled UWC

Atlantic – in St Donat’s Castle in Wales. A later addition to the UWC community, UWC Adriatic, is located in the grounds of Duino Castle, just north of the Italian city of Trieste. Closer to home, many UK independent schools occupy similarly notable sites, such as Rugby School’s Old Quad Buildings and Stowe School’s Marble Saloon⁶.

With school architectures in mind, I would like to return to the value of place to the act of learning. This time, I draw on the ideas of Yi-Fu Tuan, the Chinese-American academic best known for his work on the relationship between human experience and the geographies which inform it. Tuan writes that place is a “center of meaning constructed by experience,” which exists on different levels, such as towns and neighbourhoods (pp151-153)⁷. This experiential construction can be purposeful, too. Intentional environments, for instance, may try and shape social attitudes, demonstrated in the designs of the Victorian model towns Bournville and Port Sunlight, with their emphasis on greenery to “temper social ills” (p243)⁸. Such layouts may also have educational motives, such as “handing down a tradition” or “presenting a view of reality” (p112)⁹.

So, if a place, whether natural or fabricated, is grounded in understandings that emerge from

our experiences of it, might we not frame educational places in the same way? Thus, a school is also a “center of meaning” arising out of the experiences of its pupils, staff and parent community. This, in its turn, impacts on learning, where supportive encounters can build up a valuable bank of positive experiences, fostering confidence and curiosity on the part of the pupil.

How we arrange these encounters is at the heart of the matter. Tuan’s ideas might give us some useful starting points. Creating a school garden, for example, encourages an awareness of nature through direct interaction with it. Pupils getting the chance to grow and tend to their own vegetables, flowers and herbs can forge a deep connection with the natural world, which can become a powerful motor for deeper ecological concerns. Tapping into a school’s history is another option. This can give a sense of heritage to the learning process and help pupils substantiate what is essentially an abstract concept through the signs and symbols they observe around them. Community projects also offer a way forward, by building historical ties and traditions between a school and its surrounding social landscape.

At Priory School of Our Lady of

Walsingham on the Isle of Wight, we have explored variations on these ideas. Outdoor learning, for instance, is part of the Junior School curriculum. The Eco-Council draws on pupils from across year groups in its mission to promote environmental awareness. Elsewhere, the Victorian origins of the school are utilised as part of the History curriculum. Social action comes into play, too. The regular Tuesday Talk, for example, features a variety of local guest speakers, discoursing on topics as varied as stunt acting and poetry, while co-curricular activities, such as carolling visits by the school choir and charity drives, help broaden the pupils’ horizons while supporting the wider world.

There are many ways of using scholastic settings to better our efforts and effectiveness as teachers. School architectures, inside and out, are uniquely important spaces, where children spend a good deal of their time. As a result, these environments are considerably more than the sum of their parts, echoing Tuan’s conception of place as a locus of meaning, and revealing the power of art, history and geography, in a locational context, to shape a child’s educative journey in enduring ways.

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3 Barrett, P., Davies, F., Zhang, Y. and Barrett, L., 2015. 'The impact of classroom design on pupils' learning: Final results of a holistic, multi-level analysis', Building and Environment, 89(1), pp. 118-133.

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A new era of transparency and trust

Head of Admissions and Marketing at Palmers Green High School, London, and a former chair of AMCIS, Oli Adams, reflects on the recent AMCIS (Association for Admissions, Marketing and Communications in Independent Schools) Conference.

It was wonderful to return to the De Vere Cotswold Water Park for the AMCIS Annual Conference 2025. It's always a fantastic opportunity to catch up with old friends, make new ones, learn from others and indulge in the therapy that comes from surrounding yourself with other people's similar issues.

An introductory session from BBC News AI expert Priya Lakhani OBE set the tone for the future-facing but optimistic nature of the topics presented, while also empowering marketing and admissions teams to take control of their own digital destiny.

An overwhelming theme kept emerging throughout the two days, which was that transparency and trust are now more important than ever in the marketing of independent schools. We were repeatedly advised that parents look past the polished presentation from the head, the glossy photographs on the website or in prospectuses, and the bullet-pointed list of cutting-edge facilities. This was demonstrated on day one by Nicky Blunt and Audrey Lenihan from

Trinity School, Croydon, with their raw and authentic pupil video content, and Melanie Sanderson from The Good Schools Guide with her call for humble and honest conversations around fees and affordability.

In a post-lunch session, Melanie also called for ultimate clarity for prospective parents with regards to available information on websites, and personal touches to seal the deal, going above and beyond expectations to stand out in the crowd.

Day one concluded with a panel discussion on the MTM Confidence Index Report, hosted by education consultant, Dominic Moon, with help from Director of Communications and Marketing at Wycombe Abbey, Buckinghamshire, Sian Rees-Evans; Head of Admissions and Administration at LVS Ascot, Berkshire, Lindi Smit; Senior Registrar at Rossall School, Lancashire, Jonathan Cohen; and MTM's Director of Business Development, Daniel Cohen. This was a real confidence boost at the end of the day and underlined the

importance of admissions teams as the chief revenue earner for the school.

The annual gala dinner and IMPACT Awards Ceremony, hosted by joint AMCIS Chairs Jennifer Hirst and "LinkedIn's David Milner" (a nickname coined by Dominic Moon earlier in the day), got off to a rousing start with a lifetime achievement award presented to the outgoing AMCIS CEO of 21 years, Tory Gillingham. Lots has already been said about Tory's retirement but a touching video tribute from her many friends and colleagues in the sector had the audience captivated before she took to the stage to accept the award and express what an honour it had been for her to "walk alongside us on this journey". Congratulations and good luck Tory!

Congratulations also go to the seven worthy award winners on the night, representing everything from small budgets (Hymers College, East Yorkshire) to strategic marketing (St Mary's School, Hampstead). Plenty to celebrate and, judging from the large crowd in the bar downstairs afterwards, celebrate they did!



Day two kicked off with a keynote speech from Irfan Latif, Head of Royal Hospital School, Suffolk, who once again emphasised the importance of trust and authenticity, speaking of it as the new currency in independent schools. His session ended with an impromptu Q&A involving his Director of Marketing and Admissions, Rebecca Keeble.

After the ISC's Matthew Dent indulged us with some vital research ahead of the ISC Census being published*, the final keynote from speaker, coach and author, Steve Head, on 'Making the 1% Difference' sent us off feeling energised, revitalised, optimistic and ready to face whatever challenges come next. Thank you to the AMCIS team for putting together such an inspiring programme. See you again next year!

**See page 26 for more detail on the ISC Census for 2025*

Education Summit

Bryanston School, Dorset, has hosted its annual Education Summit. Nearly 200 educators and parents attended the event which is now in its tenth year. The day mixed keynote speakers with workshops exploring teaching, learning and adolescent wellbeing.

The summit opened with an interactive presentation by 'Gogglebox' star and educator, Baasit Siddiqui, followed by cricketing legend Kumar Sangakkara who drew parallels between leadership on the sports field and in education.

Secondary School Teacher of the Year, Oli McVeigh, from Ferndown Upper School, Dorset, joined

Ferndown's Deputy Head, Deneen Kenchington to unpack their award-winning boys' mentoring programme, while senior leader and education trainer, Amjad Ali, shared practical strategies for supporting pupils with special educational needs. Finally, Satveer Nijjar gave a talk on self-harm awareness.

Elsewhere, former English teacher-turned-academic Dr Haili Hughes tackled staff workload and positivity; psychologist Dr Lindsay Browning mapped sleep patterns in teens; and Alanna Fraser of Character Compass demystified the online "manosphere" influencing many boys. Alicia Drummond, founder of The



Wellbeing Hub, also talked about how to have open conversations with teenagers at home.

Adding a splash of colour to the Bryanston lawn was a retro double-decker bus from James Shone's I Can & I Am foundation, offering pupils and visitors a mobile resilience workshop.

Bryanston staff also took to the stage with PE teacher and double

Olympian Beth Rodford leading a session on elite-sport mindsets with hockey coach James Morris.

Commenting on the milestone event, Education Summit Director, Stephen Davies, said: "A decade on, the summit proves that when schools, families and experts work together, every child benefits. We're already planning how to make the next event even better."

Young Environmentalist competition



A team from Kimbolton School, Cambridgeshire, has won the Rotary District 1070 Young Environmentalist competition. The event, held at Kimbolton Castle, brought together young environmental leaders from six counties, with the school's U17 team impressing judges with their project on reducing food waste and lowering the school's carbon footprint.

Elliot R, a Sixth Form pupil at Kimbolton, represented the team at the event, delivering a presentation about the project. Supported by a display and video, Elliot outlined how the team

Pictured: Some of the successful pupils from the U17 team

had tackled food waste at the school and the wider impact their efforts could have on reducing environmental harm.

The project featured a range of initiatives, including pupils growing their own food on school grounds, which was later used in school. Other activities included conducting food waste audits, introducing a wormery to recycle organic waste, and holding assemblies to raise awareness about food waste reduction. Additional initiatives further supported the project's goal of promoting sustainability within the school community.



'A Touch of Green Week'

Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) pupils have taken part in a focused week of activities to promote sustainability and biodiversity.

The school's fourth annual 'A Touch of Green Week' is a sustainability initiative to encourage environmental responsibility and pupil wellbeing. Building on the school's ongoing commitment to responsible practice, the initiative has already seen a positive effect in terms of food waste recycling.

Head of Science and Biology at NHSG, Emma Waton, said:

"We've been gathering food waste figures for the last few years to see how we're doing and it's really

Pictured: Pupils enjoying green activities

satisfying to see a significant shift and reduction in waste. We're now regularly sending less food to landfill and seeing more of it being eaten by our worms in the school wormery – where food is turned into compost. The Touch of Green Week celebrated these ongoing achievements as well as delivering a whole host of new activities for pupils to take part in and learn about the many ways we can reduce our impact on the environment."

The week also saw pupils and parents take part in a bat walk, moth trapping and observation, a dawn chorus walk, bug identification and pond dipping.

Advertorial Feature

Investing in yourself: 5 questions that can change everything

The independent sector is at a crossroads. For some, it has meant school closures and for others, a quick change in strategy to meet the needs of the community. It's easy to put yourself at the bottom of your own priority list. But investing in yourself isn't a luxury – it's a responsibility and can make you future-proof.

Here are five empowering questions to help you realign your energy, clarify your goals, and start showing up for yourself with intention:

1. What do I truly want to grow in – personally or professionally – and what's stopping me?

This question invites honesty. Name the dream. Then name the fear or excuse. Awareness is the first step to change.

2. If I gave myself the same support I give others, what would I do differently?

So many of us are generous to others and harsh with ourselves.

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Reversing that imbalance can be a powerful act of self-investment.

3. What skill, habit, or mindset shift would make the biggest difference in my life right now?

Not all changes are equal. Identify the one that would unlock the most energy, freedom, or confidence – and start there.

4. Am I surrounding myself with people who challenge, inspire, and support my growth?

You don't grow in isolation. Community matters. Who you spend time with directly shapes your ambition and self-belief.

5. What will it cost me not to invest in myself over the next year?

Growth has a cost – but so does stagnation. Don't underestimate what you're giving up by staying still.

Your growth serves everyone around you. Ask the hard questions – and then give yourself the permission to act on the answers. Take time to reflect on the year that was, and plan for the year that is coming.



Exeat She Writes



How stricter EHCP rules could affect families and children

Executive Headteacher of The Unicorn School, Oxfordshire, Andrew Day, examines the upcoming changes to the EHC plan system, and discusses how it relates to both pupils and the independent school system.



The UK government is planning significant changes to the criteria for obtaining an education, health and care plan (EHCP), sparking considerable concern among parents, educators, and professionals. The proposed changes aim to streamline the system and ensure that support is directed to those with the most severe needs. However, for many families, particularly those with children who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), these changes could have profound implications.

An EHCP is a legally binding document designed for children and young people up to the age of 25 who require more support than that typically available through standard special educational needs (SEN) provisions. The plan outlines the child's needs across education, health and care, detailing the specific support required to meet those needs.

The government's proposal involves tightening the eligibility criteria for EHCPs, introducing stricter assessments and higher thresholds. The intention is to allocate resources more effectively by focusing on those with the

most critical needs. While this approach may seem logical in theory, it raises significant concerns about the practical implications for families and children.

The new rules could result in longer waiting times and more rigorous assessments for families seeking support. This added complexity can lead to increased stress and uncertainty for parents already navigating a challenging system. Families whose children do not meet the new criteria may feel compelled to seek private assessments or therapies, which can be prohibitively expensive. This financial burden is particularly concerning for families with limited resources.

The process of securing support for a child with SEND is often emotionally draining. Facing rejection after navigating a complex and demanding system can be heartbreaking for parents who are striving to ensure their child receives the necessary support. Children who do not qualify under the new criteria may miss out on essential support, potentially hindering their educational and

emotional development. Without the appropriate assistance, these children are at risk of falling behind academically and struggling with their mental health.

The proposed changes could exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for children from families that cannot afford private support or lack the knowledge to advocate effectively. This could lead to a widening gap between those who receive adequate support and those who do not. The absence of necessary support can have a detrimental impact on a child's mental health.

Children may experience increased frustration, anxiety, and a loss of confidence, which can affect their overall wellbeing and future prospects.

Independent specialist schools play a crucial role in providing tailored support for students with SEND, often relying on EHCP funding to deliver these services. The proposed changes could result in fewer students qualifying for EHCPs, leading to reduced funding for these schools. This financial strain may force schools to cut services or alter their operations,

potentially compromising the quality of care and education they provide.

State schools, already operating under significant pressure, may face additional challenges as they are required to support more students with complex needs who do not have EHCPs. This increased demand could lead to larger workloads for teachers, reduced support for all students, and a strain on already limited resources. The potential reduction in support services could leave many children without the tools they need to succeed.

While the government's goal of managing resources better is understandable, the proposed changes to EHCP eligibility criteria could have serious negative consequences for families, children, and schools. It is essential to ensure that the education system remains inclusive and supportive, providing every child with the opportunity to thrive. As stakeholders in the education sector, we must advocate for policies that do not leave vulnerable children without the support they need and deserve.

Boarding investment

Finborough School, Suffolk, has announced it is investing in a complete refurbishment of its boarding facilities.

The refurbishment has been designed to support the needs of both domestic and international boarders from Year 3 through to Sixth Form. Each pupil will benefit from their own personal space, complete with a dedicated desk for focused study and academic achievement. The plan also includes refreshing communal

areas to support evening and weekend activities that are an integral part of the school's boarding programme.

For the youngest boarders, the new design will emphasise a warm, homely environment that will create a home away from home. Meanwhile, Sixth Form students will enjoy newly created recreation areas inspired by modern university-style shared spaces, encouraging independence, collaboration, and social

development in preparation for life beyond school.

Working with the students, the project management team at the school has also developed a series of mood boards to help visualise how the proposed updates will look and feel.

At the helm of the project will be the newly appointed Director of Boarding, Mr James Conlon, who will join Finborough in August from The Royal School in Surrey.



Pictured: Conceptual image of new boarding facilities Photo credit: Tiago Mendes

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Emergency repairs and risk management with school buildings: what every school should know

Even the best-maintained estates can suffer sudden structural issues from weather damage, or slow-developing defects like large cracks appearing in ceilings or walls beginning to bulge. Whatever structural issue you are faced with, whether it's a failed canopy, crumbling masonry, unsafe walkways or decaying roof timbers, structural engineers should be your first port of call to investigate and advise on making the situation safe.

Structural engineers not only support schools when there is a structural failure, but we can also help plan long-term estate management and provide essential advice on risk assessments and prioritising repairs.

Recognising the warning signs of a structural failure

Not every structural emergency starts with a dramatic collapse; early identification that there might be an issue is key. Subtle signs include cracks in walls, sagging ceilings, water ingress, or unusual floor movement. For example, cracks wider than 2 mm, on external walls and ceilings should always be investigated by a structural engineer. Cracks on external walls may be letting in water, causing further damage, and ceiling cracks can be an indication of structural failures. These 'symptoms' may indicate structural or subsurface issues such as failing foundations, timber decay, or soil subsidence.

Staff, caretakers, and site managers should be trained to recognise these signs and report any unusual changes in buildings or outdoor infrastructure. Establishing regular inspection routines, even informal walkarounds, can help spot potential problems early on. Encourage staff to take photographs and report anything concerning.

Immediate steps when a building fails or is at risk

If a structure or element of a building suddenly fails, or you

suspect an immediate risk (e.g., due to a storm, collapse, or subsidence), follow these steps:

1. Safety first

Evacuate the affected area (if necessary) and restrict access.

2. Contact a structural engineer

Structural engineers are trained to assess damage quickly and determine the cause and severity of structural issues.

3. Document the damage

Before anything is moved, or removed, take photographs (if safe to do so) and keep a written record of events and findings.

How structural engineers can help in emergencies

A qualified structural engineer can provide immediate and ongoing support, including:

- **Site assessment and risk analysis:** We will come to site to determine whether an area is safe to occupy and identify any immediate hazards that may not be apparent to the untrained eye.
- **Temporary works design:** We can then recommend, or design, temporary supports or shoring to prevent further damage or collapse.
- **Root cause diagnosis:** Structural engineers will be able to identify where the problem stems from, whether it is a structural failure, poor workmanship, water damage, or freak external forces.
- **Specification for repairs:** Engineers then design

permanent repairs, oversee any remedial works, and co-ordinate with contractors.

At SWJ Consulting, we work closely with schools to provide calm, clear advice and practical solutions, helping you maintain continuity with minimal disruption.

Emergency repairs often uncover long-standing issues that weren't previously identified. That's why we strongly advocate for regular structural condition surveys as part of a school's estate strategy, regardless of the age of the buildings.

These surveys can provide clear, prioritised recommendations and allow schools to manage maintenance budgets more effectively. They also reduce the likelihood of sudden failures that require costly emergency repairs.

Triage and prioritising repairs

When problems are identified, especially during or after a structural survey, schools often face difficult decisions about where to allocate limited budgets. A triage approach can be helpful, and structural engineers can help with prioritisation.

1. **Immediate risks:** Address issues that pose direct threats, such as collapsing walls, failing roofs, or unsafe walkways.
2. **Progressive damage:** Next, tackle problems that will worsen rapidly if not addressed (e.g., ongoing water ingress, roof leaks).



Rhys Skym

3. Aesthetic or low-risk issues:

Finally, plan repairs that don't pose safety risks but impact appearance or functionality.

Working with structural engineers, schools can use a triage framework to create a phased repair plan, avoiding unnecessary closures and spreading costs over manageable timelines.

Structural problems can be disruptive and costly, both financially and in terms of reputation. With the right planning, swift professional support, and a culture of vigilance, independent schools can manage risks effectively. Whether responding to a sudden failure or planning estate investments, working closely with a structural engineer ensures safe, timely, and durable solutions.

If you have concerns about your school's buildings or would like to review your risk management strategy, get in touch with our experienced team at SWJ Consulting. We're here to support you with expert advice, clear reporting, and practical design solutions that put student safety first.

Rhys Skym is Managing Director of SWJ Consulting – www.swjconsulting.co.uk based in Witney, Oxford and Southampton

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'Backpack for Life' – designing a curriculum for the world children will inherit

In 2018, Jack Ma – former English teacher and founder of the e-commerce giant Alibaba – stood on stage at the World Economic Forum and said: "We cannot teach our kids to compete with machines. We have to teach them something unique – values, independent thinking, teamwork, care for others." Headmaster of The Croft Preparatory School, Warwickshire, Marcus Cook, explains how hearing these words has led to the creation of a new personal development curriculum at the school, and what it means for the children growing up in today's changing world.



Marcus Cook

I remember hearing Jack Ma's message and thinking: he's absolutely right. We're preparing children for a world we don't fully understand yet, and the only certainty is that human qualities will matter more than ever. That realisation planted the seed for developing a new bespoke personal development curriculum called 'Backpack for Life' which is now being delivered at The Croft alongside the national curriculum.

What is Backpack for Life and how does it work?

It is a structured programme focused on self-discovery and soft skills. We're teaching children how to be resilient, imaginative, empathetic and thoughtful – traits that won't be replaced by technology. It runs in parallel with our academic teaching, not instead of it.

Each pupil receives a 'Backpack Passport', broken into five 'Pockets'. These Pockets represent key areas of personal growth, and children collect stickers as they demonstrate their development in each.

The idea being that by the time they leave us, their backpack is full – not just of academic achievements, but of the kind of inner qualities that help them thrive in the real world.

The approach

Jack Ma's words were a turning point. They didn't ripple through the education world, but they resonated deeply with me. It was about seizing the opportunity to make a lasting difference. We've always had great teaching at The Croft, but I wanted to add something more human, something children could carry with them for life.

What are the five Pockets?

Each Pocket focuses on a different skillset that machines can't replicate.

- 1. Skill & Innovation** – Encouraging problem-solving, practical thinking and creativity.
- 2. Personal Attributes** – Doing the right thing at the right time, for the right reasons.
- 3. Emotional Intelligence** – Learning about yourself

and applying that wisdom to relationships.

4. Society – Understanding the wider world and making informed, ethical decisions.

5. Developing Potential – Unlocking inner strengths to thrive personally and academically.

Together, these make up a well-rounded human being. That's our goal.

How is the programme delivered?

Backpack for Life is introduced through half-termly enrichment tasks, each one aligned to a specific Pocket.

The Michaelmas Term saw a focus on Skill & Innovation and Personal Attributes. Pupils created imaginative inventions – from a zip-line school map to a robot that "eats worries" – and found new ways to demonstrate kindness and leadership.

In the Lent Term, attention turned to Emotional Intelligence and Society, where pupils explored empathy, ethical choices, and community engagement.

Now, in the Summer Term, pupils are concentrating on the final Pocket: Developing Potential.

This is about helping children uncover their own strengths and passions.

And uniquely, Year 6 pupils are experiencing a "turbo boost" this term. Through their Faculty Projects, they're applying all five Pockets in an intensive, integrated approach that challenges them to lead, collaborate and innovate.

It has seen them working with the debating team from Stratford-upon-Avon's King Edward VI School, running sports sessions for

younger years, as well as simulating earthquakes in STEM challenges – real-world tasks that bring all five skills together. It's like a dress rehearsal for life.

And feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The children are genuinely excited by the challenges, and we're seeing new sides to them emerge – confidence, reflection, collaboration. They're also setting the pace; they're suggesting ideas, leading activities. It's no longer us telling them – it's us learning with them.

As Deputy Head of Pupil Achievement, Gemma Cook, who played a pivotal role in the rollout, said: "What's been most powerful is seeing children recognise growth in themselves. They're proud of who they're becoming – not just what they're achieving. That's what this programme is really about.

"It's a constant dialogue – listening to their reflections, adapting our approach, and creating an environment where they feel safe to explore who they are becoming."

What comes next?

By the time they leave The Croft, we want every child to be confident in who they are and capable of shaping the world around them – not just succeeding in it. That's what 'Backpack for Life' is all about.

And looking ahead, this is just the beginning. As a school we plan to use insights from this pilot year to expand the programme's reach and impact.

We will also embed Backpack for Life more deeply into everyday school life – it's not a bolt-on; it's becoming part of our ethos.



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Six reasons to invest in your outdoor facilities

When budgets are tight finding funds to enhance outdoor facilities might slip down the priority list, but investing in your outdoor areas is just as vital as investing in your indoor facilities, and can help your school and pupils reap numerous – often unexpected – rewards:

1. Create imaginative, practical learning opportunities: Outdoor learning spaces, covered by all-weather canopies, not only make use of dead areas of your school's site but also enable practical, messy, hands on-learning experiences such as arts and crafts and science experiments. During periods dominated by desk learning, these hands-on experiences help punctuate the learning day and reinvigorate pupils.

2. Support wider skills development: In recent years, there's been an increasing focus in the workplace on vital soft skills such as teamwork, resilience

and leadership, and team sports provide unique opportunities to hone these skills in young people. By making your outdoor sports facilities year-round with a covered MUGA, you can demonstrate your commitment to providing growth opportunities that extend well beyond the classroom.

3. Enhance emotional wellbeing: Numerous reports point to a connection between emotional wellbeing and time spent in nature. By creating inviting all-weather outdoor dining and social areas for your pupils to enjoy come rain or shine, you can enable your pupils to discover the

restorative emotional and mental impact of spending free time surrounded by green spaces.

4. Encourage positive behaviour: Installing covered walkways is a simple way of enhancing pupil behaviour, by facilitating a steady, organised flow of pupils around a large site. Covered walkways also demonstrate a commitment to staff wellbeing by creating environments that are pleasant and easy to work in.

5. Create a point of difference: In today's increasingly competitive schools market, creating a way to stand out is



all-important and installing all-weather, covered sports and social facilities is an impactful way of doing this. Why not show your leadership by being one of the first schools to install in-demand all-weather padel facilities?

6. Build valuable new revenue opportunities: Quality all-weather facilities like covered MUGAs, covered padel courts and expansive outdoor dining areas create coveted facilities that can be hired out to local sports and community groups to create valuable new revenue streams for your school.

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Why variety in school sport makes the difference

Sport, exercise and physical activity are known to be vital components of a balanced school day. Former teacher, Anderley Hampson, shares some of the reasons why it is important to give students a range of sport, PE and activity options.

Even back in 1785, William Cowper was wise enough to recognise that “variety is the spice of life” – and nowhere is this more true than in sport.

Every sport has something to offer but variety is also key for maximum benefit – academically, socially and emotionally as well as physically.

As time at school is the metaphorical starting gun for involvement in sport for most people, all schools do well to think about how boosting their variety of sports provision can have far-reaching positive effects in other areas.

In a nutshell, participation in sport improves whole body fitness and safety, breaks boredom, creates confidence and fosters friendships. What is more, it is on the sports field, pitch or court that many a eureka moment has occurred when a

student realises what they are good at or interested in.

In the Ofsted report ‘Going the Extra Mile: Excellence in Competitive School Sport’, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, recognised the impact of sport in all areas of life and the impact of independent schools’ ethos of making sport front and centre of a student’s education. He said: “In independent schools, competitive sport isn’t an optional extra; it’s a key component in building self-esteem, confidence, school ethos and academic excellence. The drive to compete and excel in sport shapes a youngster’s character, binds the school together and reinforces the drive to compete and excel academically.”

All of the above benefits become even more possible if the variety of

sport on offer is as diverse, and inclusive, as possible. Of course, you could take this to the extreme by adding Quadball, unicycle hockey and fire juggling to your curriculum if you feel so inclined but there are many alternatives that may be more accessible!

Figures show that schools offering a more unusual curriculum for PE – such as golf, cycling and archery – have led to a boost in the popularity of sport. And popularity of sport can only be a good thing for the health, wellbeing and positivity of our future generations.

According to the TOP Foundation 2014 ‘National Governing Bodies of Sport Survey: Competitive School Sport’, school sports generally fit into three core categories – see tables.

Looking at these options in greater detail, it is interesting to see how these sports divide up when comparing independent and state school interest and success in school teams championships.

What is more, as per the TOP Foundation 2014 National Governing Bodies of Sport Survey, the research found that a significant proportion of international athletes had some form of sport scholarship when they were at school – Rugby Union players receiving the most sports scholarships (45%). A more in-depth look showed that nearly 50% of scholarships examined took the athletes from state to independent school. The report has shown that there is some evidence to indicate that on average our best athletes have a greater likelihood of having an independent school background than the national population.

The Sutton Trust August 2024 commentary by Erica Holt-White and Rebecca Montacute also advised that: “It should be noted that independent school scholarships can be given to students who excel in a sport from a young age. For example, Tom Daley received

scholarship offers from multiple independent schools after the Beijing 2008 games.” And “Some independent schools also open up their sports facilities for state school students to train, even if they don’t attend (such as Adam Peaty).”

It is interesting therefore to look at, and maybe learn from, the approach and range of sports offered by independent schools and the positive impact this has for the students, parents and school alike.

The variety and quality of sports provision in the independent sector must inevitably increase the chances of students being able to expand and consolidate their physical skills by trying out new activities and transferring learning from one skill to the next.

For those who are naturally good at sport or who already have an open mindset, this variety will extend their experiences and opportunities, propelling them further along their successful path. Lewis Hamilton, for example, enjoyed cricket at school and has said his alternative to Formula One would have been a career in football.

Other students who lack confidence in sport, social interaction and new learning situations may also be helped as this variety nudges them into trying different things and maybe even finding something they can enjoy and succeed in. It is also the school playing field, pitch, court, gym, river, stables, climbing wall and target lane where the student gets to discover their very own, independent sporting dreams.

Considering all the above, variety of provision in sport seems a logical way to help pupils and students, ‘sporty’ or not, to broaden their skills, confidence, self-discovery and love of life and learning. If this is true, then it is also logical that any school that wants the best for the next generation will seek to make a difference though variety in its sports provision.

Major school sports: common to the school curriculum for boys and girls		
1	Badminton	17
2	Basketball	18
3	Cricket	19
4	Cross country	20
5	Football	21
6	Gymnastics	22
7	Hockey	23
8	Netball	24
9	Rounders	25
10	Rugby league	26
11	Rugby union	27
12	Swimming	28
13	Table tennis	29
14	Tennis	
15	Track and field	
16	Volleyball	

*No data was provided for these sports from their NGBs

Paralympic sports: linked to common school sports		
30	Boccia	
31	Goalball*	
32	Wheelchair basketball	
33	Disability athletics*	
34	Sitting volleyball	
35	Judo (VI)	
36	Football (ID)	
37	Wheelchair tennis	
38	Disability table tennis	
39	Disability swimming	

		Independent school wins (%)
1	Swimming	91%
2	Hockey	83%
3	Cricket	83%
4	Tennis	80%
5	Rugby union	52%
6	Gymnastics	50%
7	Table Tennis	43%
8	Cross country*	34%
9	Netball	24%
10	Volleyball	20%
11	Rounders	19%
12	Track and field*	18%
13	Badminton	18%
14	Football (Schools ESFA)	4%
15	Basketball	2%
16	Rugby league	0%

*Note: Cross country and track and field are part of one NGB ESFA is the English Schools' Football Association

		State school wins (%)
1	Rugby league	98%
2	Basketball	98%
3	Football (Schools ESFA)	96%
4	Track and field	82%
5	Badminton	80%
6	Volleyball	80%
7	Rounders	69%
8	Netball	67%
9	Cross country	66%
10	Table tennis	57%
11	Rugby union	48%
12	Gymnastics	38%
13	Tennis	20%
14	Cricket	17%
15	Hockey	16%
16	Swimming	9%

1 National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sport Survey, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e110d40f0b62305b80947/National_20Governing_20Bodies_20of_20Sport_20survey_2C_20Competitive_20school_20sport.pdf

2 An equal chance at Olympic success? <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/an-equal-chance-at-olympic-success>



Hockey success

King Edward VI School (KES), Hampshire, is celebrating after both its U13 girls' and U15 boys' hockey teams have qualified for their respective national outdoor hockey finals.

The U13 girls earned their place after their performance at the South Central In2Hockey tournament, where they were unbeaten throughout the competition, conceding just one goal all day. Their victory saw them crowned Regional Champions and secure a spot at the England Hockey national finals in Nottingham.

At the finals, held last month, the girls were narrowly defeated

Pictured: The U13 girls' hockey team

in their opening game before going on to win two matches and finishing second in their group. In the third-place play-off against St Faith's School, Cambridge, KES took an early lead, but their opponents levelled the match, sending it to a shuffle shootout, where the KES girls triumphed 2-1 to secure the bronze medal – finishing third in the country and earning the school its first-ever national medal in girls' hockey.

Their success follows the U15 boys' qualification for the national outdoor finals, marking the first time in over a decade that a KES team has reached that stage in boys' hockey.



Swimming Showcase and Gala

Pupils from Leweston Prep, Dorset, made waves just before the May half term taking part in a Pre-Prep Swimming Showcase and Prep Swimming Gala.

The Swimming Showcase saw children from Reception to Prep 2 demonstrate their aquatic abilities in front of staff and family members. From mastering breaststroke techniques to perfecting their

backstroke, the young swimmers showed remarkable progress and confidence in the water.

Following the Showcase, the excitement continued with the annual Prep Swimming Gala, where pupils from Prep 3 to 6 competed in a series of races. The event featured individual performances and displays of teamwork, particularly during the House relays.

Pictured: Leweston pupils in the water

Equestrian success

The Equestrian team from Woodbridge School, Suffolk, is celebrating following a successful weekend at Hickstead NSEA (National Schools Equestrian Association) Championships. It saw the school have their most successful championships to date, with Woodbridge riders winning both the 75cm and 85cm Eventers Challenge.

Year 9's Grace, Year 8's Kirsty and Year 7's Tati and Daisy made up the team for the 75cm Eventers Challenge, with Grace winning the class individually, while Kirsty and Tati finished in 2nd and 3rd place overall, competing against 36 other schools.

Year 10's Zac and Harry, Year 9's Grace, and Year 7's Daisy made up the 85cm Eventers Challenge team, with Zac winning the class individually.

The Dressage team, which included Year 7's Daisy, Year 8's Jasmine, and Year 9's Grace, took 4th place.

The Show Jumping teams were both placed 5th and included many of the riders already mentioned, plus Year 10's Edie.

With the 95cm Eventers Challenge team coming in 8th place, this meant the school placed in all the classes they competed in.



Pictured: Year 10's Zac

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Marking a new era: how Taunton School transformed grounds management with Turf Tank

Taunton School, located in Somerset, England, is a prestigious educational institution that prides itself on offering a wide range of activities to engage its students. With a commitment to continuous improvement, the school has recently invested in new facilities around campus, including improvements to their sporting facilities.

The challenge

In the past, Taunton School faced significant challenges in marking and maintaining their sports pitches. The process was time-consuming, labour-intensive, and often resulted in inconsistent line markings.

The solution

To address these challenges, Taunton School implemented an innovative solution in 2023: the Turf Tank line-marking robot, with the aim of streamlining the pitch-marking process, improving accuracy, and freeing up the grounds team to focus on enhancing the overall standards of the school's outdoor facilities.

- 93% labour efficiency improvement
- 50% paint consumption reduction
- New opportunities

Increased efficiency in line marking

Mark Jolliffe is the Head Groundsman at Taunton School and he explains the biggest benefit he sees in adopting the Turf Tank line marking is the time savings.

"Time saving is the biggest thing, definitely, and the ease of use is a big thing as well. It's just freed up our time so much more to do other stuff, stuff that we should be doing, that perhaps we weren't."

Marking a rugby pitch

Manual Marking	Turf Tank
3-4 hours	40 minutes robot marking
3 grounds managers	1 person for robot setup 1 robot marking the pitch

Taking the example of a rugby pitch, Mark makes a comparison between how the process used to be in the past when marking the pitch manually, compared to how it is now with the robot.

"Marking a rugby pitch out, it could take three to four hours for three people to mark that pitch from scratch, whereas the Turf Tank does it in about 40-45 minutes."

Mark Jolliffe, Head Groundsman, Taunton School

Marking a 400-metre running track

Manual Marking	Turf Tank
12 hours	3 hours robot marking
3 grounds managers	1 person for robot setup 1 robot marking the pitch

Similar savings are recorded when looking at the running track as well, one of the most time-consuming types of pitches:

"For a 400 metre track, it could take sort of three of us a day, day and a half, to properly mark it out. Whereas the Turf Tank, it'll mark it out in about three hours.

"It's a massive time saving, particularly at a time of year when we're really busy, at Easter, so it really showed when we did it for the first time this year."

Apart from the time savings, the robot makes the process more efficient in terms of paint consumption as well.

"We've only had the Turf Tank for just under a year, but it's definitely at least halved our paint costs."



Improved accuracy and facilities standard

Another issue the school faced when marking pitches the traditional way was the inconsistent and imperfect lines. Over time, as lines were repeatedly marked, they would often deviate from their original position, leading to inaccuracies in dimensions.

And Mark is happy to know that now there is no more stress in getting the perfect results the school is looking for.

“The accuracy is phenomenal. It’s arrow-straight lines, every time.

“And that’s something we just can’t do manually when you’re over marking, the line always goes off a bit when you’re marking manually, but the robot is dead straight every time.”

Furthermore, the robot’s precision allows for easy remarking without deviation: “It doesn’t matter if the lines fade out and you lose the pitch, nothing to worry about. You can just send the robot back out and it’ll mark it exactly the same again.”

The improved accuracy and efficiency of the Turf Tank robot not only resulted in better-looking lines but also contributed to an overall

enhancement of the facility’s standards. By dramatically reducing the time spent on line marking, the grounds team could redirect their efforts to other critical tasks that were previously neglected due to time constraints.

“The question was asked by the Chief Operating Officer here: does it mean we can replace a groundsman or drop a groundsman down to part-time hours? But it was just a case of convincing them actually the reason for getting it is, obviously for presentation and accuracy, but also to free us up to do more of the jobs we should be doing that we don’t normally get time to do. So any time we can save through having the Turf Tank marking means we can get on with all the other peripheral stuff and improve the presentation and standards of the site.”

Beyond sports pitches


The Turf Tank robot proved to be a versatile tool, offering capabilities that extended far beyond basic line marking.

One of the standout benefits was the ability to create complex designs and logos: “Since we started marking the logos, they’ve become very popular. They just add that extra touch to the site, particularly on open mornings or if you’ve got a big match on. So having the logo there is really good for marketing as well.”

“Other things we use it for is we mark the stripes out the bays for grass cutting. We also mark out the lines we need to follow for fertilising or spraying. So all that can be done, and that saves using flags and string lines.”

To draw the line

The implementation of the Turf Tank robot at Taunton School has revolutionised their approach to grounds management. By significantly reducing time and labour requirements, improving accuracy and consistency, and offering versatile functionality, the Turf Tank has proven to be an invaluable asset.


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Launch of sports park

Claremont School, East Sussex, has announced a major new investment in its sporting facilities. Backed by the International Schools Partnership (ISP), the initiative will mark a significant step in the school's long-term development plans.

The Claremont Sports Park, launching in 2026, will be a purpose-built hub designed to enrich the physical education experience and support the school's expanding sports curriculum from prep to senior level.

The development will include a new full-sized floodlit 3G all-

weather pitch; resurfacing of the existing astroturf pitch; renovation of the sports hall at the Prep School, including refurbished changing rooms and public areas; along with an upgraded playing surface to support a broad range of indoor sports.

Principal at Claremont School, Ed Dickie, said: "This development reflects our belief that sport plays a vital role in shaping confident, resilient and well-rounded young people. We're excited by the prospect of the Sports Park becoming the cornerstone of our sports programme for years to come."

Pictured: Impression of the completed Claremont Sports Park



New sports facility

St Gerard's School, Gwynedd, has unveiled a new multi-use sports facility.

The site includes a 'next generation' artificial grass surface which can be used for five-a-side football, netball, hockey, tennis, basketball and more.

An access road, parking, running track and landscaping neighbour the development and there are plans to construct a toilet block and changing rooms in the coming months, in addition to floodlighting.

Business Manager Steve Griffiths commented: "The facility is a fantastic addition to the site and further improves our physical education (PE) provision.

Pictured: The new MUGA facility

"We have also introduced a garden and landscaping around the area to complement the 'wellness walk' we launched last year, and the overall redevelopment of the seven-acre site."

Headteacher Campbell Harrison added: "This is not just a MUGA (multi-use games area), it is a commitment to our pupils and the community.

"We promote health, wellbeing and exercise, combined with fun! That's one of the main reasons behind this new facility, which I'm sure will prove very popular with learners but also people in north west Wales keen to participate in sports like five-a-side, netball and basketball in the evenings and on weekends."

Advertorial Feature

Why your school needs padel courts

Padel is the UK's fastest growing sport. It's the perfect modern sport: quick to learn, fun to play, and fantastic for physical and social development.

What is padel?

Padel is a fun, fast-paced racket sport that blends tennis and squash. It's played in doubles on an enclosed court about a third the size of a tennis court. The ball can bounce off the glass walls, which keeps the game going and adds an exciting twist.

Benefit for students

Padel offers a range of benefits for students, both physically and mentally. It encourages agility, co-ordination, and cardiovascular health, helping students stay fit in a fun and dynamic way. As a social and engaging doubles sport, it promotes teamwork, collaborative play and creates a positive atmosphere that gets students excited to be active.

Its accessibility makes it suitable for girls and boys across all fitness

levels, reducing participation gaps and making it less intimidating than many traditional sports. Additionally, padel supports wellbeing by providing an enjoyable outlet during or after school, while also fostering confidence and discipline through structured play and competition.

Benefit for schools

Introducing padel positions your school as forward-thinking and committed to future-focused sports development. By adding this modern, fast-growing sport to the curriculum, you will enhance the value and appeal of your overall sports offering.

Padel courts also provide a versatile space for after-school clubs, inter-house tournaments, and hosting fixtures, enriching the extracurricular experience for students. This can attract new families who are seeking schools with diverse and dynamic opportunities. Additionally, padel is a cost-effective option, with low maintenance courts made from durable materials and synthetic turf.

Our versatile courts allow them to be installed indoors or outdoors, and even over existing tennis courts which significantly reduces costs while maximising the use of space. Contact us to hear how adding padel courts can create an income stream for your school.



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Charity partnerships

Head of Thomas's Battersea, Rupert Hawkins, discusses the mutual benefits of entering into a partnership with a charity and how it means so much more than raising money.

There is no better initiative than for a school to work in partnership with a charity over the course of an academic year.

We do it – and the results are exceptional.

Define results. There lies the impact of such a partnership. Money was raised, of course – but the significance of what was achieved extended far beyond the financial gain for the given charity.

Thomas's Battersea is a school that supports and works closely with a different charity every year. We do this for so many reasons, but perhaps the most important is that, as a community, we long to give something back. As the Head of the school, I am constantly asking the question: what is this all for – If not that our pupils come to understand the immense privilege that has been bestowed upon them, and that giving back is the essential response.

We are a school that has ten school values, and the charity of the year enables all ten values to be lived out, but particularly values 1 and 10.

The first value is what our school is all about: Kindness.

Set up in the 1970s, Thomas's had two school rules. The first was 'Be Kind'. The second was 'Don't Run'. The Thomas's family dropped the second rule, Don't Run and kindness has remained ever since,

and it forms the moral compass for the school community, around which every interaction and every lesson unfolds.

The tenth and final value is to be: Givers; not Takers. It is our reminder to be giving back in every way we can, and the charity of the year helps us do just that.

Every year, the community chooses the charity it wants to support. What follows are the fundraising initiatives and events, school parties, weekend activities and so much more – all for the charity of the year. Our aim is to find a charity that is local and that will inspire our pupils to live out the first and last of our school values.

It may seem a daft concept to choose between a group of charities, all of which have noble causes. However, when pupils are empowered to choose that cause, it only helps make it feel more real. Our pupils know and understand the charity they are supporting – and that makes a significant difference.

As one pupil put it: "I love having a charity of the year because we get to choose it", and another said: "It is always interesting to learn about local charities and what they are doing to help people, and choosing the charity of the year gives us a chance to have a say on what we want to support."

School communities and charities must understand the mutual benefits from being in partnership with one another. Yes, the charity receives the money raised so that it can continue to do the outstanding work for which they are known. Importantly, however, it is the pupils that can truly benefit from becoming invested in a charity that models what it looks like to make a positive difference in our world.

It is why, when we came across the charity 52 Lives, we became instantly interested.

The concept is that the charity looks to support an individual in need for one week every week throughout the year – in total impacting the lives of 52 people every year. But it is so much more than that.

With its own School of Kindness, which looks to connect Kindness Ambassadors across different schools and discuss different ways to be kind, we found we had so much in common with the charity, in that we both looked to centre our very existence around kindness and what it means to give back.

The mutual understanding was clear from the start. We were aligned with our values and our aims. It was an instant hit.

The result was that the partnership was not just a school looking to support a charity as part of a tick-



Rupert Hawkins

box exercise, but it was a genuine partnership. We supported each other. While we looked to help in any way we could, 52 Lives inspired a next generation of school children, demonstrating to us what it looks like to live out kindness in action, and to give back.

And the shared benefits played out throughout the year. Pumpkin carving sales, plogging (jogging while litter-picking), golf days and bake sales were just a small number of ways the children raised money, while the children took part in Kindness Workshops and Kindness Challenges, becoming part of a Kindness Ambassador Programme to help spread kindness in the school and wider community.

One of the many highlights was when the pupils made cards for some of the individuals the charity was helping. The beneficiaries received the cards, and then wrote back to us. But it didn't stop there. Parents attended kindness workshops, and were at the heart of everything the partnership looked to achieve.

By working in partnership it was not a mere, distant concept for which we looked to fundraise. This was different, and that is one of the many benefits of supporting a charity over the course of a year.

Triathlon fundraiser

Over 780 young athletes from 30 schools have come together at Bryanston, Dorset, to take part in the Knight Frank Schools Triathlon, the UK's largest fundraising event for children.

By swimming, cycling, and running, the young triathletes collectively covered more than 1,700 km roughly the distance from Blandford to Valencia, raising £58,000 for youth charity, Restless Development, and over 30 other charities selected by participating schools.

Among the standout moments of the day was the top fundraising team, The Olive Green, from Port Regis School, Dorset, who raised £1,550.

The Bryanston event was part of a national 12-event series organised by Restless Development, aiming to raise over £1.2 million between May and June.



Taking part in the triathlon

All funds raised go directly to charity, supporting grassroots initiatives around the world.

Hosting the event for a second year, Bryanston welcomed over 2,000 attendees, including participants, families, volunteers, and businesses from the local community.

CHANGING FACES... CHANGING PLACES...



Blundell's School, Devon, has announced the appointment of Gareth Pearson as its next Head, beginning in September 2026.

Originally from Dorset, Mr Pearson studied Mechanical Engineering at Loughborough University before serving as an Officer in the Royal Marines. His teaching career has

included leadership roles at Millfield, Somerset; Wellington College, Berkshire; and Lord Wandsworth College, Hampshire. He is currently Head of Christ College, Brecon, where he has led the school since 2017.

Mr Pearson will succeed current Head, Bart Wielenga, who will return to South Africa to become Rector of Michaelhouse.



Carl Shuttleworth has been named as the new Head of School at St Christopher's Prep

School and Nursery, Staverton, Devon. He is the first person outside the founding family to take on the role. He takes over from current Head Alexandra Cottell, who is the daughter of school founders Jane

and Greg Kenyon.

With a background spanning both nursery and prep school education, Carl has experience from both independent and state schools in the North of England.

He will be relocating to South Devon with his wife Gemma, their two young boys, a dog, a cat, and a small collection of chickens.



Surbiton High School, Surrey, has announced the return of Mr Byron King as Head of

Surbiton High Boys' Preparatory School from September 2025.

Mr King is a familiar member of the

Surbiton High School community having first joined as a Year 5 Form Teacher at the Girls' Preparatory School, and later becoming Deputy Head at the Boys' Preparatory School. Most recently, he has spent the past year working with an education technology company.

King's Birthday Honours List

Melvyn Roffe, the current CEO of the Clifton Education Group, has been awarded an MBE for services to Education and to the community in Edinburgh in the King's Birthday Honours List.

The award is in recognition for his ten-year leadership of George Watson's College, Edinburgh, and for his role in delivering community education partnerships in Scotland.

On receiving news of his award, Melvyn said: "I am thrilled and humbled to be honoured in this way. For me, education has always been much more than just a career, as fulfilling as my career to date has been, so it means a great deal that this honour also recognises service to the community in Edinburgh. I have always been committed to the idea that young people are best educated in schools which are integral to their communities and that communities are stronger if they benefit from active citizens and strong institutions, including schools, working within them. In accepting this honour, I would like to pay tribute to all those who are working in state-funded and independent schools across



the UK to make communities stronger and to secure better opportunities for young people."

In his role at George Watson's College he supported several community projects which focused on improving access to education in Scotland. This includes the formation of the Swire Chinese Language Centre which provides Mandarin Chinese lessons to state schools in Edinburgh and the Engineering and Computer Science in Edinburgh Schools project (ECSES), which provides access to high quality computing education. He was also Chair of the Education Working Group which delivered the schools education programme for the Eric Liddell 100 project, which is a programme of events and activities in recognition of the Scottish Olympian.



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