

The Independent Schools Magazine



The professional journal for Management & Staff

schoolblazer



Excellent



★ Trustpilot

*Quality
without complexity.*

UNIFORM + SPORTSWEAR

schoolblazer.info | info@schoolblazer.com | 01832 280011

schoolblazer

In this issue...



UK School Dog of the Year crowned

Sunshine, a dog rescued from the streets of Cyprus, has been named the UK's 2026 School Dog of the Year.

Working at Octavia House School (OHS) in London – a specialist school providing education and therapy for pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs, and many who have had adverse childhood experiences – Sunshine offers comfort, reassurance, and emotional support during regular visits with her owner, Laura Freeman. These visits have had a measurable impact on pupils' attendance, self-esteem, and ability to form relationships, according to the school.

Laura Freeman and Sunshine received the award at a ceremony at the Palace of Westminster.

In nominating Sunshine, Director, Therapy at OHS, Emily Rattenbury-Barlow said: "Sunshine brings joy and a sense of calm, providing warmth, acceptance, and comfort. Our pupils adore her. We feel incredibly lucky to have Laura and Sunshine as part of our therapy team."

Laura Freeman, who is qualified in Animal Assisted Play Therapy, said: "Pupils learn about compassion and empathy when interacting with Sunshine, supporting her wellbeing as well as theirs."

The UK School Dog of the Year Awards celebrate schools and other education providers which work with dogs responsibly, and safely, and with a measurably beneficial impact on pupils. From nominations received from across the UK, the judges selected winners in each of four categories, before announcing Sunshine as the 2026 UK School Dog of the Year at the ceremony.

Pictured: Orla and Penelope with Dan Snow

Cover background

AI in education

With AI in education remaining a key topic of discussion, read about why it's important to go beyond just the implementation of an AI tool, the implications of pupils using AI for homework, and find out more about how one school has been involved in developing an Ethical AI & Entrepreneurship Qualification, see pages 4-6.

AI in education

- 04 Taking AI integration beyond the obvious
- 05 AI and homework
- 06 Ethical AI & Entrepreneurship Qualification

07 Recipe for success

Mixing classes in primary year groups

08 Reimagining Sixth Form study

Introducing a dual pathway model

12 Food for thought

Bringing Science, Tech, Engineering, and Cookery together

20 Beyond evidence

Embedding a research driven school culture

23 The classroom under siege

What can schools do about misinformation and disinformation

26 Pastoral care

A look at some of the trends

28 Profile

In conversation with Dominic Oliver

38 The 11-plus

What is it really costing pupils?

39 Broadening students' academic and career horizons

A focus on a secondary enrichment programme

Plus

- 16 Group, merger, and partnership news
- 30 Stronger together: why collaboration not competition creates better choices
- 32 School uniform: why it looks different and why it matters
- 34 Astronomy for schools
- 36 Music, Drama, & Dance feature
- 42 The dissolution of independent schools
- 46 Closures and schools under threat
- 48 Sports feature
- 52 Focus on IT and administration

Contact us; Editorial Advisory Board – page 54

Is your school mentioned?

Schools featured in this issue include:

Abbey Gate College; Abbotsholme School; Abingdon Prep School; Abingdon School; Ardreck School; Bancroft's; Bolton School Girls' Division; Bryanston School; Burgess Hill Girls; Caterham School; Clifton High School; Cobham Hall; Cokethorpe School; Colchester Prep and High School; The Croft Preparatory School; The Downs Preparatory School; Downside School; Ellesmere College; Francis Holland Prep School, London; George Heriot's School; Glenalmond College; Glenesk School; Gordonstoun; Haberdashers' Elstree Schools; Hamilton College; Highfield and Brookham School; Highfield Prep School; The High School of Glasgow; Hurstpierpoint College; Ipswich High School; Jordanhill School; Kimbolton School; King Edward VI School (KES), Hampshire; King's Hawford; The King's School Canterbury; King's School Plymouth; Leighton Park School; Leweston School; The Leys School; LGS Stoneycage; Long Close School; Loughborough High School; Malvern College; The Manor Prep; Morrison's Academy; Mount House School; Moyles Court School; New Hall School; Newton Prep School, London; Northampton High School GDST; Octavia House School; Oundle School; Pangbourne College; Pocklington School; Polam School & Nursery; Putney High School GDST; Queen's College, Taunton; Queenswood School; Radnor House Prep; Robert Gordon's College; Rossall School; Ruckleigh School; Ryde School; St Aubyn's; St Albans School; St Faith's School; St Gabriel's School, Newbury; St. Helen's College Prep School; St Joseph's College, Reading; St. Mary's College, Liverpool; St Michael Abbey School, Tenbury; Salcombe Preparatory School; Shebbear College; Spring Grove School; Stoke College; Thorngrove School; Trinity School, Croydon; Woodbridge School; Woodford Green Preparatory School

Taking AI integration beyond the obvious

With the job market likely to be most different for the youngest students, what does this mean for prep schools when thinking how best to respond to AI, especially when a lot of AI tools have age restrictions? Director of Innovation at Haberdashers' Elstree Schools, Hertfordshire, Clare Jarmy, considers the advances in AI, why it's important to go beyond just the implementation of a tool, and how teachers should be explicit regarding goals to ensure pupils have the best opportunities to use AI to make a positive impact in the world.



Clare Jarmy

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is developing and advancing quickly, so the conversation in schools must be ongoing and our guidance dynamic enough to remain current. As teachers, we have to be explicit regarding our goals if we want to give pupils the very best opportunities to use AI to make a positive impact in the world. That means nurturing an ongoing, open dialogue with pupils around how to achieve this. New tools are cropping up all the time, as are new challenges, so we can never rest on our laurels, the discussion is always evolving and although daunting at times, it is something that schools should feel excited to be part of.

Prep schools have particular challenges when it comes to responding to AI. On the one hand, the job market is going to be the most different for the youngest students. On the other, age restrictions on many AI tools put them beyond the direct use of prep school pupils (and many would say "rightly so"). Prep schools must both be responding to AI whilst not giving pupils access to much of it. Faced with this dilemma, it can be tempting to just look for a tool: an AI program that pupils can safely use at a younger age. Whilst this might well be part of an answer,

the danger is that such an approach ticks a box, whilst not addressing a wider issue.

Critical thinking and positive engagement

Viewing the integration of AI technology in relation to the development of children as people, and beyond simply learning how to use these tools appropriately, is a good place to start. AI is not simply a new tool, like a glue stick or pair of scissors in a pencil case. AI challenges what it means to think, to work, to come up with an idea. In January 2026, the CEO of MacKenzie announced that of its 60,000 employees, 25,000 were now AI agents. Ultimately, this means prioritising an ethical, pedagogical, and philosophical understanding of AI, which in turn will promote critical thinking and positive engagement across your school community.

At our school we are launching a new curriculum for pupils aged 8-13 years in September, which is designed to assess 12 key dispositions, such as collaboration, initiative, and integrity: the deeply human traits that we believe really matter, and those which are not replicable by AI. We piloted this approach in Year 5 last September, building a curriculum about ethical

entrepreneurship, sustainability, human rights, and fast fashion around the ISEB's iPQ qualification. This is a meaningful response to a world that is being shaped by developments in AI, but one that goes beyond mere integration of tools. The feedback we have had on this approach so far has been really positive. Parents and students are both recognising the complexity of problem-solving, that it is bringing to the curriculum.

Academic standards matter

At the same time, it is important, particularly in the pre-prep and prep stage, to recognise what skills remain important, despite the fact that AI can replicate some of them. It is so important not to take this point too far – i.e., just because *Mo Farah can run faster than me, it doesn't follow that I don't need to learn to run, not only to acquire a new skill, but for the health benefits it would bring me*. Pupils need to learn to research, to write, to remember, to think, and to analyse; academic standards still matter.

But how do we know that our pupils are learning these things? The key is that our main modes of assessment focus on the product, and not the process. If we can find ways to assess this,

we will be measuring the learning taking place. Importantly, this requires that pupils belong and are known in their schools. They need teachers to know their work, understand their thinking, and how their individual ideas have been developing. By flipping our assessment intentions from product to process, we can change the whole *modus operandi*, and with that bring big wins for positive relationships and pupil motivation.

Rooted in purpose

As schools we have a duty to ensure that any approach to AI is rooted in purpose, to empower young people to become more than simply passive users. Pupils should be encouraged to become active makers who use the technology available to solve real-world problem. They must start to think critically about AI: how algorithmic bias affects outputs; how deepfakes affect what we think of as reliable. More than anything, we must respond with a curriculum which cultivates what is best about humans.

In the end, the foundational learning around the use of AI is more about understanding our individual pupils and our educational journey with them, which is developed and nurtured through an ongoing process of learning.

Haberdashers' Elstree Schools (Habs) is one of only five independent schools in the UK to have been awarded the highest possible Gold AI Quality Mark from the Good Future Foundation for its strategic integration of AI technology in relation to the development of its students

AI and homework: The gap between policy and reality

As generative AI becomes more embedded in everyday learning, what are the implications when thinking about the use of AI for homework? AI and Critical Thinking research lead, Toby MacLachlan, examines the extent of the problem, outlines what the latest research is suggesting, and offers some thoughts on what schools can do to bridge the gap between policy and reality.



Toby MacLachlan

Homework used to be worth setting. A decent answer demonstrated a student had grappled with the topic and reinforced their understanding through productive struggle. A minority just submitted poor work or nothing at all. Times have changed. Freely available AI chatbots now enable students to submit perfect answers without either the struggle or the understanding. Homework is still useful if done right, but these days it rarely is.

How widespread

80%+ of students self-report using AI for homework, according to an Oxford University Press survey of 2,000 students in October 2025. Schools have responded variously by asking students not to use AI (which they resent or ignore), to use AI responsibly (which is hard to define or achieve), or to submit their AI transcripts along with their homework (which is onerous and unscalable).

The policy gap

There is a significant policy gap: whilst many schools have AI policies, those policies are rarely specific to homework, and few teachers believe their students clearly understand what acceptable AI use looks like. All schools are required to have an "AI policy" by

the end of this year, but there's a substantial disconnect between policy and practice.

Cheating by default?

It would be too simplistic to say that most students are "cheating". A recent survey during my own research with the University of Birmingham showed 42% turn to AI for explanations; only 4% want the answer. The trouble is that the AI they reach for, ChatGPT, Gemini, and the like, is designed to give answers, not explanations. Students aren't trying to cheat; the tools they use by default just aren't designed for learning.

Whose responsibility?

Homework falls between teachers, students, and parents, and is in grave danger of each group shrugging shoulders and saying "it's not my problem." Each has its own failing to address. Teachers should recommend AI that encourages dialogue rather than gives answers. Students need to recognise the cost of cognitive offloading and be more thoughtful about when to turn to AI. And parents, concerned by AI but rarely monitoring their children's use of it, want schools to take the lead.

2026 University Research

In the Spring term of 2026, I worked with Dr Catherine Lawler at the University of Birmingham to

assess the impact of different types of AI on the critical thinking of Y12 students. Some 500+ students across 15 schools enrolled, split into three equal cohorts running weekly exercises on fake news. One group used ChatGPT, another a Socratic AI (designed to foster dialogue and reflection without giving answers), and the third had no AI.

The results are not yet published, but the engagement figures tell their own story. Students using the Socratic AI spent an average of 32 minutes per week on the exercise; those in the ChatGPT group spent under four minutes. Asked about their perceived improvement in critical thinking, 68% of the Socratic AI cohort reported gains, against 52% of the no-AI group and just 35% of the ChatGPT group. Strikingly, students with no AI reported more improvement than those with ChatGPT, suggesting the wrong AI may be actively worse than none.

What can schools do?

The first step is understanding: of what AI can do, and of how and why students are using it. Give teachers licences to AI products and encourage them to try doing the homework they set with AI. Then survey students to find out why they're turning to AI; the answers may be more encouraging than

many fear.

The next step is to provide the right type of AI. Not all AI is equal: our research has shown that ChatGPT is worse than self-learning, but education-designed AI delivers better outcomes than no AI at all.

The final step is visibility and accountability. Students ten years ago proved they'd spent time on homework by handing in answers. Now we still want them to spend the time, but to prove it by evidencing their working, not their answers. Time in productive struggle creates critical ability, independence, and resilience; the finished piece of work does not. Teachers need dashboards showing why, when, and how often students turned to AI.

Visible thinking

AI can be productive or counterproductive, but it will not be absent. Students are using it and will continue to do so. The question for schools is no longer whether AI should be allowed into homework, but what kind of AI use counts as learning. If homework is to remain valuable, schools must shift the emphasis from polished answers to visible thinking: the questions students ask, the reasoning they develop, and the effort they put in along the way.

Toby MacLachlan is the founder of Dr Connor, a Socratic AI used in research with the University of Birmingham, and now offered free to secondary schools this year, www.dr-connor.app

Platt Fisher Lecture

Bolton School Girls' Division, Lancashire, has hosted the annual Platt Fisher Lecture, which this year featured Old Girl, Professor Sue Turner, OBE.

This lecture series, hosted by the Girls' Division, began five years ago and provides a platform for inspirational Girls' Division alumnae to use their personal experiences

and interests to inspire current and former pupils.

The 2026 Platt Fisher Lecture was titled 'The future belongs to the curious: why AI makes your questions more valuable than ever.'

A Professor in Practice for AI and Technologies at the University of Bristol Business School, Professor Turner, established AI Governance

Limited to advise business and policy makers on pragmatic AI, data ethics and governance issues, and making a societal impact in 2020.

Her Platt Fisher Lecture was a thoughtful exploration of the impacts of AI and what it means for the future, and in particular how it will impact and be used by the young people in the audience.



Pictured: Professor Sue Turner, OBE
Photo credit: Bolton School Girls' Division

Giving pupils an EDGE: innovating curricula

Caterham School, Surrey, has recently launched an Ethical AI & Entrepreneurship Qualification with Nottingham University Business School, named EDGE. Caterham Head, Ceri Jones, explains what the GCSE equivalent course is all about and how it's been designed to fill the graduate skills gap and ensure young people use AI ethically.

The conversation about innovation in education is often dominated by technology – devices, platforms, and particularly the rapid development of AI, but a more purposeful and meaningful shift in education is not simply about what hardware and software pupils use, but how our young people learn to think, create, co-create, and apply knowledge in an uncertain world which presents ever faster tech developments. The launch of a new curriculum initiative from Caterham School offers a compelling example of what that shift can look like in practice, future-proofing pupils by developing skills and understanding.

In partnership with Nottingham University Business School and Enactus UK, Caterham has developed and launched the EDGE certificate, a GCSE-equivalent qualification, recognised by UCAS and designed specifically for Key Stage 4 pupils. Our ambition in doing so is clear: to bridge the widening gap between traditional academic pathways and success and the skills young people need to thrive in a fast-changing, technology-driven economy. We need our young people to secure the grades that open doors but also develop the skills to thrive when they step through them. The ambition is to make this KS4 curriculum available to all schools once Caterham's first cohort have begun the course this September.

For school leaders and classroom practitioners, the significance of the EDGE curriculum lies not just in its content, but in its underlying philosophy. At its core is a recognition that conventional curricular – while academically rigorous – can struggle to keep pace with the realities of modern work and society. Employers and universities increasingly point to deficits in areas such as problem-solving, adaptability, collaboration, and real-world application of knowledge. The World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs Report

highlighted that skills gaps are emerging as the “biggest barrier to business transformation around the world,” detailing an estimated 59% of the global workforce needing reskilling by 2030. EDGE is an attempt to address these challenges head-on.

Unlike traditional qualifications, the course integrates business theory with project-based learning and technology whilst placing social impact and innovation at the centre. Pupils are not simply learning about enterprise; they are actively creating it. This experiential model transforms abstract concepts into lived experience, helping learners understand not just what works, but why.

Crucially, EDGE also embeds the ethical use of AI as a foundational element. As AI becomes increasingly ubiquitous, the question facing educators is no longer whether pupils should engage with it, but how. By incorporating ethical considerations into practical application, the programme moves beyond technical literacy to cultivate critical awareness – an approach that many schools are still grappling to define. At Caterham pupils benefit not only from the EDGE curriculum but from a school which practises what it teaches with our own EdTech start up in house. Our first product, RileyBot, is an AI powered teaching and learning bot in schools across the UK.

Professor Andrew Bacon OBE of Nottingham University Business School, a partner in EDGE's development, describes the curriculum initiative as a milestone for enterprise education, emphasising the importance of “business with purpose” as a defining feature of the future economy. His comments reflect a broader shift in thinking across higher education and industry: that success will depend as much on values and impact as on technical competence.

For education leaders this raises an important strategic question. If one of the purposes of education is to prepare young people for life beyond school, how should curricula evolve to reflect that responsibility? Our view is that it is our responsibility as educators to create pathways and opportunities that genuinely equip pupils for a fast-paced and uncertain world. That framing may resonate widely across the sector, particularly as schools balance accountability measures with the need for broader skill development.

What distinguishes EDGE as a curriculum is its deliberate blending of structure and flexibility. While grounded in established business studies principles, the qualification allows space for creativity, iteration, and failure – elements that are often constrained in more traditional assessment models. Pupils must navigate uncertainty, test ideas in unfamiliar contexts and refine their thinking based on real feedback. These are precisely the conditions that define both entrepreneurial activity and much of modern professional life.

Amy Brereton, CEO of social entrepreneurial charity Enactus UK & Ireland, highlights another key benefit: confidence. By developing skills and behaviours within a supportive environment, pupils are more likely to carry them forward into higher education and employment. For teachers, this reinforces the importance of creating classrooms where experimentation is encouraged and risk-taking is seen as part of the learning process, rather than something to be avoided.

The development of EDGE has also involved input from business leaders and educational innovators, ensuring that its design reflects current and emerging expectations. This kind of collaboration – between schools, universities, and employers – will no doubt become increasingly important as



Ceri Jones

the pace of change accelerates. No single institution can fully anticipate future skill needs in isolation; partnerships such as the ones Caterham has developed with Nottingham University Business School and Enactus offer a more responsive and informed approach.

Looking ahead, there are plans to extend the EDGE curriculum beyond Caterham to both state maintained and independent schools across the UK. If realised, this could contribute to a more systemic shift in how enterprise and innovation are embedded within secondary education. It also raises questions about scalability, teacher training and assessment frameworks – areas that will require careful consideration if such models are to be adopted more widely.

For now, the EDGE KS4 curriculum stands as a case study in what educational innovation can achieve when it is aligned with clear purpose. It is not simply about adding another qualification to the timetable, but about rethinking the relationship between knowledge and application, between learning and doing.

For headteachers and teachers navigating their own approaches to curriculum development, the message is both challenging and encouraging. Innovation does not necessarily require abandoning academic rigour; rather, it involves reimagining how that rigour is applied. As the demands on young people continue to evolve, so too must the experiences we offer them in school.

In that sense, initiatives like EDGE may signal not just a new course, but a broader direction of travel – one in which education becomes more connected, more purposeful, and more attuned to the realities of the world pupils are preparing to enter.

A recipe for success? Mixing classes in primary year groups

The class reshuffle between year groups can often be a source of anxiety, especially for parents. Deputy Head Teaching & Learning at Newton Prep School, London, Dr Phoebe Graham, takes a look at the decision-making process of a class reshuffle from a school's perspective, the role teacher knowledge and insight plays in that, and offers some thoughts on how to try and ease the transition for both pupils and parents.



Dr Phoebe Graham

It's class list announcement day. There are smiles and sneaky fist-bumps, tantrums, and tears; and that's just from the parents.

Making the decision to shuffle children between classes from one academic year to another is sometimes a divisive topic in prep schools, particularly with parents who believe that, rightly or wrongly, their fees buy them an opinion. Some advocate that keeping a core group of friends together throughout the school journey is essential to social and academic success. Others see groups of friends stagnate, fractures appear, or a certain "pack mentality" take over. As with all evidence-based practice, such decisions should be informed by three things: research, context, and experience.

The research in this case, unfortunately, is sparse. Some studies have looked at the benefits of staying with close friends when making the big move from primary into secondary (such as Ng-Knight et al., 2019). Others look at promoting successful transition from Nursery into "big school," typically finding that continuation of expectations, friendships, and experiences support successful functioning following carefully developed transition programmes (Margetts, 2007). However, very few investigate the mixing of classes within an established school environment. One reason for this lack is likely feasibility; a "perfect" study design would

likely involve several classes from the same school, some mixing and some not, whilst also trying to account for individual differences and variation between teachers. Aside from the objective unfairness of keeping some classes intact and some mixed, how would you determine exactly what differences in social or academic outcomes (however you measured those) came from class mixing?

However, what research has highlighted for decades is that successfully managing developmental change equips children with the resilience needed to cope positively with future social and institutional transitions (Fthenakis, 1998). Children as young as six have been found to have good levels of adjustment in transition periods, having an appropriately mature nervous system, acquiring emotional resilience, and learning adaptive skills (Kienig, 2002). Importantly, this ability to adjust and settle is significantly improved if the broader setting is familiar (Bowman et al., 1992). Margetts (2007), whose work focuses specifically on transition and adjustment in young children, found that the presence of even one familiar playmate in the same class was strongly associated with improved social adjustment, reduced problem behaviour, and greater academic confidence. Within-School class-mixing, then, becomes a safe environment for children to learn to get along with

others and adapt to change. This becomes especially important as they move further through their school and encounter increasingly fluid groupings, specialist teaching, and, eventually, the transition to senior school.

Of course, all of these conversations happen within the context of a particular school; one-form entry schools do not have the luxury of choice, whilst international schools may have to constantly reorganise due to turnover of numbers. Indeed, in the current market, it is quite possible that a year group may have several children leaving this July, all from the same class, leading to an imbalance in September if there was no shuffling.

Crucially, experience and teacher knowledge matter. One approach is to give the children a voice, for example by allowing them to choose five friends they would like to be with, and guaranteeing at least one. Teachers can then consider the depth and quality of friendships, social confidence, pastoral needs, learning dynamics, class balance, and wider group interactions. The guarantee of at least one named friend therefore becomes a minimum assurance rather than the limit of considerations. Where teachers know that a child has one or two particularly significant friendships, that professional knowledge can carry substantial weight in the process.

Parents are, understandably, often concerned that their children will not be able to cope with making new friends. They are also, perhaps not so overtly, concerned that they will not be able to cope with making friends with their children's new friend's parents. A *Grazie* article published in 2024 summed this sentiment up with a piece titled 'I pick my kids' friends based on the coolness of their parents – don't we all?' This additional anxiety can make for some very frustrated parents. One way to ease this transition, for both pupils and parents, is to ensure that children have as many opportunities as possible to spend time with their new classes and teachers in gradual, positive, and supported ways. Transition activities, social stories, shared play opportunities, and carefully planned classroom experiences can ensure children feel secure and excited about the move. New class "mixers," for want of a better term, can help parents develop new relationships themselves.

For my money, shuffling classes where the context allows and the teacher's knowledge is sufficient can be helpful in developing children's independence, social awareness, tolerance, and adaptability. And heaven knows, they will certainly need all of these in abundance.

References

- Fthenakis, W. E. (1998). Family transitions and quality in early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 6(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13502939885208131>
- Kienig, A. (2002). The importance of social adjustment for future success. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.) *Transitions in the Early years: Debating Continuity and Progression for Children in Early Education* (pp. 23–38). London: Routledge
- Margetts, K. (2007). Preparing Children for School—Benefits and Privileges. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 32(2), 43–50.
- Ng-Knight, T., Shelton, K.H., Riglin, L., Frederickson, N., McManus, I.C., and Rice, F. (2019). 'Best friends forever'? Friendship stability across school transition and associations with mental health and educational attainment. *Br J Educ Psychol*, 89: 585–599. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12246>

Reimagining Sixth Form study as a launchpad for the modern economy

In the modern economy, there are many new and diverse careers. To ensure young people are supported to develop and pursue all different types of skillsets and find the best route to suit their individual talents, Mount House School, Hertfordshire, has developed a dual-pathway Sixth Form model, supported by an Enterprise Curriculum. Head of the School, Jon Cooper, outlines what this looks like and how it's possible for Sixth Forms to adopt enterprise pathways that balance academic rigour with practical experience.



Jon Cooper

When students leave Sixth Form, exam results and university destinations are no longer the sole measures of their future success. As the World Economic Forum¹ has highlighted, technology is reshaping industries and making career paths less predictable, increasing the importance of skills such as adaptability, communication, problem-solving, and confident decision-making alongside academic achievement.

No one can say for sure what the employment market will look like in a decade, but we do know that young people will need these skills to navigate change and the judgement to apply their learning in new situations. With that in mind, every school should be asking: "How well does our Sixth Form prepare students for what comes next?"

At Mount House School, that question led us to review our offering and consider whether it reflected our students' different aspirations, strengths, and learning styles. We acknowledged that A Levels are an excellent route into higher education and will continue to provide a rigorous academic foundation for many young people. They rightly sit at the heart of our Sixth Form, but it became clear that a single pathway could not meet every student's needs.

We began exploring alternatives that would maintain our

high standards while creating opportunities for all students to develop a broader range of skills and experiences. My background as an International Baccalaureate teacher led us to explore the International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme. There is much to admire about both the IBCP and the IB Diploma, especially their emphasis on independent thinking and intellectual curiosity. However, after careful consideration, we felt neither programme was the right fit for what we wanted to create.

So, we developed an Enterprise Pathway that combines Level 3 qualifications, including the BTEC Diploma in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, with a recognised IT qualification and a substantial workplace placement.

The placements are now a defining feature of the programme, as work experience is usually compressed into a week or two, offering a snapshot of professional life. We wanted something that would allow students to become part of an organisation, understand its culture, and gradually assume responsibility.

Students spend one day a week at work and four days at school, often staying with the same employer for both years of Sixth Form. This consistency is important because it allows students to build relationships, work on projects, and learn about

workplace expectations in ways that are difficult to achieve in a classroom setting.

So far, the results of our new pathway have been impressive. Some students who did not do as well in traditional exams have thrived because they can show their skills in different ways. Their confidence has grown and what they learn in class feels more relevant because they use these ideas in real workplaces.

We also wanted to ensure that vocational learning did not mean less academic challenge or rigour. Students on this pathway can complete an Extended Project Qualification and join our service-learning programme, which offers opportunities to work within the community and stretch themselves intellectually and professionally. The programme is flexible, so students can shape their experience to match their interests and ambitions.

In many professional environments, success relies on good communication, teamwork, and the ability to solve complex problems. So, as the pathway evolved, we reconsidered how achievement was assessed. We ensured that presentations, project work, and case studies were given the same importance as traditional evaluation, providing students with opportunities to demonstrate these professional skills as part of a well-rounded education.

Offering more than one pathway also made us think about how these options would work together structurally. Sometimes, schools can unintentionally divide students by the subjects they study, creating separate cultures within the same Sixth Form. As a school that prides itself on our collaborative culture, we were keen to avoid that.

Our response was to establish a shared Futures programme for all Sixth Form students. It is built into the timetable and brings everyone together to look at topics that are not always covered by exams but are very important for adult life. The programme includes financial literacy, critical thinking, global issues, academic enrichment, such as the EPQ and careers advice.

Looking back on our journey at Mount House, I am even more convinced that Sixth Form should prepare students for the real world. Every school is different, but it is worth reviewing whether traditional models really help young people understand what drives them and where they want to go next.

As school leaders, we have a valuable and timely opportunity to support students in developing confidence, building professional skills, and leaving school with the strongest possible foundation for the opportunities and expectations ahead.

¹ Leopold, T. (2025). Future of Jobs Report 2025: The jobs of the future – and the skills you need to get them. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/future-of-jobs-report-2025-jobs-of-the-future-and-the-skills-you-need-to-get-them>



THE INDEPENDENT CHOICE FOR SCHOOL MINIBUSES

NEW FOR 2026

PEUGEOT BOXER L4 AUTOMATIC MINIBUS

ORDER TODAY

Premium, fully compliant minibuses delivering safety, reliability, and fixed budget peace of mind

- Fully Type Approved minibuses meeting all UK safety and compliance standards
- A choice of high-quality 9 - 17 seat vehicles, including accessible options
- 6 speed manual and NEW for 2026, 8 speed fully automatic options
- Flexible funding options with predictable whole-life costs
- New and Approved used minibuses to suit capital or lease budgets
- Nationwide demonstrations and long-term after-sales support
- D1 and B Licence minibuses
- Supporting Schools across the UK since 1982
- Vehicle Telematic Data options

Call today to arrange a quotation or a demonstration

Tel: 01202 827678 redkite-minibuses.com sales@redkite-minibuses.com

PEUGEOT FORD VAUXHALL



VEHICLE
CERTIFICATION
AGENCY

APPROVED PRODUCT

BVRLA
Quality Assured

VOSC
Vehicle Occupant Safety Centre



Social media ban for under 16s

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has announced that the government will ban social media access for children under 16 next Spring.

Responding to the news, the Girls Day School Trust (GDST), said the announcement reflects growing concern among parents, schools, and young people themselves about the impact of social media on wellbeing, confidence, and childhood development.

Head of Putney High School GDST, Jo Sharrock, commented: "Social media is intentionally addictive. Combined with the harmful content proliferated by these platforms, it poses very real dangers to young people and society at large."

Two years ago, Putney High School introduced phone pouches to create a phone-free school day. From September 2026, all GDST schools will extend a mobile

phone-free environment to pupils up to Year 11.

Sharrock said: "We have seen lowered anxiety, increased concentration, an increase in active play, and a significant decrease in friendship issues associated with online activity.

"The message from our young people is clear: something must change. This announcement recognises the scale of the challenge, but if we truly want to protect children, we must go further."

There is also increasing recognition that technology companies must play a greater role in protecting young users.

Head of Northampton High School GDST, Dr May Lee,

said young people themselves often have a more nuanced understanding of social media than adults assume: "When I speak to pupils about Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok, they recognise the benefits. These platforms help them stay in touch with friends, feel connected, discover new interests, and learn about the world.

"However, they are also very honest about the harm. They tell me that social media can leave them feeling unhappy, tired, anxious, and exposed to bullying or upsetting content."

She added: "The most important step our government could take is to push hard on big tech companies to make their

platforms safer by design, with stricter age verification and legislation holding platforms accountable on harmful content."

Sharrock concluded: "Parents and schools are already playing their part, but they need support. There is a wider societal issue here which requires government intervention, regulation, and more responsible ownership from tech companies.

"Technology should serve young people, not shape and control them. This announcement is an important milestone, but it must be the beginning of a wider conversation about how we protect childhood in the digital age."

MOTIVATIONAL, ASPIRATIONAL, ENCOURAGING

HONOUR BOARDS
YOUR CHOICE, ANY SIZE, SHAPE, STYLE, FRAMING OR COLOUR!

Wells Cathedral School
OF EDINBURGH'S GOLD AWARD HOLDERS

King's Magna Middle School
QUEEN ETH

Head's Prize
JAMIN THOMAS

Steyning Grammar School
Boarding

HOLYPORT COLLEGE
Opened by Her Majesty The Queen

SHERBORNE Q&A
PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Goldtree Bespoke,
9 Huffwood Manor Trading Estate,
Partridge Green, West Sussex, RH13 8AU

For further info and your questions answered:
Tel: 0345 260 2350 or 01403 711553
Email: info@goldtreebespoke.co.uk

QUALITY & BESPOKE SERVICE

www.goldtreebespoke.co.uk

Falling pupil numbers

While the release of the ISC Annual Census is imminently expected (report on this to follow in September magazine), the ISC have already made the results of pupil figure numbers for 2026 available. They show a considerable fall in numbers across the sector.

Data shows that the total pupil numbers for 2026 are 526,611, down from 545,640 in 2025, and 556,551 in 2024, a drop of nearly 30,000 pupils over the two years.

Regionally, the North East, Wales, and Scotland saw the biggest declines but the sector saw pupil numbers fall across all parts of the country*.

Similarly, declines were recorded across all year groups with Year 1 and Year 12 both seeing the biggest falls at 6.6%.

ISC Chief Executive, Julie Robinson, said: "This year's Census shows a significant fall in pupil numbers across independent schools. Behind these figures are families facing difficult financial decisions and schools working hard to preserve

the opportunities, expertise, and support that parents value. While independent schools remain resilient, these trends demonstrate that policy decisions can have real consequences for families' educational choices. Despite the challenging headwinds, our schools remain committed to widening access through bursaries, supporting pupils with complex needs and contributing positively to communities across the country."

The figures have highlighted concerns that the impact the VAT on fees policy is greater than the government estimates, with the ISC head of media and communications, Sarah Cunnane, commenting to 'The Spectator' that if current trends continue, the number of pupils moving from the independent sector into the state sector could exceed the government's original forecasts. She also noted that, for some schools, VAT on fees has "proven a bridge too far," adding to a number of financial pressures already facing the sector.

*figures exclude Northern Ireland and other UK territories outside the mainland regions

White Paper calling for education reform submitted to government

As debate grows over the impact of AI on education and employment, Highfield and Brookham School has submitted a White Paper to the Department for Education calling for urgent reforms to ensure young people are equipped with the skills, resilience, and digital literacy needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The submission follows the school's Raising the Future conference, which brought together education leaders, employers, technology experts, safeguarding specialists, and former Education Secretary Gillian Keegan to examine whether the current education system is keeping pace with rapid social and technological change.

The White Paper, 'Education for a Changing Society: Human Skills, AI Readiness, and Preparing

Learners for the Future of Work', argues that while the government's planned curriculum reforms represent a positive step, further action is needed to equip young people with the skills and resilience required for modern life.

Among its recommendations are:

- Greater emphasis on communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills across the curriculum.
- Reform of GCSE assessment to better reflect real-world competencies and applied learning.
- A national framework for AI literacy and the responsible use of AI in schools.
- Stronger guidance around smartphone use, online safety, and digital wellbeing.

- Closer collaboration between schools, employers, and policymakers to ensure education reflects future workforce needs.

Head of Highfield and Brookham School, Mrs Suzannah Cryer, said: "Education is facing one of the most significant periods of change in a generation. The rise of artificial intelligence, changing employer expectations, and growing concerns about young people's wellbeing require us to think differently about what success in education looks like.

"Our conference brought together voices from across education, business and public policy. The message was clear: academic excellence remains essential, but schools must also help young people develop the human skills, adaptability, and ethical judgement that will enable



Suzannah Cryer

them to thrive in an increasingly complex world."

The White Paper has been submitted to the Department for Education as part of ongoing discussions surrounding curriculum and assessment reform ahead of proposed changes due from 2028.

Highfield and Brookham School plans to continue the conversation through future roundtables and cross-sector partnerships aimed at shaping a more future-focused education system.

To read the White Paper visit: www.highfieldandbrookham.co.uk/school-plus/raising-the-future



Transform your grounds with fine quality designs, hand crafted by Haddonstone



Visit haddonstone.com



HADDONSTONE



Food for thought: What a group of 10-year-olds taught me about the future of education

The High School of Glasgow (HSOG) is set to open a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Cookery (STEC) room that will bring together STEC in what they believe to be the first facility of its kind in Scotland. Rector of HSOG, Antonia Berry, explains how the concept was developed by a group of pupils and how their proposal has highlighted how such practical, hands-on learning is crucial in an AI-driven world.



Antonia Berry

One of the most interesting educational ideas I have encountered this year did not come from a government report, an academic conference or a leadership seminar.

It came from a group of Junior 6 pupils.

As part of an innovation challenge, pupils at The High School of Glasgow were asked to redesign an area of the school.

Their idea surprised me.

Rather than asking for bigger playgrounds or more technology, they proposed a new learning environment that brought together Science, Technology, Engineering, and Cookery (STEC). The idea was ambitious enough that we have now taken our first steps towards making their vision a reality by creating what we believe will be Scotland's first STEC room.

The pupils recognised something

that adults often overlook. Some of the most powerful learning happens when young people are making, creating, testing, and refining. They learn best when they can apply knowledge rather than simply acquire it.

Children do not naturally separate knowledge into departments. They move effortlessly from science to food, from creativity to technology, from experimentation to practical application. To them, learning is something you do.

I suspect they are onto something.

Real-world problems rarely arrive neatly packaged within the boundaries of a single subject. They require us to draw upon different forms of knowledge simultaneously. They demand creativity, communication, judgement, and adaptability. Above all, they require us to put knowledge to work. To learn through doing.

Perhaps this is why I found myself

reflecting recently on the success of one of our pupils, Rebekah de Groot.

Earlier this year, Rebekah won the national Young Chef competition from a field of more than 6,000 entrants. It was a remarkable achievement, but it also highlighted something that schools do not always articulate particularly well.

When people think about cookery, they often focus on the finished dish. What they do not always see is the thinking behind it. A young chef is constantly making decisions. They are applying scientific knowledge. They are solving problems, managing time, evaluating results, and adapting when things do not go according to plan. They are combining technical skill with creativity.

In many respects, that process looks remarkably similar to the kind of thinking we claim to value elsewhere in education. Yet practical disciplines are still sometimes treated as though they sit apart from academic learning. I suspect that distinction will become increasingly difficult to defend.

This feels particularly important at a moment when AI is beginning to reshape almost every aspect of our lives. Schools are rightly asking what knowledge and skills young people will need in an AI-powered world. We hear endless discussion about coding, digital literacy, and technological change.

Those conversations are important. Yet I increasingly wonder whether we are overlooking a more fundamental question.

What kinds of learning should we be protecting?

AI is becoming exceptionally good at storing information, retrieving facts, and generating content. What it cannot easily replicate is human curiosity, judgement, creativity, and the ability to turn ideas into reality.

Human beings will still need to create. They will still need to exercise judgement. They will still need to collaborate, experiment, and solve unfamiliar problems. These skills are developed through practice. Through experimentation. Through making mistakes. Through doing.

That is why spaces such as laboratories, kitchens, art studios, sports halls, and workshops remain so important. They provide opportunities for young people to test ideas, develop resilience, exercise creativity, and experience the satisfaction that comes from creating something tangible.

As AI becomes more capable, schools will understandably spend time thinking about technology.

I hope we spend just as much time thinking about the experiences that technology cannot replace.

The conversation sparked by a group of Junior 6 pupils has reminded me that education is not simply about what young people know. It is about what they can do with what they know.

In the years ahead, creating space for that kind of learning may prove more important than ever.



Pictured: National Young Chef Rebekah de Groot

The first lesson of the day shouldn't be hunger

By Julie Harkness, Vice Principal, Carr Manor Community School and Magic Breakfast Trustee.



Julie Harkness

When I chose teaching, it wasn't for league tables or inspection frameworks. It was for children and young people, for the chance to show them they matter and that learning can open doors they've yet to imagine.

Nothing has tested that conviction more than recognising, in a child's glazed eyes or restless fidgeting, that they simply haven't eaten, sometimes not since their free school meal the day before. Hunger isn't a side issue. It's a wall, and no amount of brilliant teaching can break through it.

In the UK today, four pupils in a class of 30 are at risk of hunger. These are not abstract statistics; they are the children and young

Visit: www.magicbreakfast.com

people in our classrooms. Hunger affects concentration, fuels anxiety, and damages long-term health. It widens the attainment gap and quietly erodes a child's sense of belonging. In my own school, where many children live with instability and food poverty, I see its impact every day.

This is what led me to Magic Breakfast.

Each school morning, Magic Breakfast provide nutritious breakfasts to hundreds of thousands of children and young people, but it is more than a plate or bowl of food. The magic is in the calm as a child walks through the school doors and is greeted warmly by name. It's the laughter

shared over toast, quiet chats with trusted adults and small moments to play, settle, and feel they truly belong. Transformative moments that allow children to start the day ready to learn, rather than fighting simply to cope.

Magic Breakfast's vision is bold: by 2040, every child in the UK nourished, empowered, and able to thrive. Yet today millions remain hungry.

This is where independent schools can make a difference. The independent sector has deep educational expertise, engaged communities, and a long tradition of values-led action, making you uniquely placed to lead meaningful fundraising initiatives.

When pupils fundraise for Magic Breakfast, they do more than raise money. They bring to life the values we strive to instil: empathy, responsibility, and the belief that their generation can shape a better world.

We did not enter this profession to stand by while children and young people lose ground before the school day even begins. The potential in every classroom is extraordinary. Let's ensure nothing as preventable as an empty stomach stands in its way.

The first lesson of the day shouldn't be hunger.



Children and young people should be hungry to learn, but 2.1 million children in the UK are at risk of coming to school hungry.

Magic Breakfast is on a mission to change that, and your school can be part of it. Together, we can build a UK where every child is nourished, empowered, and thriving.



magic breakfast
fuel for learning

magicbreakfast.com



Partner with us and receive **free resources for fundraising, a curriculum-linked classroom workshop, and staff training**, all focused on the importance of breakfast and good nutrition.

Scan to get involved!



Registered Charity No. 1102510 in England & Wales, SC048202 in Scotland

Living History event

Thousands of people saw the past vividly brought to life at Kimbolton Castle as History Alive! Knights, Queens and Time Machines welcomed visitors for a journey through nearly 2,000 years of British history.

Set against the historic backdrop of the Castle – famed as the final home of Katherine of Aragon – the two-day event transformed the grounds of Kimbolton School into a living timeline. More than 200 re-enactors, performers, and history enthusiasts brought the past to life with immersive camps, hands-on demonstrations, and dramatic displays spanning Roman Britain to the Second World War.

Organised by Kimbolton School Parent's Association (KSPA), the event included an Elizabethan joust, large-scale medieval battles, and the thunder of muskets and cannons. Twentieth-century exhibits demonstrated WWII vehicles and encampments offering a glimpse into wartime life. American actor, humanitarian, and military advocate, Gary Sinise, also visited the event as part of a wider tour of Kimbolton, taking time to explore the living history displays and meet with re-enactors and organisers.

Headmaster at Kimbolton School, Will Chuter, said: "Seeing nearly two thousand years of history come to life at Kimbolton



Castle was truly special – there's nothing quite like experiencing the sights, sounds and stories of the past in such an authentic and historic setting. With history unfolding in every corner of the grounds, the event delivered on its promise to take visitors back in time – bringing stories out of the textbooks and into vivid,

unforgettable reality. Well done to KSPA for organising such a fantastic event."

Beyond the battlefield, visitors explored traditional craft stalls, watched skilled artisans at work, and enjoyed a range of food and refreshments in the spring sunshine.

Pictured: The Living History event at Kimbolton

Tudor discoveries



A series of Tudor tunnels and artefacts have been made at New Hall School, Essex, during ongoing repair works to part of the historic ha-ha. The tunnels, believed to date back to the reign of King Henry VIII, have been uncovered beneath the grounds of the former Tudor Palace of Beaulieu.

Initial inspections of the tunnels have revealed a range of artefacts, offering a glimpse into Tudor life. Among the items discovered are what appear to be Tudor-era pots and pottery, alongside bones, glass bottles, fragments of glass, and pieces of lead. These finds are currently being carefully examined, with plans underway to display selected artefacts in the future.

Pictured: One of the newly discovered Tudor tunnels

New Hall Principal, Mrs Katherine Jeffrey, said: "This is a remarkable discovery and an extraordinary opportunity for our students and the wider community to engage directly with the Tudor past. The uncovering of these tunnels brings history to life in a way few sites can offer. The artefacts hint at the richness of what may lie beneath, and we are excited to continue exploring and sharing these findings."

New Hall School occupies the site of the former Palace of Beaulieu. The estate – once owned by Sir Thomas Boleyn, father of Anne Boleyn, before being acquired by King Henry VIII in 1517 – includes a Grade I listed main building, while the surrounding grounds and avenue are designated as a Grade II registered park and garden.

Fly past to commemorate the fallen



The whole of the community of Downside School, Somerset, gathered together on 15 May at 15.15 at the cricket pavilion to remember the day in 1943 which saw a plane crash on the school grounds which sadly led to the deaths of the pilot and nine pupils.

On the afternoon of Saturday, 15 May, 1943, two Sea Hurricanes from RNAS Yeovilton performed low-flying training manoeuvres over the grounds at the school.

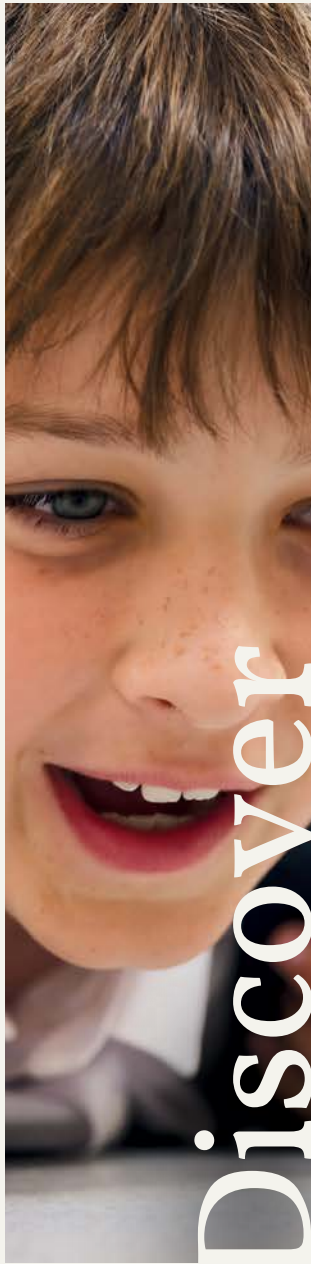
During a cricket match, the second aircraft dropped to an exceptionally low altitude. While attempting to climb over tall fir trees bordering the pitch, the plane clipped the trees and nosedived into a grass bank. The burning wreckage ricocheted and crashed into a crowd of boys who were gathered on the embankment to

Pictured: Navy Wings Chipmonk flying over the cricket grounds

watch the match. The pilot, Sub-Lieutenant Alan McCracken and eight boys died instantly. A ninth pupil succumbed to his injuries a few days later. More than a dozen others were injured.

The fly past was conducted by pilots from a Navy Wings Chipmonk, part of the historic flight of the Fleet Air Arm based at RNAS Yeovilton.

Remembering: David Michael Jennings, aged 10; Hugh Michael Dearlove, aged 14; David Hugh Lowndes, aged 16; Laurence John McNabb, aged 15; Brian Richard Patrick McSwiney, aged 14; Michael Bagot Quinlan, aged 15; Philip Humphrey Peter Rose, aged 14; Keith Edward Charles Stokes, aged 15; and SLt Alan McCracken, aged 22.



Discover



more.



Become



more.

For children aged 4-11

Childhood is a remarkably short chapter. Formerly Radnor House Prep School, Kneller Hall Junior School in Kew champions each child with exceptional care, attention and ambition.

The next chapter begins here.

Now enrolling for September 2026.



KNELLER HALL
SCHOOL



knellerhallschool.org • 020 3869 5871



Bryanston School, Dorset, has announced its intention to acquire **Thorngrove School**, a prep school on the Hampshire/Berkshire border.

Founded in the 1980s by Nick and Connie Broughton, Thorngrove began as a school created to educate their own four children.

The Broughton family also has long-standing ties with Bryanston, having educated all of their children at the school.

Following the acquisition, and subject to the necessary approvals, Thorngrove will join the Bryanston Group, alongside Bryanston Senior and Bryanston Prep.

Chair of Governors at Bryanston, Eric Benedict, said: "The Governors are delighted to support this exciting new chapter for Bryanston and Thorngrove. This partnership reflects our shared commitment to providing an outstanding education, while preserving the distinct identity and character of each school."

Pictured (l to r): Head of Thorngrove, Nick Graham, with Connie and Nick Broughton; and Bryanston's Head, Deputy Head, Staff & Partnerships, and Chief Commercial Officer – Richard Jones, Liz Thornton, and Hannah Attridge

Nick and Connie Broughton, Founders of Thorngrove School, said: "Bryanston's acquisition of Thorngrove gives us great confidence that the school's legacy will endure and flourish. Seeing the school become part of the Bryanston family feels like a natural next chapter, and one that secures a bright future for the school that we have cherished for so many years,"

Both schools remain committed to preserving their individual character while enhancing provision through thoughtful collaboration.

Looking ahead, Thorngrove's curriculum will evolve to incorporate elements of the Bryanston Method alongside its newly established Thorngrowth curriculum. Strategic development will focus on enhancing facilities, strengthening educational provision, and expanding opportunities for pupils and staff.

Two Bristol schools, **Clifton High School**, and **The Downs Preparatory School**, have announced the formation of **Pembroke Education**, a new school group founded to strengthen distinctive, values led schools while protecting what makes each one unique.

Pembroke Education's vision is "to build a community of schools where shared excellence and collaboration shape bright futures for every learner."

At the heart of the group are three core values:

Ambition – setting purposeful, future focused expectations for learners, staff and schools.

Belonging – ensuring every

individual is known, valued and supported.

Collaboration – sharing insight and expertise to build sustainable strength across the community.

The group will be led by educational professionals, including Peter Bodkin as Chair of Governors, Jason Collard as Vice Chair, Will Phelan as Head of Pembroke Education and Head of Clifton High School, and Debbie Isaachsen as Deputy Head of Pembroke Education while continuing as Head of The Downs Preparatory School. They will be joined by specialists in finance, estates, pastoral leadership, strategy, and external relations, to create the leadership team.



St Bede's School Trust, Sussex, and **Burgess Hill Girls, West Sussex**, have announced that **Burgess Hill Girls** has joined the Trust.

Burgess Hill Girls will continue to operate as an all-girls school on its current site, retaining its name, traditions, and ethos. The merger will enable Burgess Hill Girls to benefit from the wider expertise, resources and long-term support of Bede's Trust, while preserving the identity and heritage that are central to the Burgess Hill Girls community.

Chair of Governors at Burgess Hill Girls, Simon Thornton-

Pictured: Burgess Hill Girls School

Wood, said: "This is a significant and positive moment for Burgess Hill Girls. Throughout this process, Governors have been focused on the long-term interests of our students and the future strength of the school.

"Joining Bede's Trust allows us to preserve what makes Burgess Hill Girls special, our commitment to an all-girls education, our ethos, our site, our heritage, and our community, while opening up new opportunities and resources for current and future students. We look forward to beginning this next chapter with confidence and ambition."

Two Cambridge independent schools, **The Leys School** and **St Faith's School**, are set to become a single co-educational school from September 2028.

The schools – which have been part of the same foundation since 1938 – are merging to offer a seamless all-through educational journey from Early Years to Sixth Form.

Under the plan, pupils from Early Years to Year 8 will be educated at the current St Faith's site, while Years 9 to 13 will be based at the current site of The Leys. The all-through school will be called 'The Leys School, Cambridge'.

Chair of the Foundation's Governing Body, Sir Matthew Rycroft, said: "This is the start of a new and very exciting chapter for our two schools. Our schools already enjoy extremely close collaboration. They share the same ethos, values, school motto, and deliver an outstanding education for our pupils.

Pictured: Pupils from The Leys and St Faith's



"This plan frees vital capacity at The Leys site allowing us to meet demand from families for places in Years 9 to 13. We will be better positioned to widen access at every entry point to our two schools and offer stronger continuity for our pupils."

Further details about admissions arrangements, transport between sites and expanded wider curricular offering will be shared as the planning phase develops over the next two years. There is no change for pupils currently at either school prior to September 2028.



Oxfordshire schools, **Abingdon School**, **Abingdon Prep School**, and **The Manor Prep** are joining together to form the Abingdon Schools Group at the start of the new academic year.

This new group is being created from a position of strength, bringing together three thriving schools. By joining forces, the schools will be better placed to invest in educational excellence, enhance opportunities for pupils and build resilience in an evolving educational landscape.

Each school in the Abingdon Schools Group will retain its own identity, culture and

Pictured (l to r): Nicky Black, Head Abingdon Prep School; Rachel Hamlyn, Head The Manor Prep; and Mike Windsor, Head, Abingdon

community. Families, pupils, and staff can continue to expect the same educational experience and sense of belonging that defines each school, while also benefiting from the advantages of closer collaboration and shared expertise.

Chair of Governors at The Manor Prep, Peter Dickson, commented: "This partnership marks a significant and exciting milestone that celebrates and protects the unique heritage of each of our schools, while our shared commitment to educational excellence will unlock even greater opportunities for our pupils."

schools the same, but to allow two distinct schools to work together in ways that build on their respective strengths. Spring Grove will remain proudly Spring Grove; and King's will remain proudly King's.

"We are so excited about our new partnership with King's and what it promises – for pupils, staff and all members of the Spring Grove and King's families."

Head of The King's School Canterbury, Jude Lowson, said: "This is a long-term vision, and one we approach with real excitement. The foundations are strong, the ambition is clear, and we look forward to what both



Ardreck School, Perthshire, and **Sedbergh Schools Group** have announced a new partnership that will see Ardreck become the first Scottish prep school to join the expanding Sedbergh Schools Group.

This partnership has been designed to strengthen and protect everything that makes Ardreck so special. The school will retain its name, identity, traditions, ethos, and approach to education, while benefiting from the long-term stability, investment, and opportunity that comes from joining a wider charitable schools group.

The Sedbergh Schools Group, led by Executive Head Dan Harrison, comprises Sedbergh School, Cumbria; Sedbergh Prep School, Cumbria; Terrington Hall Prep School, North Yorkshire; international schools in Vietnam and China; Sedbergh Courses; and the Sedbergh International

Pictured: Ardreck Prep School

Summer School programme.

Speaking about the announcement, Debbie Spens, Chair of Governors at Ardreck School, said: "From our earliest conversations, it became clear that there was a natural alignment between Ardreck and Sedbergh Schools Group, a shared belief in the importance of childhood, character, community, and providing children with exceptional opportunities to grow in confidence and ambition.

"What makes this partnership so special is that it allows Ardreck to remain proudly Ardreck. Our identity, traditions, and values will remain at the heart of the school, while this partnership provides the strength, investment, and opportunity to ensure Ardreck continues to flourish for generations to come. We believe this is the beginning of a very exciting new era for our school and our community."

looking forward to what we can achieve together for the children and young people of King's and Spring Grove both now and in the months and years ahead."

Both King's and Spring Grove will each retain their own head, senior leadership team and local governance, with responsibility for the day-to-day leadership and development of their school. They will continue to have the same uniform, routines, and school life. Admissions to King's will follow the same criteria and processes as they do now, and Spring Grove will continue to send pupils to a wide range of state and independent schools for their senior education at 11+.

It has been announced that two Berkshire schools, **Pangbourne College**, and **St Gabriel's School, Newbury**, will be joining Mill Hill Education Group as part of separate charitable mergers.

The addition of these two schools expands Mill Hill Education Group's network and creates a Berkshire cluster alongside Heathfield School in Ascot.

Pangbourne College and St Gabriel's will retain their unique identities, values, and traditions while benefiting from the confidence, support, and opportunities that come from being part of an established educational group.

CEO, Mill Hill Education Group, Antony Spencer, said: "I am delighted to welcome Pangbourne College and St Gabriel's into our growing collection of schools.

Pictured: Pangbourne College and St Gabriel's School

This marks an exciting step in strengthening our presence in Berkshire. These two distinctive and highly regarded schools bring new opportunities and, alongside Heathfield School in Ascot, create a local network of three strong schools that will benefit pupils, staff and the wider community. I very much look forward to working closely with colleagues across the schools."

Principal of St Gabriel's School, Ricki Smith said: "We are delighted to announce that St Gabriel's is joining the Mill Hill Education Group. This partnership brings together two thriving communities united by a commitment to academic excellence, exceptional pastoral care, and the development of confident, well-rounded young people. By joining the Group, St Gabriel's will benefit from

enhanced collaboration, shared expertise, and wider opportunities for both pupils and staff, while continuing to celebrate the traditions, ethos, and identity that make the school so special. Together, we look forward to an exciting future defined by growth, innovation, and success."

Head of Pangbourne College, Oliver Knight, said: "This is an exciting and significant moment in the history of Pangbourne College. Joining Mill Hill Education Group is not about changing who we are; it is about building on our strengths and creating even more opportunities for our pupils and staff. This charitable merger allows us to preserve everything that is distinctive about the college while benefiting from the expertise, collaboration, and opportunities that come from being part of a



wider educational family. We will continue to place our pupils at the heart of every decision we make, while ensuring that each individual is known, valued, and supported to fulfil their potential."

As Pangbourne College and St Gabriel's begin this new chapter, the day-to-day experience of pupils will remain unchanged.

Redshift Education, a growing schools group founded by independent education leader Timothy Fisher, has announced the acquisition of four well-established independent schools: **Salcombe Preparatory School, London**, **Glenesk School, Surrey**, **Colchester Prep and High School, Essex**, and **King's School Plymouth, Devon**.

These schools join Redshift Education's founding schools, **Polam School & Nursery, Bedford**, and **Long Close School, Berkshire**, forming a family of schools united by shared education-values and a commitment to educational excellence.

Previously part of the Cognita Schools Group, each individual school brings its own distinct character and strengths.

Redshift Education is committed to ensuring continuity and a smooth transition for pupils, families, and staff, working closely with each school's leadership to preserve individuality whilst enhancing opportunities for future development. The

process is expected to complete in time for the new academic year in September 2026.

Speaking about the acquisition, Timothy Fisher commented:

"These are exceptional schools with strong identities and communities. Equally, the schools' heritage is long dated and, as such, we have a sense of privilege in becoming custodian and remain committed to supporting their continued success, while creating opportunities for growth and innovation."

Jason Whiskerd, General Manager at Cognita, said: "We are confident that these schools will benefit from Redshift Education's strong commitment to supporting and enhancing independent schools across the UK. Redshift is well placed to invest in and develop the schools further, building on their successes and working in close partnership with Heads, Senior Leadership Teams and whole school communities as they enter the next phase of their development."

It has been announced that three Essex schools, **Bancroft's, St Aubyn's**, and **Woodford Green Preparatory School** are set to join in September 2026 to form the Bancroft's Family of Schools.

The formation comes from a position of collective strength, with all three being financially robust and educationally thriving, reflecting a proactive response to an evolving independent school landscape.

Bancroft's educates pupils aged 7 to 18, while St. Aubyn's and Woodford Green Prep both cater for children aged 3 to 11.

Each school will retain its own leadership, staff, curriculum, and distinct character.

Head of Bancroft's Alex Frazer, said: "I am tremendously excited to be building on the longstanding relationship with our friends and colleagues at St Aubyn's and Woodford Green Prep, welcoming

them into the Bancroft's Family of Schools.

"United by our shared commitment to a broad and ambitious education, first-class pastoral care and a rich co-curricular life, this charitable merger secures a strong and collaborative future for our three institutions, all rooted in the local community of Woodford Green."

Head of Woodford Green Preparatory School, Jenny Maslen, commented: "Our school motto, 'Let Each Flame Burn Brighter', sits at the very core of this decision. We have always believed that ability is not fixed, and that there should be no limits on what a child can achieve. In Bancroft's, we have found a partner who shares our values of excellence and nurture."

Head of St Aubyn's School, Louis Taylor, added: "This partnership is a deliberate, forward-thinking move. By joining the Bancroft's Family of Schools, we are ensuring that St Aubyn's remains at the very forefront of Prep education for generations to come.

"Being part of a strong and sustainable Family of Schools brings clear advantages. It will open up opportunities for collaboration, shared expertise and professional development."

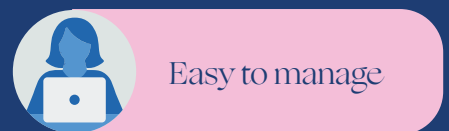


Pictured: Bancroft's family of schools



Every school day starts with trust

Zurich Municipal has over 30 years' experience protecting the public sector, and works closely with independent schools to build long-term partnerships. Our insurance offering is:



This allows you to concentrate on providing outstanding education, while we help keep your community safe and resilient.

We provide tailored insurance, protection, risk management, and expert claims handling to help keep the entire school environment safe, running smoothly, and thriving.

For more information on the choices available, please contact us on info@zurichmunicipal.com or, visit our website at www.zurich.co.uk/municipal/independent-school-insurance

Beyond evidence: Building a research driven school culture

Deputy Head Academic at Francis Holland Prep School, London, Andrew Hart, discusses how the Francis Holland Schools Trust is embedding a research driven culture into their schools in a way that has not been positioned as an external initiative but as a living, practical tool for continuous improvement owned by teachers and shaped by everyday experience.



Andrew Hart

In recent years, schools nationally have been encouraged to engage more intentionally with educational research. For some teachers, however, research can still appear remote: generated beyond the classroom, framed in specialist terminology, and difficult to meaningfully translate into daily practice. At Francis Holland Schools Trust, the response has not been to import a new way of working, but to reveal, formalise, and refine an enquiry rich culture that has long been embedded in professional practice.

Across the Trust, a coherent and values driven research strategy is now being articulated, drawing together habits of reflection, collaboration, and professional curiosity that have always characterised its schools. The purpose is not to pursue novelty or abstract theory, but to strengthen real-world classroom practice, support pupil wellbeing, and deepen professional expertise through close to practice, collegial action research. In this way, research is positioned not as an external initiative, but as a living, practical tool for continuous improvement, owned by teachers and shaped by everyday experience.

At the heart of the Trust's approach is a clear belief: our teaching staff are not mere users of research but powerful researchers in their own right. When teachers investigate questions arising from their own classrooms and pastoral contexts, research becomes purposeful, proportionate, and immediately relevant. It strengthens professional judgement and fosters reflective practice rather than short term change.

The Trust's strategy emphasises ethical clarity and pupil wellbeing at every stage. Safeguarding, consent, and data protection are embedded within project design, ensuring that enquiry strengthens, rather than distracts from, core educational responsibilities.

Two current action research projects at Francis Holland Preparatory School illustrate how this strategy is working in practice. Both are rooted in Key Stage 1 and reflect priorities shared by many schools: learning behaviours, inclusion, and emotional wellbeing.

The first project explores how developing metacognition in mathematics can support young pupils to become more reflective,

independent learners. Rather than relying on pupil intervention alone, the project combines staff professional development with targeted small group work. Teachers develop shared language and modelling approaches, while pupils are supported to plan, monitor, and evaluate their thinking within meaningful mathematical tasks. A particularly powerful feature of this enquiry is its focus on sustainability. The research does not simply ask whether pupils make progress during an intervention, but whether those strategies transfer into everyday classroom practice. In doing so, it ensures that research findings inform teaching across the wider cohort, benefiting far more children than those directly involved.

The second project focuses on emotional regulation and social interaction, recognising that wellbeing underpins learning and relationships. Through a structured small group intervention alongside changes to the learning environment, the project explores how children can be supported to recognise, manage, and communicate their emotions more effectively from a young age.

Here, research evidence is gathered from multiple perspectives: pupil voice, teacher observation, learning journals, and parental feedback. This holistic view reflects Francis Holland Prep's belief that children's development cannot be understood through a single lens, and that meaningful improvement depends on listening carefully to lived experience.

For teachers, the value of this approach is clear. Close to practice research respects professional expertise and creates space for thoughtful experimentation. It

encourages teachers to test ideas, reflect collectively, and refine practice in response to evidence rather than assumption.

For schools, it builds internal capacity. Over time, action research develops confident research leaders, strengthens professional dialogue, and supports consistency across classrooms without imposing uniformity. Importantly, it also enables insights from one setting, such as Francis Holland Prep, to inform practice across the wider Francis Holland Schools Trust.

For families and the wider public, this work offers reassurance that improvement is not driven by trends or external pressure, but by careful enquiry focused on children's learning and wellbeing. Research becomes a mechanism for accountability and care, grounded in everyday school life.

Looking ahead, the Trust is focused on extending and sustaining this research culture. Plans include strengthening research leadership pathways, sharing findings through Trust wide professional learning forums, and creating structures that allow schools to collaborate while retaining ownership of their enquiries. Perhaps most importantly, the Trust's approach reminds us that research does not need to be grand or disruptive to be transformative. When enquiry is embedded thoughtfully and ethically, it becomes part of how schools think, reflect, and improve.

Across the Trust, research lives in classrooms, corridors, and conversations. It is not an initiative with an end date, but a habit of professional curiosity, ensuring that teaching and learning continue to evolve in the best interests of every child and every teacher.



First researchED Conference

Morrison's Academy, Perthshire, welcomed around 150 educators from across Scotland to its Crieff campus in May, for Perthshire's first researchED conference – an event designed to bring educational research into classroom practice.

The conference formed part of the international researchED movement and featured keynote speaker Prof Haili Hughes, alongside education figures including Dr Carl Hendrick, Bruce Robertson, Lucy Crehan, Robin Macpherson, and Dr Alex Fairlamb.

Across the day, teachers, researchers and school leaders took part in a wide range of workshops exploring themes such as effective teaching practice, curriculum design, cognitive science, inclusion, and practical classroom strategies. Sessions focused on sharing evidence-

informed approaches that can be applied directly in schools, while encouraging professional dialogue and reflection.

Teachers and Teaching Assistants from Morrison's Academy played an active role throughout the day, contributing to sessions and supporting the delivery of the programme.

Depute Rector at Morrison's Academy, Emma McCormick, said: "We were delighted to host the first researchED in Perth & Kinross at Morrison's Academy and to welcome colleagues from across the UK to our campus. At Morrison's Academy, we believe that great teaching begins with great learning. For many years we have been building a people-led approach to professional development in our school, one that places staff at the centre of their own learning."

Pictured: Morrison's Academy Speakers with Emma McCormick, Depute Rector



Head of College at Robert Gordon's College, Robin Macpherson, added: "It's been great to see the growth of researchED across Scotland over the past five years and we have been keen to move the event around different local authorities.

"Our aim with researchED is to give everyone involved in education an opportunity to engage with evidence and inform their practice. It's a unique event which combines newly qualified teachers with internationally renowned academics."

Advertorial Feature

Strong response to PHVC's EV16 prompts additional demonstration availability

Positive feedback from the education sector

Since launching the EV16 electric minibus, PHVC has seen strong interest from schools, colleges, and other education providers looking to introduce zero-emission transport into their fleets.

Built on the Ford eTransit platform, the 16-seat EV16 has proved particularly popular thanks to its practicality, driving range of up to 196 miles and the ability to be driven on a standard Category B licence (subject to eligibility). Customers have also highlighted its

quiet, comfortable ride and modern safety features, making it well suited to a wide range of school transport duties.

More opportunities to experience the EV16

Following the positive response, PHVC has increased the number of demonstration appointments available, giving more organisations the opportunity to experience the EV16 before making an investment.

Schools and other operators can arrange a demonstration at their own site and, where appropriate, keep the vehicle for up to a week. This allows transport managers, drivers and senior leadership teams to see how the vehicle performs on their own routes and assess whether it meets their operational requirements.

For those who would like a first look before booking a demonstration, PHVC has also produced a short video showcasing the EV16's key features. It can be viewed on the company's Electric Minibuses webpage.

Supporting schools on the journey to electric

Alongside the EV16, PHVC continues to offer the EVWAV² electric accessible minibus, providing a practical solution for organisations requiring inclusive passenger transport.

With interest in electric minibuses continuing to grow, PHVC is helping education providers make informed decisions through practical demonstrations, expert advice, and flexible purchase or leasing options.



Call: 01489 580 333 | Email: sales@phvc.co.uk

ads@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk



Watch the EV16 video:

www.phvc.co.uk/electric-minibuses

Getting World Cup ready

Pupils at Loughborough High School, Leicestershire have been involved in the trial of a football and physics outreach initiative led by Loughborough University ahead of this summer's World Cup.

Named 'Get World Cup Ready', the World Cup edition of the initiative was developed by researchers at the university in partnership with adidas and funded by the Royal Academy of Engineering, building upon the 'Subject in a Box' scheme. It was then shared with teachers at Loughborough High School, who provided feedback to further develop the interactive learning lesson, which could then be rolled out to other schools across the UK, providing an interactive and scientific understanding of the physics of football.

Each box contains footballs of different sizes, football pumps, pressure gauges, and weighing

Pictured: 'Get World Cup Ready' in the classroom

scales. These are supported by practical summary cards and worksheets to provide pupils with the hands-on and unique opportunity to undertake some of the same tests used to approve elite match balls, through which they can explore the link between football and physics.

During a trial lesson in the Spring term, Year 8 pupils at Loughborough High School undertook a series of experiments that showed how a football is tested according to the FIFA Quality Programme standards. This included measuring the circumference of the ball, recording its rebound height, and looking at the impact of water absorption.

The Subject in a Box initiative also aims to provide secondary school pupils with an insight into university-level study. The World Cup edition of the initiative



encouraged pupils to think about university courses that are related to the lesson such as Sports Technology, Engineering Physics, and Product Design Engineering.

Teacher of Physics at Loughborough High School, who led the trial World Cup in a Box lesson, Mr Mark Harper-Williams, said: "The World Cup in a Box initiative proved a fantastic way to get our girls thinking about possible career paths. Not only that, but the interactive lesson encouraged them to think logically

about the science behind sport. With the upcoming World Cup, the initiative effectively highlighted the real-world link between large-scale sporting events and physics. It was great to see our pupils so engaged with the initiative."

The 'Get World Cup Ready' initiative, which is free to request – any boxes scheduled for delivery up to 31 July 2026 will receive free return postage – has been rolled out to senior schools across the UK.

Designing real-world solutions

Over the past few months, Year 9 pupils at Queen's College, Taunton, Somerset, have taken part in a Design Technology project with the brief to design something that could genuinely improve someone's life.

The project, titled 'Make a Difference', was developed by Head of Design Technology Mr Ben Higgs, who wanted pupils to see how classroom skills can be used to create positive change beyond the school gates.

As part of the project, pupils worked directly with Stanley, a local wheelchair user, photographer, beekeeper, and small business owner, who visited the classroom to share his lived experience.

Stanley spoke openly about some of the everyday challenges he faces, including being difficult to spot in busy environments, carrying items while using his wheelchair, and managing equipment while pursuing his passion for photography.

Rather than designing for a theoretical brief, pupils were able

Pictured: Stanley at Queens College, Taunton



to engage with a real person, ask questions, and develop practical solutions tailored to his individual needs.

Following the visit, pupils undertook a full design process: identifying challenges, researching, generating ideas, building prototypes, testing designs, and manufacturing final products.

Designs included an LED number plate to improve visibility, a light-up snail logo for Stanley's market stall, a honeycomb-inspired bottle holder reflecting his interest in beekeeping, and an adjustable phone mount designed to support his photography work.

Engineering competition

A 12-year-old pupil from Ellesmere College, Shropshire, has won a national competition for his idea of a phone charger that generates power through walking and staying active.

Freddie Davenport, had the winning idea for the West Midlands region in the 'If You Were An Engineer' competition.

The Year 7 pupil was given the award at Coventry University after being challenged to identify a real-world problem and design an innovative product to solve it.

Head of Ellesmere College, Jonathan Shaw, said: "This engineering honour is a testament to Freddie's creativity, hard work, and determination throughout the competition process.

"The competition encouraged creativity, problem-solving, and engineering skills, with students developing a wide range of impressive ideas."

During the awards, organised

Pictured: Freddie Davenport



by educational not-for-profit Primary Engineer, pupils were given a tour around Coventry University's engineering facility by Patricia Ashman, Associate Head of School of Engineering at Coventry University.

The national STEM competition was hosted at the Engineering & Computing Building and was open to children aged between three and 19-years-old.

Entries were graded by local industry professionals before going to a regional judging panel where they picked two winners and two highly commended for each year group.

The classroom under siege: Misinformation, disinformation, and what we must do

Headmaster at Leweston School, Dorset, John Paget-Tomlinson, considers the challenges around misinformation and disinformation in the modern world, the impact this is having on pupils, and why independent schools are well placed to lead a structural response.



As a history teacher I have always found rich material in the deliberate distortion of truth. Operation Fortitude, convincing the Nazi leadership that a whole army group was massing in Kent aimed at the Pas de Calais rather than Normandy, never failed to delight a GCSE class. The fall of the Knights Templar, and Philip IV's fabricated allegations that brought an entire order to its knees through manufactured outrage, reliably turned fascination into moral fury. What I didn't anticipate was that these would become less historical curiosities and more instruction manuals for the world our pupils now inhabit.

The crisis unfolding in our schools does not announce itself with a safeguarding referral. Yet its consequences can be just as serious. In the 1990s a child in the UK formed their opinions through a small circle: family, friends, teachers, print media, television. That circle could be monitored and, to a degree, influenced. Now, the hundred people who might once have shaped a young person's worldview have been replaced by potentially six billion, and the adults who know that child best have almost no control over what they encounter.

The distinction between misinformation and disinformation matters. Misinformation is false content shared without malicious intent, a pupil repeating a health myth from Instagram, or forwarding a Reddit story they didn't pause to question. Disinformation is

deliberate: content designed to deceive, manipulate, or inflame. Both are now endemic to the digital lives of our pupils, and both arrive in school whether we acknowledge them or not.

The algorithms that govern what young people see are not neutral; they are engineered to maximise engagement. Outrage, fear, and tribal solidarity drive engagement far more reliably than accuracy and the most dangerous content is often the most widely circulated. Young people are not naïve, but they are inexperienced. The neural architecture of adolescence makes teenagers particularly susceptible to content that is emotionally charged, identity-affirming, or socially shareable. In short, if it's dangerous it is going to sell. Dennis Healy's attempted financial reforms in 1976 are not a common topic for GCSE history but Nazi propaganda is.

Independent schools, with their strong pastoral cultures and emphasis on character, are well placed to respond, but they are not immune. Conspiracy theories about vaccines, climate change, and historical atrocities can take root even in the most carefully managed environments. Perhaps more insidiously, subtler forms of bias and distortion, partial narratives, misleading statistics, fabricated quotations attributed to real figures, circulate freely and are far harder to identify and challenge.

The academic consequences are real. Teachers across all disciplines are encountering essays that cite

unreliable sources or reproduce claims derived from unverified, and increasingly AI-generated, online content. The epistemological habits that underpin rigorous study are precisely the habits that a diet of misinformation erodes. Tolerance of ambiguity is being replaced by the tyranny of polarisation. The pastoral consequences follow: fractured friendships, hardened prejudices, and an atmosphere in which nuanced discussion becomes difficult or impossible.

The regulatory landscape is shifting accordingly. The updated KCSIE guidance (September 2025) now explicitly classifies misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories as safeguarding harms, placing misleading content alongside radicalisation as recognised risks to children's welfare. The Online Safety Act 2023 places new duties on platforms around media literacy and the government's Media Literacy Action Plan, published in March 2026, commits to a three-year cross-departmental strategy with the DfE explicitly named as a partner. The direction of travel is clear. Whether it arrives in time to help current pupils is another matter.

So what should we actually do? The temptation is to be reactive, an assembly here, a PSHE lesson there. This is not enough. The response must be structural.

First, curriculum. Media literacy, the ability to evaluate sources, identify manipulation, and reason clearly about contested claims,

deserves a sustained and prominent place across subjects, not merely a bolt-on digital safety lesson. The evidence is clear that these skills can be taught, and that pupils who receive sustained training are markedly better at identifying unreliable content. This is a thread that should run through the humanities, the sciences, and every subject in which evidence is examined and arguments made. Colleagues have often joked with me that history has no relevance, but now source analysis should be the skill taught to all.

Second, culture. We must create forums, whether student-led or staff-led, where uncertainty can be acknowledged openly, where changing one's mind is valued rather than mocked, and where the difference between a contested opinion and a demonstrable falsehood is treated as worth establishing. The classroom has always been, at its best, a place where received wisdom is examined and truth is pursued with rigour and humility.

Finally, leadership. Those of us who speak plainly about these challenges, who treat them as matters of pupil welfare and academic integrity rather than political inconveniences, send a clear signal about the culture of our institutions. The government has recognised the scale of the problem. Independent schools, with our resources and our freedom to act, have every reason to lead rather than wait.

Stepping Stones Award

King Edward VI School (KES), Hampshire, has introduced the Stepping Stones Awards, a new means-tested award offering up to 25% reduction in school fees for eligible families entering the early years and preparatory stages of its prep schools – KES Prep in Romsey and Prince's Mead in Winchester.

Designed to support families at the beginning of their journey with independent education, these Awards aim to ensure that a child's potential can be nurtured early, even when financial circumstance make full fees a challenge at the outset.

The Stepping Stones Awards have been designed to build on KES's commitment to access and opportunity within today's educational and financial landscape. They are not full bursaries, but structured awards to provide support at a key moment in a child's educational development.



Pictured (l to r): Adam King (Prince's Mead); Neal Parker (King Edward VI Senior Et Sixth Form Southampton); and Rebecca Smith (King Edward VI Preparatory School Romsey)

Reducing catering complexity without compromising quality



The ability of schools to deliver consistent, high-quality meals is increasingly under pressure. Rising costs, tightening budgets, and staff shortages are making school catering one of the most operationally vulnerable parts of the school day – impacting on meal uptake and, ultimately, pupil health and wellbeing.

Traditional catering models can be demanding, requiring skilled kitchen staff time-intensive preparation and complex procurement processes, all while meeting strict nutritional standards and supporting varied dietary needs. This leads to mealtimes becoming vulnerable to disruption when staffing levels fluctuate.

Our State of the Nation Report, launched in partnership with ISA in 2025, found that 70% of schools identified labour shortages as a key challenge, with 40% reporting a direct impact on their catering operations.

Given the crucial role that school meals play in supporting pupils and giving them the fuel needed for learning, these challenges pose a significant concern.

Rather than adapting around growing complexity, many schools are now rethinking how their catering is delivered and seeking approaches that reduce operational strain whilst protecting the quality of food and nutritional standards.

Simplified catering solutions, such as utilising pre-prepared meal offerings, are increasingly emerging as a practical solution. By removing labour-intensive preparation and streamlining kitchen processes, these models can significantly reduce day-to-day pressures while maintaining consistency and compliance. This not only supports more efficient operations but also builds resilience and enables schools to continue delivering high-quality

meals even during periods of staff shortage or absence.

The benefits extend beyond the kitchen. A more streamlined approach can reduce the need to redeploy teaching or support staff into catering roles, helping schools maintain focus on their core priority: supporting pupils.

Importantly, simplifying operations does not mean compromising on quality. With the right approach, schools can continue to provide nutritious, appealing meals without carrying the full burden of complex in-house production.

In practice, this shift is already delivering tangible results. For example, utilising *apetito's* pre-prepared provision reduces schools staffing requirements by

up to 50%, while still delivering nutritious meals that pupils enjoy. By removing the reliance on skilled chefs and reducing operational complexity, schools are better protected from labour market volatility and can ensure greater consistency in their catering offer.

As pressures on school catering continue to grow, simplifying catering operations will be essential to maintaining both nutritional standards and pupil wellbeing.

At *apetito*, our expert chefs, dietitians and nutritionists have developed a huge range of delicious, nutritious meals for schools to choose from, and our dedicated team are on hand to guide you through every step, from menu planning to staff training.



To learn more about *apetito's* service, please visit: <https://apetito.link/ISM26>



Make *the* move

Over **170** schools are switching to apetito this September, see why.

With **over 150** premium quality dishes that pupils genuinely enjoy, meals are **designed for children, approved by children.**

Want to make the move? With a dedicated onboarding team, you could be ready in a little as 3-4 weeks for a **smooth, seamless switch.**

Join us today:



education@apetito.co.uk



0117 463 3563



[apetito.link/
make-the-move](https://apetito.link/make-the-move)



Trends in pastoral care

Second Master and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead at St Albans School, Hertfordshire, Melody Jones, reviews what some of the current trends schools are navigating in respect of pastoral care and offers some thoughts on how these will evolve in the future.



Melody Jones

Schools across the country are currently navigating several key trends in pastoral care that reflect an increased focus on whole-school wellbeing and mental health strategies, including digital wellbeing. There is also an emphasis on early intervention and targeted support strategies aimed at promoting resilience. As such, many school behaviour policies now frequently incorporate restorative practices, and peer mentoring alongside student leadership roles which play a vital role in addressing growing emotional and academic demands.

In response to rising demands from parents, schools are implementing visible and evidence-based pastoral structures that tackle teenage mental health, online risks, peer relationships, and academic pressure. Clear communication and structured intervention pathways are now commonplace, providing parents with assurance that their school is actively promoting safety and wellbeing. For instance, the introduction of strict phone management systems, requiring students in Years' 7–11 to lock their phones in pouches during school hours as well as mandating “brick” phones for Year 7 pupils, demonstrates proactive measures to enhance student safety.

A strong focus on mental health awareness is essential, especially as students between the ages of 11 and 18 face increasing rates of anxiety, social media pressure, and academic stress. Establishing a positive whole-school culture around mental health enables schools to identify any concerns early, allowing students to seek support before issues escalate. This approach also mitigates long

waiting times for external mental health services, which can hinder access to necessary support. Schools are adopting multi-tiered support systems, which include wellbeing spaces, peer mentoring, and robust PSHEE programmes. Integrating mental health education within PSHEE and tutor time can help to normalise discussions around resilience and regulating emotions.

Comprehensive training for teachers

To effectively support students' pastoral needs, teachers require comprehensive training that equips them to handle complex emotional, behavioural, and academic pressures. A significant number of staff in schools are trained as mental health first aiders, and in our case, all staff members receive regular safeguarding updates and training on restorative approaches. Strong INSET frameworks ensure that teachers are well prepared to detect early signs of distress and are able to work closely with pastoral leads.

Restorative behavioural approaches are beneficial in promoting accountability, empathy, and improved peer relationships within the school community. Such methods can effectively de-escalate conflicts and encourage a culture of reflection rather than punishment. Over time, schools implementing these approaches can enhance trust between staff and students, instil robust community values, and nurture a more resilient school culture across all year groups.

In response to the increasing reliance on technology, schools are addressing digital wellbeing

through initiatives such as digital literacy education, monitoring systems, and creating strict boundaries to minimise distraction and protect mental health. The requirement for pupils in Years' 7–11 to lock their phones away during school hours and limiting Year 7 students to basic “brick” phones demonstrate best practices that not only reduces distractions but also enhances focus, sleep hygiene, and in-person social interactions during crucial developmental phases.

Strong collaboration between school and home

Partnerships with parents are vital in fostering a supportive pastoral care environment. As the complexities of pastoral care expand, including issues surrounding mental health, peer relationships, and digital life, good collaboration between home and school establishes consistent expectations and helps parents feel supported in navigating teenage challenges. Schools can enhance these relationships through regular PSHEE and pastoral updates, transparent behaviour and device management policies as well as frequent parent engagement events.

As pastoral care continues to evolve, leadership and financial stewardship pose challenges for school leaders and bursars. The rising complexity of student mental health need coupled with increasing anxiety and emotional dysregulation, requires efficient management of wellbeing support. With high thresholds for external services, schools frequently find themselves handling complex cases internally, which places added pressure on pastoral and safeguarding teams

already balancing numerous academic responsibilities.

Success in pastoral care initiatives is measured through wellbeing check-ins, behavioural patterns, and engagement in peer mentoring. Strong pastoral systems lead to improved emotional regulation, high levels of engagement in both academic and co-curricular activities, and a willingness to seek support. Close monitoring of attendance, behavioural trends, and student feedback is critical in assessing the effectiveness of support strategies.

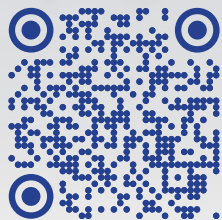
Financial implications of pastoral needs

It is no secret that the financial implications of meeting the rising pastoral needs of students have significantly increased over the last decade. There is a greater allocation of teaching time towards tutoring and PSHEE programmes, and investment in training focused on pastoral care, such as mental health first aid, is essential. Additional staffing expenses arise from the need for well trained nurses, counsellors, and mentors to provide timely support. More robust IT systems also necessitate complex and costly filtering and monitoring strategies. Likewise, the creation and upkeep of wellbeing hubs and gardens require considerable investment.

These costs are not optional but fundamental to ensuring positive student wellbeing, which is crucial for academic and social success. Therefore, prioritising these needs within an increasingly constrained budget is essential for students to fully thrive in school.

Put the EV16 to the test

Book a free 7-day school demo and see how a fully electric 16-seat minibus (Non D1) would work for your routes.



Scan to book your free 7-day demo
phvc.co.uk/electric-minibuses

Call: **01489 580 333**

Email: sales@phvc.co.uk



Profile

In conversation with Dominic Oliver

Married: Yes

Children: Yes, two.

Schools and Universities attended:

Sacred Heart College, followed by Sixth Form College. University of Sheffield, scholarship year in America, then University of Oxford.

First Job: Paper round, then petrol

pump attendant at a motorway services. I had some fantastic times working as a laboratory technician for an automotive tech company, as a live-in carer in a home for the disabled and then I spent two eye-opening seasons working for the Illinois police in their outreach to underprivileged children. All of these were massively formative – and all of them could provide fuel for their own articles...

Career before schools:

After completing an MPhil in English at St Peter's College, Oxford, I remained at Oxford as a Lecturer at St Peter's and a member of the University's English Faculty, specialising in Shakespeare.

First job in independent education:

English teacher and Head of Gifted and Talented enrichment, The Royal Grammar School Worcester.

Appointed to the current job: 2025

Favourite piece of music:

I couldn't choose one. Anything from Radiohead to Bach, but it's probably Baroque and Classical music that comes up first on my Spotify account

Favourite food:

Anything cooked at Rabanel in Arles.

Favourite drink:

White Burgundy or a Negroni.

Favourite holiday destination:

Provence

Favourite leisure pastime:

Cinema, reading, music, walking the dog and time with family.

Favourite TV or radio programme/series: The Wire

Q You started your career as a university lecturer before moving into teaching in schools. Why the change? Who or what inspired that move?

A University life was enormously stimulating. I loved the research, the pleasure of exploring ideas, finding new connections, and revisiting old ones. But I quickly found the most exciting part was connecting with people.

The most inspiring people I encountered were incredible researchers, but they were also the best teachers I had come across. They made the work pedagogic as well as research-led. That drew me more and more towards helping young people find their own path and interests in the same way I had been inspired to do.

The great thing about schools is that pupils are still at the beginning of that journey. At university, many students can already do it. In schools, you can have a much bigger influence, because you are helping them find confidence, interest, and understanding at an earlier stage. There is something immensely exciting about seeing someone move from uncertainty, or even fearfulness, to thinking: "Actually, this is interesting. I can do this." That is what drew me into schools: the chance to help young people discover the pleasure of learning for themselves.

Q 2026 is the National Year of Reading, an initiative aimed at reversing the decline in reading enjoyment. With your background as an English lecturer and then English teacher with Shakespeare as a specialism, what do you see as key to encouraging a love of reading among young people both within school and more widely?

A Reading needs to be something that is fun and enriching. If we treat it simply as another route to examination success, we are missing the point.

The reason I studied English was that it was a way into exploring other things. The reason one should read is much the same. It is a way into other ideas, interests, and questions. It enriches the mind, the heart, and our sense of what is right and wrong.

At Oundle, we make an active commitment to giving pupils space to read, including older teenagers. We also model it. I often ask pupils coming here what they are reading and sometimes I ask their parents too. Reading habits are shaped by the examples young people see around them.

The question is not simply "Will this help me get a grade?" It is: "What kind of life are you going to lead?" That feels a much more interesting place to begin.

Q The school is set to expand its boarding facilities with the redevelopment of the old Oundle Primary School into a new boarding house for girls aged 13-18. Does this herald an increase in boarding from the current 75% of pupils? As a school that is already predominantly boarding, how do you balance the needs of day pupils so they feel included?

A The new boarding house is principally about investing in the quality of our boarding provision and giving us greater flexibility across the estate, rather than changing the balance of the school. Oundle has long been predominantly boarding and that remains an integral part of its character.

Boarding offers something increasingly valuable in modern life: the right kind of space. Space to grow up, develop friendships, and pursue interests without spending half your life travelling between them. It creates a genuine community where work, rest, and play sit naturally alongside each other.

Our day pupils are part of that community in the fullest sense. They belong to Houses, eat with their House groups, take part in the same activities and are encouraged to be involved in everything the school offers. For some, the only real difference is that they go home to sleep.

What matters is that everybody feels part of the same community and contributes to it fully.

Q Around 20% of your pupils are either foreign nationals living abroad or expats living overseas. Is this where you see the growth in boarding?

Dominic Oliver has been Head at Oundle School, Northamptonshire, since August 2025. He was previously Headmaster at Lancing College, West Sussex.



A Twenty percent has remained consistent for some time and feels right. It gives the school a genuine cosmopolitan quality while allowing everybody to cohere as one community.

One of the great strengths of boarding is that pupils live alongside people whose backgrounds, experiences, and assumptions may be different from their own. We are not preparing them simply to go out into the world and meet people just like themselves. What matters is that pupils are proud of their different national and cultural backgrounds, but are also part of the same Houses, classrooms, teams, and friendships.

Oundle should remain rooted, outward-looking and connected to the world beyond itself.

Q Oundle made a decision several years ago to remove smartphones from daily life for younger pupils. With the government tabling an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill which would put the guidance on use of mobile phones in schools on a statutory footing, can you share how the removal of smartphones has impacted the student body since that decision was taken? Has this informed the school's Digital Wellbeing Framework?

A Removing smartphones creates more space for conversation, attention, and ordinary human interaction. Pupils are not constantly looking down and inwards. They are talking to one another, to older and younger pupils and to adults who are present in their lives throughout the day.

That does not mean they are disconnected from the world. Oundelians ask challenging questions about politics, culture, sport, and how the world works. Some of the most pleasurable conversations I have had here have been over lunch, talking with pupils about what is happening in the world.

Our aim is not to make pupils technologically alienated. They need to be digitally confident and engaged with the world. But we also have a duty to help them develop control, rather than be controlled by devices designed to capture their attention.

That thinking informs our approach to digital wellbeing. It is about regulation, yes, but more importantly it is about giving young people agency and protecting the human connectedness that sits at the heart of a school like this.

Q You advocate "joy" in education. What do you mean by this? Can you give an example or two?

A Joy in education is not about making everything easy. It comes from being fully engaged in something and discovering that you can do more than you thought you could.

I see it in big events such as Sports Day but also smaller ways too. The conversations I have had with pupils here have been joyful. Interviewing prospective Heads of School was a good example and I wish I could have appointed all of them. They were thoughtful, engaging, and full of ideas. We laughed a great deal during those conversations and I came away feeling enormously optimistic about these young people.

For me, that lies at the centre of the joy of schools: the human contact, the optimism, and the sense that pupils are discovering what they can become.

Q The school has a Learning for life programme in place which aims to help pupils develop character, make wise choices, as well as to equip them with knowledge, self-awareness, and resilience. It was designed by both pupils and teachers. How has that shared ownership influenced the success of the programme?

A Learning for Life is important because it gives proper space to conversations that already sit at the heart of life. Growing up is complicated. Young people need knowledge, but they also need judgement, confidence, and the ability to think well when situations are not straightforward.

The fact that pupils have helped shape the programme matters. Adults bring experience, but pupils help us understand what feels

relevant, what has changed, and where the real questions are.

Learning for Life should help pupils think carefully: about themselves, about others, and about the world they are going into. If it helps them listen better, disagree well, and make wiser choices, then it is doing something very important.

Q As part of your partnership programme you have developed collaborations with both Imperial College London, and Swansea University, with the school employing an Imperial College London Outreach Fellow to teach Biology and Chemistry and lead science clubs in local schools. What advice would you offer to schools if thinking about setting something similar up?

A Schools should be outward-looking. One of the dangers for any institution is that it can become too self-contained, too focused on its own concerns. Partnerships matter because they are part of that connectedness to the outside world.

What I like about partnerships is that they bring together different people, different experiences, and different perspectives. If they are working well, everybody learns something. The best partnerships are not about one side giving and the other receiving. There should be a net gain for everybody. We learn from our partners too – it is a mutual exercise.

My advice would be not to start with the partnership itself but with the purpose behind it. What are you trying to achieve? How do you have impact? The strongest partnerships grow from a genuine shared interest and a willingness to learn from one another.

Q The school has a Green Level Accreditation which recognises your continued progress in reducing environmental impact and embedding sustainable practice across the school community, and the school has also committed to reaching Net Zero. How is that journey going, are you on target? **Continued >**

Profile In conversation with Dominic Oliver (continued)

A school like Oundle is a large, busy, seven-day community, so meaningful environmental progress has to be embedded in the way we operate rather than treated as a separate initiative.

Our iiE Green Level Accreditation is an important marker of that progress, but it also gives structure to the ongoing work. Working with an accreditation partner has helped us understand and measure our baselines, then build practical action plans across areas such as utilities, paper, fuel, food waste, menus, travel, cleaning products, and laundry. It also pushes us to think about how change is communicated and owned across the whole school, rather than simply by one group of people working towards accreditation. Sustainability has to be something a community understands and owns.

Net Zero is a serious long-term commitment and there is much more to do. We are expanding the scope of our carbon footprint

measurement, strengthening our long-term planning, and keeping the educational dimension firmly in view. Next year, we are also planning increased opportunities for younger pupils to be involved, including running Eco Schools alongside the iiE programme, so that sustainability becomes part of how pupils learn, think, and act within the community.

There can be no dispute that Oundle is one of the great names in British education with a history stretching back to 1556 and governed by Royal Charter. Leading such a revered institution, its 800+ strong workforce, and its 1,160 pupils into the 2030s and beyond must feel like an awesome responsibility. What do you do relax and wind down after the school day?

It is a responsibility, but it is also an enormous privilege. One of the things I love about schools is that they are full of energy. You spend your

days with young people who are curious, optimistic, and full of ideas. I can't think of a better environment in which to spend time.

I am not especially good at drawing a hard line between work and life because I genuinely enjoy what I do. Boarding schools are living communities and part of their attraction is that they continue beyond the formal school day.

Outside school, music has always been a huge part of my life. I enjoy reading, films, travelling, and spending time with my family. We have a dog and two ancient and eccentric cats, all of whom conspire to ensure that life is never too calm. Our dog is becoming an Oundle feature as his favourite spot is gazing out at the pupils as they go to the coffee shop across the way.

This summer, I am hoping finally to learn to scuba dive. Whether that proves relaxing or not remains to be seen.

Stronger together for every child: Why collaboration, not competition, creates better choices for families

Headmaster at The Croft Preparatory School, Warwickshire, Mr Marcus Cook, discusses why collaboration across the sector and making a shift towards a more collective approach to shared challenges and opportunities is so important.



Marcus Cook

At the heart of great education is a simple belief: children thrive when schools work in partnership. Partnership between school and child, between teachers and families and importantly, between schools themselves.

Education is not a one-size-fits-all experience. Every child is different – with unique strengths, interests, ambitions, and ways of learning. That is why meaningful choice matters so much for families navigating educational decisions.

Preparatory schools occupy a unique position within this journey, helping families understand the breadth of opportunity available and supporting children towards the environment in which they will flourish best. The role is not simply about preparing pupils academically but about

understanding each child as an individual and helping families make informed, confident decisions about what comes next.

No single school can be everything to every child nor should it try to be. The strength of the educational landscape lies in its diversity: different ethos's, approaches, cultures, and areas of expertise that allow families to find the environment where their child will flourish academically, socially, and emotionally.

When schools collaborate rather than compete, families benefit from a richer understanding of the opportunities available to them. Open dialogue, shared experiences and mutual respect between schools help create confidence and clarity at key transition points in a child's journey.

Importantly, collaboration does not dilute individuality – it strengthens it. Each school retains its own identity and values while recognising a shared responsibility to support young people and champion excellent education more broadly.

As an ISI Inspector, I have had the privilege of seeing many excellent schools in action. What stands out most is not competition between schools but the shared commitment to doing what is right for children. When schools work together with trust and mutual respect, families benefit, and young people thrive.

At a time when the education sector faces increasing pressures and challenges, it would be easy for schools to become inward-looking. But the best outcomes are achieved when schools work

together with a shared sense of purpose: doing what is right for children and families.

This mindset reflects a belief that education is not a "competition" to be won but a collective responsibility to be upheld. By championing the value of education as a whole – and by supporting one another across the sector – schools create stronger communities and better opportunities for every pupil.

Ultimately, this is about partnership. About putting children and families at the centre of decision-making. About ensuring every young person steps confidently into their next chapter with a strong sense of belonging and possibility.

Because when schools work together, everyone benefits.

Yale joins the SAT shift:

Why preparing for the SAT before Year 12 is so important

The recent announcement that Yale University has reinstated the SAT/ACT requirement marks a definitive turning point in transatlantic admissions. This shift back by almost all major Ivy League and elite American institutions underscores the profound importance they place on standardised testing. The return to mandatory testing signals that US admissions offices view these scores as an essential, objective benchmark for evaluating international applicants.

For guidance counsellors in independent schools, this development emphasises the absolute importance of preparing for this test strategically. Pupils need to start their preparation way before Year 12, building foundational familiarity with the content long before they enter

the Sixth Form. This early start is vital because it allows candidates the necessary time to fit in two, or perhaps even three, sittings of the exam. Spacing out multiple attempts ensures pupils can manage the pressure alongside school and extracurriculars, utilise superscoring, and ultimately secure their best possible result.

To help schools navigate this evolving landscape, Crimson Education offers targeted SAT support, including expert mentoring and a specialised 1500+ SAT Bootcamp. This six-week online programme is built around adaptive digital testing, real-time analytics shared with teachers, and instruction by 99th-percentile scorers who retake the official exam every two years.

As top US universities raise their expectations, independent schools that prioritise high-performance



preparation will significantly enhance their students' prospects. By providing structured, elite-level test support, guidance counsellors can ensure their candidates

stand out in a highly competitive global pool while reinforcing their school's reputation for securing world-class university outcomes.
www.crimsoneducation.org/uk






Crimson Education

The world's leading university admissions consultancy

1,739	459
Offers to Ivy League universities	Offers to Oxford & Cambridge
4,028	4,525
Offers to the US Top 20 universities	Offers to the UK Top 10 universities



★ ★ ★ ★ ★





Why our uniform looks different: and why that matters

Head at Gordonstoun, Moray, Simon Cane-Hardy, explains why it's not unusual to see a variety of different and sometimes unexpected uniforms on the school campus at any one time and how by embracing that has created a shared sense of pride, belonging, and purpose.



Simon Cane-Hardy

If we were to walk through Gordonstoun on any given day, one of the first things people may notice is that our “uniform” does not look quite how you expect it to. They may see a chorister crossing campus in equestrian jodhpurs, students heading into a debating session in their formal “going out” uniform, or students arriving at lessons fresh from sail training, boots still damp with sea air.

This is not an oversight. It is our intention.

At Gordonstoun, uniform is not about rigid conformity; it is about enabling full participation in a curriculum that is richly intertwined. Our days do not sit in tidy compartments. Academic learning, service, sport, creativity, and leadership are not scheduled as isolated activities. They run through everything we do. No single uniform can serve this breadth, because no single strand of school life stands alone.

Service, for example, is not something students visit once a week; it happens continually, woven into the ordinary rhythm of the day. A student may move from lessons to fire service training, from rehearsal to peer mentoring, from expeditions to leadership meetings. These all

require different clothing, different kit, and different readiness. Sport happens before breakfast, between meetings, after supper, and across weekends. Music rehearsals may sit alongside being on call for the Fire Service or outdoor education. Our uniform reflects that reality.

Far from diminishing standards, this flexibility reinforces them. Students learn to move responsibly between roles, adjusting not only what they wear, but how they conduct themselves. They learn, from an early age, that wearing the uniform – whatever form it takes at that moment – represents the school, its values, and its expectations.

Uniform also plays a vital role in inclusion. At Gordonstoun, it is one of the great equalisers. It removes unnecessary distinctions and allows students to belong immediately, regardless of background. When everyone shares a common identity, friendships form more naturally, confidence grows more quickly, and young people are free to focus on learning, contribution, and growth rather than appearance.

There is something powerful in knowing when a student pulls on their Gordonstoun uniform. Whether it is sports kit, service uniform, rehearsal costume, or

formal dress, they are stepping into a shared story. It reflects our ethos. It signals belonging. It signals responsibility. It signals pride.

That pride is not imposed from above; it is shaped from within. Our students play an active role in how uniforms are worn, reviewed and developed. Through Colour Bearers and House Captains, students feed back directly on how uniform functions in their daily lives. They discuss practicality, comfort, sustainability, and how well their uniform supports the demands placed upon them. In doing so, they do not merely wear the school's identity – they help to own it. It is for this reason our Sixth Form students can now wear their own clothes on a Saturday morning. They wanted to feel trusted to dress appropriately for their day and the activities they will be involved in.

This sense of ownership matters. When students feel listened to, they take greater responsibility for standards. They understand why certain expectations exist and how those expectations support the wider community. Uniform becomes not a rule to follow, but a shared agreement.

Of course, uniform also anchors us during moments of transition. Whether students are stepping onto a stage, representing the school in the wider world, attending formal events, or engaging in service beyond the campus, it provides a sense of continuity and reassurance. It reminds them who they are and where they belong – even as they are encouraged to stretch far beyond their comfort zones.

At Gordonstoun, we often speak about education as preparation for life. Life, as anyone knows, rarely fits neatly into boxes. It requires adaptability, judgement,

and the ability to move between roles with confidence and purpose. Our approach to uniform quietly supports this development. Students learn that what they wear reflects what they are doing, whom they are serving, and the standards they carry with them.

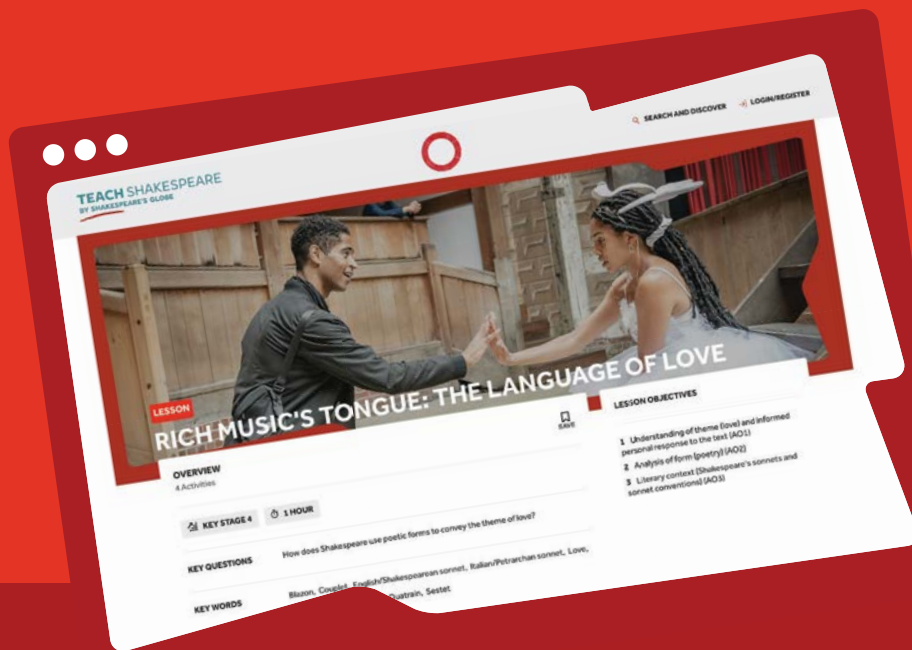
This approach to dressing for the day extends to our staff as well. Just as students move fluidly between roles, so too do the adults who teach and support them. You may find a colleague teaching lessons in Coastguard uniform before heading out on service. Members of the Outdoor and Adventure Learning team may arrive for lunch still in walking boots, having come straight from the hills or the coast. This is not about informality, but authenticity. Staff dress for the work they are doing and the responsibilities they carry, modelling the same adaptability, readiness, and professionalism we expect of our students. In doing so, they reinforce a shared culture in which uniform is not a costume, but a practical expression of purpose and commitment to the life of the school.

So yes, you may see a range of uniforms on campus on any given day. But look a little closer, and you will notice something consistent with the uniforms they wear; a shared sense of pride, belonging, and purpose. That is the real uniform of Gordonstoun – and it is worn by every student, every day.



SHAKESPEARE'S
GLOBE

TEACH SHAKESPEARE



Your go-to site for Shakespeare teaching resources

Make Shakespeare's plays come alive in your classroom with **Teach Shakespeare** by Shakespeare's Globe.

Access hundreds of curriculum-based activities and lessons, written by expert Globe educators, which approach the texts as plays for performance and get students to actively engage, analyse and create their own interpretations.

Annual subscriptions for independent schools start from:
£250.00 for two – six teachers
£65.00 for one teacher



Register today
teach.shakespearesglobe.com

Bringing the universe closer: star opportunity for schools

Founder of charity UK Astronomy, Ross Hockham, examines how astronomy can not only enrich and complement the curriculum but allow pupils to feel a sense of possibility.



Astronomy offers schools something increasingly valuable: a way to bring together curiosity, challenge, and perspective.

That belief sits at the heart of UK Astronomy.

When I founded UK Astronomy, the aim was to just find some friends to share my passion of the skies with – when I worked as a firefighter I had always been fascinated by space and the night sky. When my wife bought me a telescope, that interest became something much bigger. Today, we are a charity run entirely by volunteers in their spare time, with the simple aim: to educate, inspire, and excite others through a shared love of space.

My journey into astronomy forms a part of that. A route, not entirely conventional, has seen me leave school with the qualifications needed for one career to being recognised for the impact of another. This demonstrates what can happen when someone follows a genuine passion, works hard, and keeps learning. For young people, that can be a powerful reminder that curiosity, commitment, and perseverance can open unexpected doors.

Schools often tell us that they are looking for experiences that

complement the curriculum while also doing something more. They want high-quality enrichment, but they also want pupils to feel a sense of possibility. Astronomy offers that in abundance. It connects naturally to science, physics, maths, and engineering, but it also invites creativity, big thinking, and perspective. It gives pupils permission to be curious.

That matters across age groups. For younger children, astronomy captures the imagination very quickly. The scale of the universe, the colours of nebulae and the drama of the night sky all make learning feel alive. For older pupils, it opens up deeper conversations about scientific method, technology, observation, and humanity's place in the universe. In a school setting, that combination is powerful.

It is important outreach is designed to make that learning accessible and practical for schools. One of our most popular offers is our Solar System Talk, an interactive session that can be run for multiple classes across the school day. Using an inflatable solar system, pupils are introduced to the planets in a hands-on and memorable way, with plenty of opportunity for questions and discussion.



For something especially immersive, there are also portable indoor planetarium sessions. These bring a guided tour of the night sky directly into school, allowing pupils to experience stars, planets, galaxies, and nebulae in a memorable setting without leaving site.

Stargazing evenings, which combine the Solar System Talk with live observing, weather permitting, can also work beautifully for school communities, creating a shared experience for pupils and families while still retaining a strong educational focus. If the weather does not cooperate, additional night-sky content can be built in so that the event still delivers value. Our sessions are limited to 60 participants so that everyone has the opportunity to get hands-on with the telescopes and gain the most from the experience.

And because access matters, we also provide online talks for schools beyond the area we can easily reach in person. These cover topics including the solar system, galaxies, nebulae, and how to observe objects in your own skies. We can also provide worksheets,



which are available free on our website, helping schools continue the learning after the session itself.

We are not a large organisation, we are a charity shaped by one person's passion, sustained by volunteers, and driven by a belief that young people should have the chance to experience the wonder of space in a way that is fun and educational.

For school leaders and staff, that is why astronomy can be such a valuable part of enrichment. It supports the curriculum, sparks conversation, creates lasting memories, and very often, reaches pupils who may not previously have seen science as something for them. At its best, it does more than inform. It encourages young people to think bigger, look further, and stay curious.



UK Astronomy is a small charity based in Milton Keynes. More information about the charity and its outreach work can be found at www.ukastronomy.org

June 2027, One word: closed, open, international, merged or developed?

Is it time to get your house in order?

This year has been tough in the independent sector, with a large human cost for all generations. For years, it has been about numbers, financial performance, market positions, and operational efficiency. But what about the human factors? If there is one factor likely to define the future of independent schools by June 2027, it is employee experience. EX (employee experience), needs to take centre stage in any independent school now for sustainability. Make your biggest cost your asset!

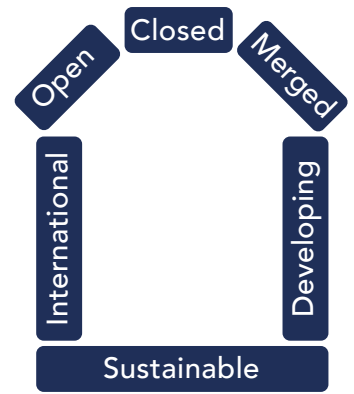
Schools that remain open, will be places that have successfully invested in a positive employee

experience. Cultures of care, empowerment where people feel valued, supported, and connected to your school's purpose. Professional development, wellbeing as a principle not as a one off and opportunities for growth. On the other side, schools closing will not simply be because of numbers, but an inability to attract and retain the talent needed for success. High turnover, burnout, and declining engagement leading to daily challenges that move to becoming unsustainable. When employee experience deteriorates, the resilience of your community often follows.

Mergers and acquisitions have become popular this year, but

what is the EX cost? Combining resources can give stability with shared expertise but also moments of shifted identities. Successful moments focus not only on financial efficiencies but also on creating stronger and a more compelling employee experience in the new world where staff work and may live. Taking your brand international, why now? Expanding globally offers access to new markets, but you need to understand your new cultural home to be successful.

The defining question for leaders is no longer simply whether they can afford to invest in employee experience. It is whether they can afford not to. By June 2027, the schools that thrive will be



those that recognise people as their most important competitive advantage.

The future may be described by one word – open, closed, merged, or international – but the deciding factor will be the experience of the people who work there.

How has your experience been this year? And would you recommend your school?

Because EX has more than one meaning...

Activity

An activity just for you

How was your year? Get a pen... and let's do some exploring.

It is time to build.

Choose five words that represent your EX this year. Build your house.

For each word, reflect on:

What it means to you **inside** (thoughts, values, motivation)

How it shows **outside** (actions, behaviours at work)

Become an architect of your future...

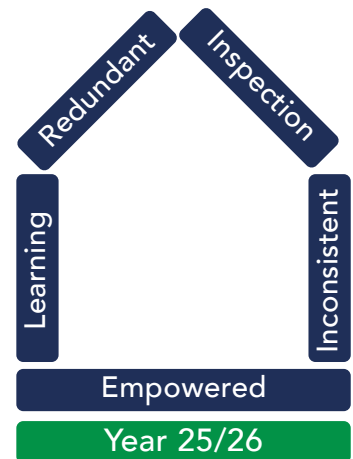
1. Why did I choose these five words?
2. Which word best represents how engaged I currently feel at work?
3. Which word reflects an area I want to improve?
4. How do these words help prepare for my future?
5. What changes could increase my employee engagement?
6. What support or opportunities would help me develop further?

Action Commitment

One word I will focus on first: _____

One action I will take: _____

How this will improve my future self: _____



National Musical Theatre competition

A Year 5 pupil from Ipswich High School, Suffolk, is celebrating national success after winning the ISA National Musical Theatre Singing Finals, alongside securing professional representation from a talent agency.

Ceci M, aged 9, earned her place in the national finals, held at Gosfield School in Essex, after being selected from more than 350 entrants in the Junior Category (Years 3–6). Only 13 young performers from across the UK reached the final stage, with competitors travelling from as far as Durham and the Cotswolds.

She performed the full version of 'As long as he needs me' from 'Oliver!'

The judging panel, comprising musical theatre performers Kate Playdon and Sam Hull,

Pictured: Ceci at the ISA National Musical Theatre Singing Finals



commended Ceci's "heartfelt storytelling, intelligent approach to the lyrics and beautiful tone."

Upon presenting her with the winner's trophy, they added: "This performance could have been in both the middle and senior category and still won a prize."

Audiences will now have the opportunity to see Ceci perform live in upcoming school productions of Matilda Jr and Annie Jr.

Dance Academy launch

Students from Rossall School, Lancashire, have taken to the stage for the official launch of the school's new-look Dance Academy.

The academy provides children with up to 15 hours of dance education per week alongside their usual lesson plan, led by professional dancers who have graced the stage with the likes of Kylie Monogue, Steps, and Blue.

Highlights of the new programme include ballet, contemporary, and jazz, tap and strength & conditioning.

It also includes opportunities to perform in venues like Blackpool's Winter Gardens alongside trips to watch performances on the West End.

The Academy will be available to pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 and run alongside the school's existing GCSE and A Level dance classes.

Head of the Dance Academy, Alice

Pictured: Rossall Dance Academy launch Credit: Rossall School/Steve Cooper Photography



Kilmartin, said: "Things have been going really well since we started reshaping our dance provision last year and we're excited to now officially launch the academy.

"We want to bring in more top industry professionals to deliver sessions for the students, including choreographers working on the West End – but our main ambition is for pupils to leave us as well-rounded individuals with dance experiences that benefit their future careers."

Performing Arts successes

Shebbear College, Devon, is celebrating a string of achievements across its Performing Arts department, with pupils excelling in music, public speaking, and on the national stage.

Among the successes, Dolly Brookes (Form 5) and Cherrie Tong (Form 3) have both achieved Distinction in their Grade 8 music examinations. Dolly (flute) and Cherrie (piano) reached this level at a notably young age, with Cherrie just 13 when she sat her exam.

Adding to this musical success, Yvie Tilley (Lower Sixth) recently represented the College at the ISA Young Musician Competition 2026, held at St Hilda's College, University of Oxford. Having been selected as a national finalist, she performed with confidence, musical maturity, and artistry on a highly competitive stage.

Pictured: Evie Highet as Deloris Van Cartier in Sister Act



Eleanor (Lower Sixth) also secured a place in the national finals of the ISA Public Speaking Competition with her original speech, 'The Power of a Question'. Her eloquence, confidence and ability to engage an audience earned her a place among the top young speakers in the country.

The school's recent Senior School production of Sister Act was also a great success with standout performances from the cast, in particular Evie Highet in Year 11, starring as Deloris Van Cartier.

Drama award

Abbey Gate College in Chester is celebrating national recognition after being awarded the Methuen Drama School and Group Prize at the National Youth Monologue Competition.

The award follows the College's success as North West winner of the Schools and Groups category, which saw four students progress to the National Final at London's Trafalgar Theatre. Accompanied by Head of Drama, Mrs Pitcher, the students performed on a West End stage in a competition that attracted more than 4,000 entries from across the UK.

Representing Abbey Gate College at the final were Flora M. (KS2 Screen Monologue), Amira M. (KS3 Screen Monologue), Amy R. (KS4 Classical Monologue), and Marcus E. (Sixth Form Classical Monologue).

Two students, Flora and Amira, were named runners-up in their respective categories.

The Methuen Drama Schools and Groups Prize is awarded to the overall winning school or group

Pictured (l to r): Flora M. and Amira M. runners up in their respective categories at the National Youth Monologue Competition

based on the collective standard of entries submitted.

Mrs Pitcher, Head of Drama, said: "To see our students perform with such professionalism and poise on a West End stage was incredibly special. Reaching the National Final was a tremendous achievement in itself, but for Flora and Amira to be recognised with runners-up awards, and for Abbey Gate College to receive the Methuen Drama Schools and Groups Prize, is simply fantastic. I am immensely proud of every student who entered the competition and contributed to this success."



Designed for the Next Generation



Specialist Manufacturer of Educational Furniture

- Survey & consultation service
- Full drawing & space planning service
 - Bespoke design
- Extensive range of finishes
 - CNC Technology
- Installation service & ongoing support
 - 10 year guarantee



Call
+44 1299 828888

Visit

www.witleyjones.com

or Email

enquiries@witleyjones.com

What the 11-plus is really costing our pupils

With admissions season in full swing, Head of Radnor House Prep, Richmond (which will join Radnor House Senior in becoming Kneller Hall in September 2026), Sasha Davies, examines the impact the 11-plus is having on children and why the system is falling short of what families expect it to be.



Sasha Davies

Every September, something quietly shifts in London prep schools. Year 5 children return from their summer holidays and, almost immediately, the clock starts ticking. Not towards the next school play, the next sports fixture, or the next science project, but towards a high-stakes academic event that will define, in many families' minds at least, whether their child's education has been a success.

For some children, the 11-plus system genuinely suits them, however that isn't the case for all. It is time for an honest, peer-to-peer conversation about what it is costing pupils – the children – in our care.

The calendar tells the real story

Preparation begins in earnest during Year 5, with timetable

changes including exam preparation and interview practice often replacing the core curriculum areas for English and Maths as well as co-curricular and extra-curricular areas of school life. And by the time children begin Year 6, the clock is already counting down to November and December when pupils will sit at least three or four separate exams across different schools, each with its own format and demands.

The school year then effectively splits into two distinct halves. The first is consumed by preparation and examination. The second becomes a collective exhale. A significant stretch of junior/prep education is hollowed out at both ends, and the gap between where Year 6 ends and Year 7 begins is larger and less acknowledged by

our sector than it should be. When looking at the development of children during this phase, there is an evident gap in the curriculum coverage but also in their personal development due to the impact of this testing, and we know from research that high stakes exams in late primary are associated with increased stress, anxiety, and lower life satisfaction for pupils.

The co-curricular cost

At Kneller Hall School, in the absence of the 11-plus, our Lower School pupils through to Year 6 will still have multiple hours of STEAM(Sport, Music, Drama, and Art) on their timetable every week. In an 11-plus school, that time goes – leading to the arts being reduced, sport squeezed, and the rich, exploratory breadth of a curriculum programme that defines the value of an independent education quietly dismantled to make room for intense exam practice, meaning children lose precisely the breadth that nurtures their confidence, creativity, and wellbeing.

The tutoring economy and the meritocracy question

Private tuition has become a significant industry in London, built almost entirely around the selective exams such as the 11-plus. Families feel, quite reasonably, given the competition, that their child can't afford not to be tutored. Parents also want the reassurance that they are providing everything for their child to access opportunities while also being able to compete with the neighbour or friend's child who may have applied for the same schools and has had tutoring for the past year. For many children, this means long evenings and weekends of extra preparation on top of a full school day, with little time left for rest, play or unstructured family life – all of which we know are protective factors for mental health and wellbeing.

The result is a system in which access to selective schools is shaped not purely by academic ability, but

by how much a family can spend on test preparation for the test meant to assess that ability.

As educators who care about fairness, that tension is worth sitting with. The meritocratic language surrounding the 11-plus is real and sincerely held, but so is the structural reality that the playing field is far from level.

The social pressure no one talks about

For many London families, the decision to pursue the 11-plus is not primarily an educational one but can be a social one; with it providing a reassuring framework for the next step in education because it's entrenched/engrained? culture in London.

Families who began their prep school journey with a genuine conviction in a creative, nurturing, broad education find themselves pulled into a process they never intended. Not because they have changed their minds about what good education looks like, but because the social cost of opting out feels too high and risky.

At Kneller Hall School, we have deliberately chosen not to enter children into the 11-plus exam as our curriculum and provision reflects an interrupted design from Reception to Year 13. That choice is not about lowering academic ambition; it is about broadening what we want to protect for our pupils – their depth of learning, their confidence, and their wellbeing. When we look back at what we gave children in Year 5 and Year 6, we want to be able to say that we protected what mattered most in their education and their childhood, rather than letting it be dictated by a single exam.

Opal

Our mission:
Every child should have an amazing playtime every day – no exceptions

outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk
Winner of the best active schools programme in Europe award

A distinctive approach to community engagement and secondary student enrichment

Woodbridge School, Suffolk, have developed a Secondary Enrichment Programme. Offered free of charge to schools locally as well as further afield, it has been designed to broaden students' academic and career horizons. Assistant Head Academic at the School, Ambra Carretta, outlines what it is all about, the mutual benefits it offers, and why engagement and enjoyment are so important as means to expand learning and knowledge.



As schools across the UK navigate the dual pressures of curriculum demands and preparing students for an increasingly complex world, the role of enrichment is evolving. It is no longer sufficient for enrichment to simply provide variety; it must offer purpose, direction, and meaningful experiences that help students make sense of their learning and their future.

At Woodbridge School, building on the success of our Primary Enrichment Programme, we have developed a Secondary Enrichment Programme for Year 9 students from local schools. Offered free of charge, the programme is designed not only to broaden academic horizons, but to support students at a pivotal moment, when curiosity begins to translate into choices about identity, aspiration, and future pathways.

Aligned with the Gatsby Benchmarks, the programme provides meaningful encounters with new subjects, people, and environments, helping students to connect curriculum learning with real-world applications. Workshops are delivered both by our experienced Heads of Department and through partnerships with local organisations such as DanceEast and EDF.

Beyond frameworks and structure, however, its success lies in a simple pedagogical principle: students learn more effectively when they are engaged, challenged, and genuinely enjoying the process.

Engagement through experience

Educational research consistently highlights the importance of active engagement in securing

deep learning. When students are intellectually and emotionally invested, they are more likely to retain knowledge and apply it with confidence.

The programme is built around this understanding. Workshops are deliberately practical and exploratory, encouraging students to collaborate with unfamiliar peers, take intellectual risks and discover strengths they may not yet recognise in themselves. At a stage when many students are beginning to consider GCSE choices, these experiences can be transformative, shifting learning from something passive to something dynamic and personally meaningful.

For teachers, this kind of enrichment complements curriculum delivery, offering tangible experiences that can spark curiosity and provide context for future learning.

The power of environment and encounter

One of the most striking aspects of the programme is the impact of a new environment. When students step into an unfamiliar setting, surrounded by different facilities, teachers, and peers, their mindset shifts. They become more attentive, more open, and more willing to engage.

At Woodbridge, visiting students experience specialist spaces, work with subject experts and interact with older student mentors. These encounters are powerful. They provide not only academic stimulus but also social and cultural exposure, helping students to build confidence and develop the interpersonal skills increasingly valued in education and employment.

For some, it is the first time they have encountered a subject or career pathway in a tangible way. For others, it is the moment a previously abstract idea becomes a possible future.

Enjoyment as a driver of learning

Enjoyment is sometimes viewed as secondary to academic rigour. Yet, in practice, the two are closely linked. When students enjoy what they are doing, they are more motivated, more resilient, and more willing to engage deeply with challenging material.

The Secondary Enrichment Programme embraces this balance. Sessions are designed to be interactive and engaging, without compromising intellectual challenge. This is particularly important for students who may not thrive in traditional classroom settings; for them, enjoyment can be the gateway to re-engagement with learning.

For educators, this serves as a reminder that curiosity and enjoyment are not optional extras, but central to effective teaching.

A shared commitment to community

The decision to offer the programme free of charge reflects a commitment to widening access and strengthening local educational partnerships. It ensures that all schools, regardless of resource, can provide their students with high-quality enrichment experiences.

The response from local schools has been overwhelmingly positive. Importantly, the benefits extend beyond individual participants. Students return to their classrooms with increased confidence, renewed motivation

and a broader perspective on their learning.

This reflects a growing recognition that education does not sit within isolated institutions. Instead, schools are part of a wider ecosystem, where collaboration enhances opportunity and impact for all.

Mutual benefit and student leadership

The programme also offers significant benefits for Woodbridge students, many of whom take on leadership roles within sessions. Supporting younger students enables them to develop communication, empathy, and responsibility, skills that are essential beyond the classroom.

These leadership opportunities reinforce the value of service and community engagement, while providing a meaningful context for personal development. In this way, the programme exemplifies truly reciprocal outreach, where all participants benefit.

Looking ahead

As the demands on young people continue to grow, enrichment must do more than extend learning, it must shape it. By prioritising engagement, experience, and community connection, the Secondary Enrichment Programme demonstrates how schools can work together to create opportunities that are both impactful and sustainable.

Ultimately, this approach is about more than enrichment. It is about helping students to see learning as relevant, to understand their place within a wider community, and to develop the confidence to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Schools want to go electric: so what's holding them back?

Rivervale Minibus completed a small survey of schools, trusts, and community transport organisations in April and May 2026 to get a sample of attitudes towards electric minibuses. John Peterson, Director of Minibus Services, reports on the findings.

Sustainability is now firmly on the agenda for many educational organisations. But when it comes to minibuses, the transition to electric is slow, and we wanted to understand why.

The majority of respondents to the survey said reducing their carbon footprint is an important goal, but less than 20% have an electric vehicle, so what is stopping them?

The survey, although small, revealed that while there is genuine interest in electric minibuses, several practical barriers and concerns are preventing organisations from making the switch.

Range anxiety remains the biggest concern

By far the most common concern raised by our respondents was vehicle range. Even among respondents already operating electric vehicles, concerns about range limitation were repeatedly highlighted.

For many schools, minibuses are expected to undertake a wide variety of journeys, from daily sports fixtures and educational visits to longer-distance residential trips and competitions. If drivers are concerned about whether they can comfortably complete those journeys without recharging, confidence in electric vehicles will naturally suffer.

Overcoming range anxiety

Schools can overcome range anxiety by carefully assessing how their electric minibus is actually going to be used.

Most schools will find that the majority of their journeys are local, including transporting pupils between campuses, attending

nearby sports fixtures and educational visits, or providing transport for extracurricular activities. These shorter, predictable journeys are often well within the real-world range of modern electric minibuses.

For occasional longer-distance trips, schools can research and plan charging stops, in line with refreshment and comfort breaks, or use an alternative minibus if available.

Battery technology is continuing to improve, as is the UK's charging infrastructure. But planning journeys and understanding the factors that will drain your battery (payload weight, internal electric use, types of driving) means that range anxiety can be managed and overcome.

Managing the challenge of a charging infrastructure

The second major obstacle cited in our survey was the UK's charging infrastructure, including the cost of installing chargers, access to charging facilities, and the availability and inconvenience of public charging points.

For busy schools with limited parking space or ageing electrical infrastructure, installing charging facilities can feel like a significant undertaking.

Grants could be the tipping point

One of the most encouraging findings from the survey was the positive impact that charging grants could have on the adoption of electric minibuses.

When asked whether a grant to install chargers would influence their decision to switch to electric, a significant proportion

of respondents indicated that it would make a difference or have a significant impact on their decision-making.

In this financial climate, schools are looking for reassurance that the financial and operational challenges of going electric can be managed, so looking at the upfront costs of charging infrastructure versus the long-term savings could help make electric vehicles a more realistic option.

Thinking long term

As well as hitting sustainability targets, the benefits of electric minibuses include reduced costs of maintenance and fuel.

There are many schools already successfully operating electric minibuses who were able to offset the upfront costs of installing a charger with the savings they make long term.

Early adopters do see benefits

Despite the concerns, schools and organisations already using electric minibuses in our survey highlighted positives including "they're quiet and comfortable to drive," "easy to use," and "well suited to shorter local journeys."

For schools whose transport needs are primarily local, electric minibuses may already be the most cost effective, environmentally friendly option.

What needs to change?

The survey findings point to several areas that could accelerate electric minibus adoption within the education sector:

1. Overcoming range anxiety

Schools need the confidence that electric minibuses can comfortably handle daily duties. Understanding

the vehicle's real-world range, what affects the battery life of the vehicles, and effective planning for infrequent longer journeys should help overcome any concerns.

2. Better charging infrastructure

The UK's charging infrastructure is improving. Increased access to reliable charging facilities will not only help reduce range anxiety but offer confidence to electric minibus users. Having the space and facilities to charge minibuses on school premises overnight might be all a school needs to run their electric minibuses locally.

3. Financial support

Charging grants and other funding initiatives could significantly improve adoption rates. Rivervale Minibus is always looking out for opportunities to help organisations move to electric. When grants are made available, we make sure our customers are informed.

Looking Ahead

Sustainability is clearly a priority for many organisations. As schools and academy trusts continue to look for ways to reduce their carbon footprint, electric vehicles are becoming an increasingly important part of the conversation.

Our survey suggests that the education sector is keen to move to electric minibuses, some are already using them. Others, although interested, are holding off until the practical and financial barriers are easier to overcome.

As vehicle technology advances, charging networks improve and grant funding becomes more accessible, the question may soon shift from whether schools will adopt electric minibuses to when.

If you have questions about electric minibuses and vans, please get in touch with Rivervale Minibus on: 01869 253744 or email: minibus@rivervale.co.uk



Ford Transit 17-seat minibuses from only £549 + VAT per month*

Vehicle shown is for illustration purposes only

01869 253744

www.rivervaleminibus.co.uk

minibus@rivervale.co.uk

*£549 + VAT based on a 17-seat Ford Transit Leader. Initial payment £1647 + VAT. Payment profile 3+59 months. Annual mileage allowance 5,000. Funder-maintained contract. Business users only, subject to status, guarantees and indemnities may be required. Excess Mileage charges apply. Unfair Wear and Tear and Damage Charges may apply. Full. Rivervale is a broker and not a lender. Rivervale Minibus Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (registration number 3723474). We do not provide independent financial advice.

We will receive a commission and/or quality-derived bonus for introducing you to one of our panel of leasing companies or finance providers. The commission we receive may be preset but can vary and will impact the amount payable by the customer.

The dissolution of independent schools

Educator of 35 years, former head, and now teacher of Religion, Ethics, and Philosophy at Hurstpierpoint College, West Sussex, Richard Taylor-West, draws comparisons between the Dissolution of monasteries by Henry VIII and the government policy of today that has seen the imposition of VAT on fees.

In 1536 an egotistical monarch set out to make some much-needed money for his secular projects. He needed to shore up his somewhat wobbly military, his grip on the secular engines of power, and be seen to be supporting reform. It was fun to make the French nervous too.

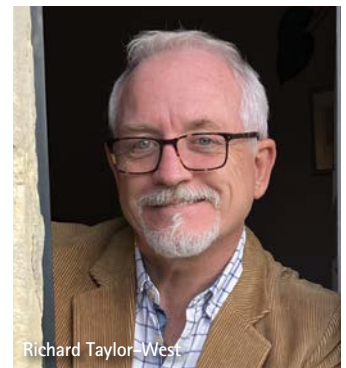
The historian Brendan Scott described it as “the greatest dislocation of people, property and daily life since the Norman Conquest” in Britain. Others might say it was an act of heinous cultural vandalism. Britain lost swathes of historical architecture and culture. Seats of learning, producers of the greatest art and literature we had ever seen, were wiped off the map. Something of us died, forever, never to be replaced. And we then “put up a parking lot.” Sound familiar?

Opening ‘The Times’ in recent weeks, I could not help feeling a dreadful sense of historical déjà vu – something along the lines of, “Oh Lord, not again.” The ice in the pit of my stomach was forming around the statistic in print that 100 independent schools in the UK have been swept away by a tidal wave of taxation and rate relief changes (by the far the most destructive instrument) brought in by government that simply does not understand what it’s doing.

There are rumours in the air that world famous schools in Sussex can feel the chill of an icy winter; St Lawrence’s has gone. Who is next? This has the feel of 1540 about it, or some horrific dystopian fiction, from which we cannot escape. To cap it all, the government has raised £1.4 billion

or so from its approach to the independent sector. Really? So little gained, on a national fiscal scale, in exchange for so much damage. There will be even less to rake in, once 85% of them have closed. Oh, of course. I see the plan now.

There is a part of me that understands Henry’s move. It was desperate and its lasting mark on our culture and landscape is indelible. It did, however, raise a lot of cash that some can legitimately argue was put to beneficial use. Many of our population own their own land now because of it. The Catholic church lost its place as a dominant landowner in the UK. The government should properly turn its sights on Google and X. There’s money to be made there. They seem to be the dominant



Richard Taylor-West

owner of our children.

The Prime Minister’s manoeuvre seems pitiful from all angles. It has achieved so little and yet has damaged so much. Our independent schools have for generations, often affordably, contrary to popular myth, provided an excellent education for so many. The majority were inclusive, adding value, did a marvellous job for SEND pupils. I could go on.

The sector has been part of the fabric of choice for our country; a cultural poly-tunnel of thought and ideas. A chance to succeed.

Admissions Award



Leighton Park School, Berkshire, has been awarded the AMCIS (The Association for Admissions, Marketing and Communications in Independent Schools) Impact Award for Admissions for 2026. AMCIS is the professional body for admissions, marketing, and communications for UK independent schools.

The award recognises schools that have delivered measurable impact in admissions practice. Judges highlighted Leighton Park’s distinctive, values-led approach as a key differentiator in an increasingly complex and competitive sector.

Pictured: The Leighton Park Admissions team

In their citation, the judges commented: “This year’s winner demonstrated how a sharply focused, values-led admissions strategy can deliver exceptional results in a challenging market. The team transformed their entire admissions journey into a highly personalised, responsive, and immersive experience, from rapid communication and tailored tours to impactful taster days, sustained feeder school engagement and sound international strategy. It is a compelling example of strategic clarity, operational excellence, and measurable impact.”

Advertorial Feature

Heath Books: Stress free school book buying

At Heath Books we pride ourselves on delivering great service. Our goal is always to make book supply simple, efficient, and cost effective for schools and be the only book supplier you need. If the book is in print, we will find it!

We offer a personal service and can choose books to fit your topic or class for everything from the latest fiction and non-fiction to suit your budgets or advise on the core textbooks available for your courses.

Our aim is to eliminate the need for teachers and school staff to spend valuable time dealing with multiple publishers, browsing vast websites, or coping with the paperwork involved in ordering from individual publishers. With us you can consolidate orders and have one delivery with one invoice.

0208 644 7788 | orders@heathbooks.co.uk | www.heathbooks.co.uk

Discounts – all school orders receive a discount but the more you buy, the more you will save.

Free Delivery – all mainland UK schools receive free delivery.

Summer Order Consolidation – need books for the start of term in September? Get your order in early and we will organise delivery to suit you. Many customers consolidate their orders into a single delivery in the summer for the new school year and we can often accommodate a specific delivery day too.



Creating space for education without compromising budgets

Independent schools continue to face a familiar challenge: how to provide exceptional learning environments while balancing increasingly complex financial pressures.

Whether accommodating growing pupil numbers, creating dedicated SEN facilities, expanding sports provision, or introducing specialist teaching spaces, the demand for additional accommodation rarely arrives with unlimited budgets or unlimited time.

At CWC Containers, we understand these challenges because, since 2021, we have worked with schools, colleges, and educational organisations to deliver practical, high-quality space solutions that are both cost-effective and built to last.

Over the past five years, we have seen a significant shift in how schools approach estate development. Increasingly, education leaders are looking for flexible, future-proof solutions that can be delivered quickly, minimise disruption, and offer excellent long-term value. Traditional construction will always have its place, but many

schools are discovering that modern modular buildings can achieve the same educational outcomes at a fraction of the cost and programme duration.

Our approach begins with understanding the school's objectives rather than selling a standard product. Every educational setting is different. A preparatory school seeking a dedicated music room has very different requirements from a senior school needing additional teaching accommodation, sports changing facilities, wellbeing spaces, or SEND provision.

By involving schools directly in the design process, we help create spaces that are tailored to their exact requirements. The result is a building that works for the way the school operates today while retaining the flexibility to adapt as needs evolve in the future.

One of the greatest advantages of modern modular construction is speed. Because the majority of construction takes place within our workshop, disruption on site is dramatically reduced. Installation can often be completed within days rather than months, allowing schools to continue operating with minimal impact on pupils, staff, and day-to-day activities.

Quality remains central to everything we do. Our buildings are fully insulated, comfortable year-round, and designed to meet modern expectations for durability, aesthetics, and performance. With a wide range of external finishes and cladding options available, buildings can complement existing architecture and become a seamless part of the wider school estate.

Sustainability is also becoming increasingly important within the education sector. Repurposing shipping containers provides a practical way of giving existing materials a second life while reducing waste and supporting environmentally responsible construction practices. For many schools, this aligns closely with their own sustainability objectives and values.

Most importantly, additional space should be viewed as an investment rather than simply an expense. The right facility can unlock new opportunities, improve the learning experience, enhance staff wellbeing, and create capacity for future growth. In many cases, standalone facilities can even generate additional income through community use, holiday clubs, sports programmes, and wraparound care.



At CWC Containers, we remain passionate about helping schools make the most of their available space and budgets. As a family-run business based in Greater Manchester, we take pride in providing honest advice, practical solutions, and buildings that genuinely make a difference.

Education continues to evolve, and so do the spaces that support it. We are proud to play our part in helping schools create inspiring environments where pupils can learn, develop, and thrive.



Kent Education Award

The Head of Art at Cobham Hall, part of the Mill Hill Education Group, Mr Mike Turner, has been named Secondary School Teacher of the Year in Art at the Kent Education Awards. The award recognises his contribution to Art education and his impact on students across the school.

Speaking about the award, Mr Turner said: "I'm incredibly honoured to receive the Kent Secondary Teacher of the Year award. Creativity has the power to build confidence, resilience, and opportunity, and I'm very fortunate to work with such talented students and supportive colleagues every day."

The news comes as Cobham Hall students Bond, Lia, and Grace, have all been shortlisted for the John Downton Art Awards. As one of Kent's largest young artists' competitions, the awards celebrate creative talent from across the county. Each student impressed the judges with their originality, technical skill, and distinctive artistic voice.

Pictured: Mike Turner and his award



Looking ahead, Cobham Hall has also announced that from September 2026, Mr Turner will lead the school's new International Art and Design Foundation Programme in partnership with NCUK. The one-year programme will provide the opportunity to explore a broad range of Art and Design disciplines while developing the academic knowledge and practical skills required for university study and future creative careers worldwide.

Find out more about the programme in a feature piece in the forthcoming September issue.

New Art Kiln

St. Helen's College Prep School in Hillingdon has installed a new kiln. It is hoped it will offer many exciting new opportunities for the pupil's creative work with clay in Art lessons and beyond.

Head of Art at St. Helen's College, Mrs Nadine Pruce, said: "We are incredibly excited to have fired up the new kiln and look forward to introducing the children to all the creative opportunities it brings. Clay is a wonderful medium for the children to explore, and the kiln will allow them to see a project right through from sculpting to the firing process, when their pieces will truly come to life. We can't wait to see what the children create."

Pupils in Year 1 were the first to experience the kiln to create sunflower bowls during a visit to the Art Studio.

Pictured: Mrs Pruce with St. Helen's College kiln Photo credit: St. Helen's College



Installation of the school kiln marks a significant investment in expressive arts facilities at the college.

To celebrate the arrival of the kiln the prep school will also be inviting parents into the Art Studio for after school parent and child clay workshops as an opportunity to experience the facilities and create something together.

Young Art Oxford

Cokethorpe School, Oxfordshire, is celebrating success at this year's Young Art Oxford Competition, with dozens of pupils shortlisted and several prize winners recognised for their creativity and artistic talent.

The annual competition, open to children from Reception to Year 9 across Oxfordshire, attracted close to 3,000 entries this year from state, independent and SEN schools, as well as home-schooled pupils, with funds raised from each entry going towards supporting the Rafiki Thabo Foundation.

From more than 250 entries submitted by Cokethorpe pupils alone, 57 works were shortlisted for exhibition.

Among the school's achievements was a first-place award in the Reception to Year 2 category for a pupil's artwork inspired by the competition's theme, 'Little Things That Matter'. Several other pupils were also recognised as category winners across both Prep and Senior School sections.

Pictured: Two of the art entries from Cokethorpe School



Shortlisted artworks will be exhibited at the Ashmolean Museum.

Art Teacher at the school, Mrs Helen Hammond, said: "Young Art Oxford is such a valuable opportunity for children to express themselves creatively and feel proud of what they can achieve. We encourage every pupil to develop their own ideas and interpretations, while helping them build techniques and confidence along the way."



How good is your provision for pupils with SpLD?

We exist to help you find out and then we tell parents.

We offer:

- For your school: a visit by an SpLD expert to assess your provision
- For parents: a free Register of schools accredited for their Learning Support Provision

Contact CReSTeD via email: admin@crested.org.uk
Or visit our website: www.crested.org.uk
Registered Charity no. 1052103
Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic pupils







High quality infection prevention and control for your staff and pupils



Infection prevention and control isn't just a current issue, it's a constant concern in any business - especially where young people are concerned.

That's why Southern Contracts offer a range of reliable, high quality laundry and dishwashing machines from Miele, designed to prevent the spread of infection and provide the highest levels of hygiene.

In partnership with

Miele

Get in touch on:

☎ 03301 222888

✉ office@southerncontracts.co.uk

🌐 www.southerncontracts.co.uk

Follow us on:

📘 SouthernContracts

📷 [southern.contracts](https://www.instagram.com/southern.contracts)

🐦 @S_Contracts

🏢 Southern Contracts Limited

Closures and schools under threat

It has been reported that several independent schools are either under threat of closure or have announced that they are set to close. Those who will be shutting their doors include St Michael Abbey School, Tenbury; Stoke College, Suffolk; Ruckleigh School, West Midlands; and Moyles Court School, Hampshire.

In respective statements, Stoke College and Moyles Court School said: Stoke College – “The Board of Directors and Shareholders of Stoke College announce, with great sadness, that the school will not operate beyond the end of the Summer Term and does not intend to reopen for the 2026–27 academic year.

“This decision has been taken following a sustained period of financial challenge affecting both Stoke College and the wider independent school sector. The introduction of VAT on school fees, the removal of business

rates relief, rising employment costs and increasing operational expenditure have significantly increased the level of investment required to sustain the school’s educational model.

“Over a considerable period, extensive efforts have been made to secure the long-term future of the school. Despite encouraging admissions activity, increasing pupil numbers, excellent academic outcomes, and strong interest from prospective families, the Board has concluded that the level of financial support required to continue operating the school beyond the current academic year can no longer be sustained.”

Moyles Court School – “It is with great sadness that we share the news that Moyles Court School will be closing at the end of the current academic year. This has not been a decision taken lightly. Since rescuing the school in 2016, owners Mark and

Jo Broadway have worked to rebuild and grow Moyles Court, creating a nurturing, inclusive environment where every child is known and valued. However, the cumulative impact of recent political, demographic, and financial pressures, including rising costs, declining pupil numbers, and changes within the independent school sector, has made it impossible to continue.”

Elsewhere, other schools are currently facing threat of closure. One of which is St Joseph’s College, Reading, Berkshire, which is (at time of print production) in a consultation period. In a statement they said: “On Monday 18 May, the Chair of Governors of St Joseph’s College, Hilary Buckle, on behalf of the Board of Governors, announced the beginning of a consultation with staff about the future of the school.”

Hilary Buckle said: “The Board has been looking at ways to ensure the future of the school but it has been unable to find a secure financial solution and therefore the consultation will be asking staff for any suggestions they may have to keep the school open and secure its future. If no solution is found, the school will close on 10th July 2026.”

Abbotsholme School, Derbyshire, has also been facing a period of uncertainty since a change of ownership at the end of May. According to national and local media reports it was initially believed by school leaders that the intention was to keep the school running, but it was announced within a few days of takeover that as “financial challenges facing the school are significantly greater than originally understood,” the school would close on 22 June. It also emerged that staff had been unpaid for two months. Despite subsequent discussions, where an agreement to keep the school open and continue in September, seemed to have been reached, just days later, parents were informed that the school would be closing early on 10 June to all pupils apart from those sitting exams, on safeguarding grounds. Speaking to the BBC, Director of Abbotsholme 2026 Ltd and new owner, Tony Costigan, said: “Notwithstanding the events of recent days, we remain committed to exploring a viable solution for the new academic year.” He has been approached for comment.

A smarter school workhorse



For independent schools managing large grounds, sports facilities, estates, or woodland areas, the new Polaris Ranger 500 offers a practical and accessible utility vehicle option.

Priced from just £9,999, the Ranger 500 brings the capability of a side-by-side into a compact package that is well suited to daily site work. At 1.49m wide, it can navigate tight tracks, paths, and service areas, while still offering the comfort, stability, and load-carrying practicality of a Ranger.

The 567cc ProStar engine provides dependable performance for everyday tasks, from moving tools and equipment to supporting grounds teams across busy campuses. A gas-assist dump box adds useful carrying capacity, while selectable Turf Mode helps reduce ground disturbance on grassed areas, pitches, and landscaped spaces.

With a factory-installed winch fitted as standard and Polaris’ reputation for tough, reliable vehicles, the Ranger 500 is a strong choice for schools looking to improve site mobility and operational efficiency.

www.polarisbritain.com

Heads Hunted

Among the upcoming head and principal appointments:

Abingdon House School	London
Cameron Vale School	London
Kingham Hill School	Oxfordshire
Lingfield College	Surrey

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

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

Please email:
mail@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk



Bring your school's walls to life[®]

Instantly add wow factor to your learning environment with zero maintenance Wall Art



TO ARRANGE A FREE SITE VISIT

Call: 020 7404 3400

email: wallart@promoteyourschool.co.uk

Wall Art.

by Promote Your School

Badminton title

A Year 8 pupil at Loughborough High School, Leicestershire, Mutiara Mandala, has claimed the U17 European title at the Austrian U17 Badminton Open 2026, causing her European U17 ranking to climb to 27.

It is Mutiara's second non-UK title, following her win at the U17 Slovenia International 2025.

Representing England, Mutiara faced three close three-set matches in the lead up to the final where she claimed the Women's Singles title in another three-set match with a score of 25-23/19-21/21-9.

Mutiara was also part of Loughborough High School's Key Stage 3 badminton team who made history last year by winning two national competitions in less than a week, securing their place as one of the country's top school badminton teams.

Pictured: Mutiara Mandala with her medal



Mutiara is supported by Badminton England as a transition athlete, training with the national programme two days a week. Her international tournament programme is fully funded by Badminton England, with coaching-team support helping her gain valuable preparation and experience as she progresses through the England pathway.

Netball coach

Trinity School, Croydon, Surrey, has as appointed Mrs Cara McCartney as Assistant Director of Sport. Cara will join the school in September.

The appointment forms part of Trinity's move to full co-education, with its first Year 6 and 7 girls joining the school in September 2027, and a £40 million investment programme that is transforming facilities including new netball courts, upgraded hockey provision and an expanded sports centre.

Cara, who currently serves as Assistant Director of Sport at Caterham School, Surrey, is also Head Coach at Roundwood Netball Club in Croydon.

Cara said: "It is a privilege to join Trinity at such an exciting new chapter as it moves to full co-education. I am passionate about creating opportunities for girls to thrive in PE and sport, whether competitively or recreationally. I look forward to building an environment that encourages

Pictured: Cara McCartney



confidence, participation and high performance, and most importantly a life-long love of physical activity in every student."

Director of Sport, Mr Sean King, said: "Our ambition is for our girls' sporting programme to be quickly established as the leading programme in South London, fostering a culture of both participation and excellence that is equivalent and complementary to our existing boys' programme.

"Significant investment in our facilities for both girls' and boys' sport, building on the provision we already offer, will play an important role in helping us achieve this vision."

Cricket agreement

Malvern College, Worcestershire, and Worcestershire County Cricket Club (WCCC) have announced a new partnership agreement, confirming Malvern College as the Club's winter training venue through to 2028.

The agreement builds on a longstanding relationship between the two organisations, with Malvern College having hosted Worcestershire's professional squads, academy, and performance pathways for winter training for over 15 years.

Under these arrangements, Worcestershire CCC will continue to access Malvern College's Sports Complex for indoor cricket training, strength and conditioning, and player development programmes across its professional, academy, pathway, and women and girls' teams.

The partnership also strengthens collaboration around player pathways and development, complementing Malvern College's

Pictured: Worcestershire CCC Chief Executive Ashley Giles (left) with Mark Hardinges, Director of Sport at Malvern College



established cricket scholarship programme.

Director of Sport at Malvern College, Mark Hardinges, said: "This agreement is a significant statement of intent from both organisations. We are proud that Malvern College continues to play a role in supporting their players' development at every level."

Both organisations have expressed their intention to maximise the partnership through collaborative community engagement, shared promotion, and regular strategic review meetings, ensuring continued benefit for players, pupils and the wider Worcestershire cricketing community.

The agreement runs until Summer 2028.



Football partnership

Glenalmond College, Perthshire, has announced a partnership with Chelsea Football Club.

The partnership will introduce a dedicated football development programme at Glenalmond's campus. Built collaboratively by both organisations, the programme has been designed to develop young footballers within an environment that values academic achievement, character, leadership, and personal growth as highly as sporting success.

Pupils enrolled within the programme will benefit from coaching delivered by Chelsea Football Club coaches and led on-site by a full-time football coach embedded within the College.

Pictured: Celebrating the partnership

The experience will also include opportunities for visits to Chelsea's Cobham Training Ground and Stamford Bridge.

Warden of Glenalmond College, Jenny Davey, said: "Sport has been part of life at Glenalmond since the founding of the College, with the first Warden, Charles Wordsworth, noting in his diary that sports facilities, including 'a ground for football, were no less indispensable than classrooms' for pupils. As we approach our 180th anniversary, we remain a school community where sport is intrinsic to our ambitions for our pupils, fostering academic achievement, character, leadership, and personal growth."



Clay court investment

Queenswood School, Hertfordshire, has opened the country's first large-scale Red Plus clay court facility in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association. Eight brand new courts, built with the support of a £600,000 LTA investment form the largest clay court competition venue in the UK.

Red Plus clay contains real Italian clay and is playable all year round, replicating the surface conditions of the professional tour. Alongside the new courts, the school's pavilion, originally built in the 1960s, has been refurbished.

The courts, which have recently hosted the GB 11U International Team Trophy, saw national squads from Great Britain (two teams), South Korea, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Switzerland, and Belgium compete.

Pictured: The Red Plus clay courts

Senior Property Investment Manager, LTA, Sophie Curthoys, commented: "This is an exciting partnership with Queenswood School to deliver this Red Plus clay venue. This is more than an investment in infrastructure. It's an investment in the future of British tennis. The courts will provide training and competition opportunities, host national and international events, and help nurture the next generation of British talent, while securing the long-term future of clay court tennis at this site."

Director of Tennis, Queenswood School, Catherine Sluter, added: "Our new tennis courts, combined with our ongoing collaboration with the LTA, will give students unparalleled opportunities to train, compete and grow as athletes."



GB Head Coach appointment

Mr Kenrick Liburd, Head of Basketball at New Hall School, Essex, has been appointed Head Coach of the Great Britain Women's 3x3 programme.

His appointment came ahead of the FIBA (International Basketball Federation) 3x3 Europe Cup Qualifiers in Romania.

Mr Liburd, who joined the school in 2024, previously led the Great Britain U23 Women's Team in the FIBA 3x3 Nations League, and he has played a significant role

Pictured: Kenrick Liburd

in developing emerging talent and preparing athletes for senior international competition.

The impact of Mr Liburd's coaching is already being felt at New Hall, with Asher (Year 9) being selected for the England Talent Programme Training Camp, part of the England Basketball performance pathway earlier in the year, and the school recently hosting the inaugural Summer Series 3x3 Tournament, welcoming ten local schools over three separate days, with teams competing from Years 7-9.

TARAFLEX

— SPORTS FLOORING —

COVER EVERY INCH OF THE HALL.

It's... Where Champions Play.

Taraflex® is the most widely specified indoor sports surface in the world. Its' unique construction and technical performance is unrivalled, it has been fitted at every Olympic Games since 1976.

Taraflex® delivers optimum safety and comfort for all users, and is widely recognised and installed in the education sectors. Over 8 million pupils everyday enjoy the benefits of Taraflex® sports flooring.

If you have an education facility and require more than just sports flooring, Gerflor have other resilient floor coverings for your project, including Vinyl, Carpets, Linoleum, and Rubber finishes.

CONTACT US FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

+44 (0) 1625 428 922
 @ contractuk@gerflor.com
 www.gerflor.co.uk

Gerflor



Romilly School, Wales

Taraflex® Evolution SL Sports Flooring





Football development programme

Ryde School, Isle of Wight, has teamed up with Southampton FC to launch a football development programme for pupils.

The affiliate partnership, initially for three years, will give Ryde School access to Southampton's football coaches and elite training resources.

Boys and girls from Year 3 to Upper Sixth will benefit, and to mark the official launch of the partnership, the school has announced additional sports scholarships, including football, for Year 7 and 9 children to join in September 2026.

Headmaster, Will Turner, said: "This is an exciting step forward in our

Pictured: Southampton FC

sports provision and the partnership will elevate our football to a more professional and competitive level."

Southampton FC academy staff will regularly visit Ryde School to deliver coaching sessions, while pupils will have opportunities to visit the club's academy, its training ground and St Mary's Stadium.

The football programme will run alongside Ryde School's other main sports, notably rugby, cricket, hockey, netball, and sailing.

The partnership with Southampton FC will officially begin at the start of the Autumn Term in September.



National Football Champs

Footballers from St. Mary's College, Liverpool, have crowned a season of soccer success at the school by winning three national cup finals on the same day.

Four of the school's football teams reached the finals of the English Schools' FA Small Schools Cup which were played at Stoke City's bet365 Stadium, with three of the St. Mary's teams winning their finals.

The under 13 girls team beat Lambrook School, Berkshire 4-3 on penalties after a closely contested match which saw the scores level at 1-1 at the end of normal time.

The girls' victory was followed by two more final wins: the under 13 boys team, who beat Royal Russell School, Surrey, 4-1 in their final and the under 14 boys team then rounded off the day with a 3-0 victory over Lingfield College, Surrey.

Pictured: The successful St. Mary's under 13 girls football team

Meanwhile, the under 18 boys team were joint winners of the Sefton Cup; the under 13 boys reached the final of the Sefton Small Schools Cup; and the under 14 boys reached the last 16 of the National Cup for Elite Schools.

St. Mary's Principal, Mike Kennedy, commented: "For a relatively small school like St. Mary's College to have four of its football teams reach the finals of this national competition is a great achievement.

"Congratulations to staff members Sally Townsley (Girls' Football Coach), Tom Manley (Boys' Football Coach), and Derek Williams (Head of Boys' PE), who have played such an important role in nurturing the talent of these young players and helping them become national champions."



U11 Cricket champs

King's Hawford, Worcester, is celebrating after the Under 11 Girls' cricket team won the IAPS cricket tournament for the third consecutive year.

King's Hawford faced Richard Pate School, Gloucestershire, in the knockout rounds, before taking on Bablake School, West Midlands, to secure their place in the final.

The tournament concluded with a closely contested final against Cheam School, Berkshire, where King's Hawford held their nerve to

Pictured: The winning U11 team

emerge victorious once again.

Head of Girls' Games at King's Hawford, Charlotte Butt, commented: "To win the U11 IAPS Cricket Tournament three years in a row is a tremendous achievement and reflects the continued growth, enthusiasm, and quality of girls' cricket at King's Hawford."

This latest success marks another milestone for the cricket programme across the family of schools at The King's Worcester Foundation.

New vision for sport

Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen, is set to welcome back former pupils from across the globe this September as it launches a new campaign to further develop sport and community facilities in the north east.

The College will host its inaugural Gala Dinner at the P&T Live arena, bringing together the international Gordonian network, regional sports partners, businesses, and supporters for an evening celebrating sport, community and the future of the College's sporting vision.

The event will mark the launch of a major fundraising campaign to support the College's next phase of investment in sports facilities, benefiting both pupils and the wider community across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

Among those returning to support the initiative is former Scotland

Pictured: Ruaridh Jackson



Rugby International Ruaridh Jackson (Class of '06), now Sales Manager at The Glenturret, who will combine his passion for rugby and the whisky industry in support of the campaign.

The campaign will focus on enhancing the college's sports campus at Countesswells and Schoolhill, with plans including improved campus connectivity, a new athletic development and fitness suite, and the creation of a new 3G pitch to support year-round training and competitive fixtures.



Official opening

LGS Stoneygate, Leicestershire, has had its new Sports Hall officially opened by England's World Cup winning rugby captain Martin Johnson.

The new four-badminton court hall facility has been in use by pupils since the start of the year and has seen them take part in various activities including netball, competitive basketball games, and PE lessons.

Martin Johnson, with his wife Kay, highlighted the importance of dedication, resilience, and teamwork.

Pictured: Christina McCullough and Martin Johnson



It comes as LGS Stoneygate marks ten years since joining Leicester Grammar School Trust. The opening of the new sports hall is said to represent a significant investment in the school and in the wellbeing and development of pupils, and aims to ensure that sports continues to play a central role in school life.

Athletics Afternoon

More than 200 pupils from eight local primary schools have visited Pocklington School, East Yorkshire, to take part in the school's first Athletics Afternoon.

The new event brought together young people from across the region for an afternoon of track and field activities, friendly competition and teamwork. Supported by 26 staff and volunteers from participating schools, the event also welcomed around 60 spectators who came along to cheer on the young athletes throughout the afternoon.

Designed to be fun, inclusive and accessible to all abilities, the Athletics Afternoon encouraged pupils to challenge themselves, try

new activities and enjoy being active alongside children from other local schools.

Throughout the afternoon, pupils took part in a range of events.

Head of PE at Pocklington School, Georgia Hird, said: "It was fantastic to welcome so many pupils to Pocklington School for our first Athletics Afternoon. The enthusiasm, energy and encouragement shown throughout the event were wonderful to see.

"Our aim was to create an inclusive event where every child could take part, challenge themselves, and enjoy being active, regardless of their previous athletics experience. It was great to see pupils from different schools coming together, encouraging one another, and having fun.

Following the success of the event, the school hopes to build on the initiative in future years, creating further opportunities for local primary school pupils to enjoy sport, develop new skills, and make lasting memories.



Pictured: Pocklington Prep Athletics Afternoon



Golf tournament

More than 70 pupils from schools across Scotland have taken to the fairways of Crieff Golf Club for the annual Morrison's Academy Invitational Golf Tournament.

Pupils from P2 to S6 competed over nine and 18 holes, before gathering in the clubhouse for the prize-giving ceremony.

The tournament, now in its fifth year, attracted young golfers from across the country, with several closely contested categories. The results were:

Boys Scratch

Winner: Seumas MacCuish, Jordanhill School, Glasgow
Runner-up: Cameron Russell, Morrison's Academy, Perthshire

Girls Scratch

Winner: Hannah Sneddon, Hamilton College, South Lanarkshire
Runner-up: Lucy Moran, Morrison's Academy

Boys Handicap

Winner: Dylan Ward, George Heriot's School, Edinburgh
Runner-up: Leo Patterson, Community School of Auchterarder, Perthshire

Girls Handicap

Winner: Hannah Sneddon, Hamilton College
Runner-up: Kornelia Zarychta, Crieff High School, Perthshire

Nine-Hole Handicap

Winner: Ryan Linnus, St Dominic's Primary School, Perthshire
Runner-up: Noah Cottam, George Heriot's School

Pictured: Morrison's Academy Invitational Golf Tournament
Photo credit: Morrison's S6 pupil Tavish Tares

National Primary Swimming Championships

Highfield Prep School, North Yorkshire, (Duchy College Prep from September) are set to represent the North East in the 2026 Primary Team Swimming Championships after success in their recent qualifier.

Pupils Georgia, Jack, Lily, Luca, Messie, and Wesley will compete against the best primary school aged swimmers in the country at the Forge Ponds International Sports Centre in Sheffield.

Head of Highfield, Mr James Savile, said: "To earn a place in the finals from over 20 schools at the North East qualifier is a testament to the team's hard work and the dedication of our talented swimming coaches.

"Competing on a national stage will provide invaluable experience for the

Pictured: Pupils Georgia, Jack, Lily, Luca, Messie, and Wesley



young swimmers, who are looking forward to testing themselves against the strongest primary school teams in the country."

Highfield also recently held its inaugural Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Week, which saw pupils take part in specialist workshops, fitness sessions, sporting activities, mindfulness and yoga classes, healthy cooking experiences, and enjoy inspiring talks from experts in a wide range of fields. These initiatives build on the launch of the Fundamental Movement Skills Programme last year.

The economics of networking simplicity

What should schools consider when thinking about investing in networking infrastructure, and can you balance something that is straightforward that also offers good efficiency and a measurable return? Networking specialist, Jordan Hobday, provides some thoughts.



Jordan Hobday

Most school networks were not built to a plan. They grew incrementally – an access point added when a new classroom opened, a security tool bolted on after a near-miss, a second vendor introduced when the first could not support a specific requirement. The result, in many schools, is a network that works just well enough to avoid immediate crisis and badly enough to consume a disproportionate share of the IT technician's day.

The problem is structural, not technical. Enterprise network tools were designed for organisations with dedicated IT departments – teams large enough to manage disparate hardware and software, maintain multiple vendor relationships, and cross-reference alerts from half a dozen separate dashboards. Schools, which typically have one or two technicians responsible for the entire digital environment, need something built to a different scale and aligned with a different way of working.

The cost of this mismatch runs in two directions. When a performance issue appears, isolating which part of the stack is responsible – and which vendor's support line to call first – can take hours that a two-person team simply does not have. The licensing cost of maintaining separate tools from separate vendors adds up quickly, as does the training burden: every person who touches the network needs to understand multiple interfaces, update schedules, and escalation paths.

Moving infrastructure to the cloud

Cloud-managed networking addresses this directly, and the case for schools has become straightforward. Hardware requirements are reduced because management shifts to the

cloud. Updates can be applied automatically rather than requiring scheduled maintenance windows. Visibility is centralised, allowing a technician to see the state of the entire network – access points, switches, connected devices, security events – from a single interface, without being physically present at each site.

The security framework built into cloud-managed platforms is not an add-on. It should include integrated monitoring that continuously analyses traffic patterns, flags anomalous behaviour, and generates compliance-ready reporting without requiring a dedicated security analyst to operate it. For schools handling student data, this matters: GDPR obligations and safeguarding requirements mean network security is not optional, and maintaining it manually is both resource-intensive and prone to gaps.

The financial case is equally clear. Schools that consolidate onto a unified cloud platform typically eliminate multiple separate licensing costs alongside the administrative overhead of managing renewals, version compatibility, and vendor escalations for each. The savings come not from reducing capability but from removing tools that were never fully used in the first place.

What a unified platform actually delivers

The practical difference of a unified, cloud-managed platform is that it collapses the management surface. Instead of monitoring switches in one tool, access points in another, and security events in a third, everything is visible and manageable from one place. Good network management platforms give IT staff real-time visibility across wired and wireless infrastructure, enabling them

to spot degraded performance, unusual device behaviour, or coverage gaps before users report them.

Device management, user access controls, and performance configuration can all be handled centrally, which means that when a student has a connectivity problem, the technician can diagnose and resolve it without leaving the IT office. Scheduled tasks – firmware updates, configuration pushes, access policy changes – run automatically, reducing the volume of reactive work that interrupts everything else. Beyond operational efficiency, consolidation also simplifies procurement: one platform, one renewal cycle, one support relationship, and when something does require escalation, there is no ambiguity about where the problem sits or who is responsible for resolving it.

Making the transition work

Moving to a cloud-managed network does not require a full infrastructure replacement, and it should not require months of professional services to configure. The best network management platforms are designed to be operational in under an hour for most school environments, with an interface that IT staff can learn without specialist training and a dashboard that surfaces the most important information immediately rather than burying it in menus.

A few criteria are worth holding to during any evaluation. The platform should deliver measurable improvements from day one – better visibility into what is on the network, faster resolution of common issues, and a clear reduction in time spent managing tools rather than using them. Security should be built into the core architecture, with automatic updates that do not depend on someone remembering to apply

them. And the right partner should understand how schools actually operate, not simply offer an enterprise product at a different price point.

Where specialist tools still fit

A unified network platform is the right foundation for core infrastructure, but it does not replace every tool a school uses. Classroom collaboration software, safeguarding monitoring applications, and management information systems serve specific purposes that sit outside the scope of network management. The right approach is to run these on top of the network platform through standard integrations or purpose-built APIs, rather than letting them drive infrastructure decisions.

This layered model – a single, well-managed platform at the centre with purpose-built applications connected to it – is the practical alternative to the tool sprawl most schools are currently managing. It is a coherent strategy rather than an accumulation of workarounds, and it gives IT teams a foundation they can extend deliberately rather than one that grows by accident.

The real return on simplicity

When the network stops generating daily friction, the people responsible for running it can direct their attention elsewhere. Technicians spend less time troubleshooting and more time supporting the teaching environment. Finance teams have a clearer view of what they are spending and why. And students and teachers have a network that simply works – which is, ultimately, the outcome everything else is in service of.

Preparing for the inevitable: why cyber resilience is key to a secure digital education system

The UK education sector has become an increasingly attractive target for cyber criminals and while much attention has been placed on preventing attacks, recent incidents show that prevention alone is no longer sufficient. Cyber security specialist, Myles Bray, looks at how schools and colleges can minimise disruption and ensure rapid recovery from cyber-attacks.



Myles Bray

Recent figures¹ underline just how exposed UK education institutions have become. These figures point to a sustained and growing threat rather than isolated or opportunistic incidents. The real-world impact can be severe, with increasing examples of schools being forced to close following cyber-attacks, which disrupt access to IT systems, cutting off digital services and affecting learning for pupils and staff.

These incidents underline the importance of cyber resilience, as it focuses not just on stopping attacks, but on ensuring organisations can recover quickly and safely while maintaining essential services. For schools and colleges, this resilience is increasingly built around effective backup, data recovery, and continuity planning.

Safeguarding learning in a digital-first education system

Technology now underpins almost every aspect of education. Learning platforms, student information systems, safeguarding records, and communication tools are central to daily operations. When access to these systems is lost, teaching and learning can be brought to a standstill.

The impact goes beyond missed lessons. Loss of access to student records raises safeguarding and compliance concerns, particularly in relation to data protection requirements. Prolonged disruption can damage trust with parents, students, and regulators, and recovery can take weeks or months if systems are not properly protected.

Resilient backup and recovery solutions play a critical role in safeguarding learning. Secure and regularly updated backups ensure that essential data can be restored quickly following an incident.

For example, cloud-based backup solutions are particularly well-suited to education environments,

offering scalability, resilience, and protection for data stored across multiple platforms and locations and by reducing downtime, they help schools and colleges maintain continuity and minimise disruption to learners.

Preparing for cyber-attacks before they happen

One of the most common challenges in education is the assumption that cyber resilience is solely a technical issue. In reality, preparation requires strategic planning and organisational involvement.

Effective backup and recovery should be treated as core infrastructure. Schools and colleges need a clear understanding of which systems and data are most critical to learning and operations, where that data is stored, as well as how quickly it can be recovered in different scenarios. This visibility allows institutions to prioritise protection where it matters most.

Automation is an important part of this preparation. Automated backups reduce the risk of human error, while automated recovery processes can significantly shorten recovery times after an attack. This is particularly valuable for education providers with limited IT resources, where rapid manual recovery may not be realistic.

Regular testing is equally important. Backup systems that are never tested may fail when they are needed most. Routine recovery testing helps ensure that processes work as expected and that staff understand their roles during an incident. This turns cyber resilience from a policy document into a practical capability.

Backup, recovery, and continuity planning in practice

Cyber resilience is about more than restoring data. It is about ensuring continuity of education. Continuity

planning brings together backup and recovery with wider operational planning so that learning can continue even when systems are disrupted.

Clear plans for alternative ways of delivering teaching, accessing resources, or communicating with parents can reduce confusion during an incident. These plans should be well understood across the organisation and regularly reviewed.

Cloud-based backup solutions support continuity planning by providing secure off-site protection that is isolated from the main environment. This is especially important in the context of ransomware attacks, where attackers attempt to encrypt or destroy backups alongside live systems. Technologies such as immutable backups add an extra layer of protection by preventing stored data from being altered, or deleted.

By aligning backup, recovery, and continuity planning with digital transformation strategies, education providers can ensure resilience evolves alongside technology rather than being treated as an afterthought.

A shared responsibility across the institution

Cyber resilience cannot sit solely with IT teams. School leaders, governors, data protection officers, and teaching staff all have a role to play in supporting a resilient environment.

Awareness and training are essential. Staff who understand cyber risks and safe data practices are less likely to fall victim to common attacks such as phishing. Clear reporting processes help ensure issues are identified and addressed quickly. Leadership support ensures that investment in backup and recovery is recognised as a safeguarding and continuity measure rather than a purely technical cost.

Ultimately, cyber resilience should be embedded into institutional culture. Just as schools plan for physical emergencies, they must also plan for digital ones. Accepting that cyber-attacks are likely does not mean accepting disruption. It means being prepared to respond effectively and recover quickly.

Building resilience for the future

As schools and colleges become increasingly reliant on digital systems to deliver education and support safeguarding, the question is no longer whether cyber incidents will occur, but how effectively institutions are prepared to respond. For education leaders, the ability to restore access to systems and data quickly and securely is now a core part of maintaining continuity of education.

Resilient backup, recovery, and continuity planning are central to this preparedness. By investing in secure, cloud-based backup solutions, regularly testing recovery processes and ensuring clear roles and accountability, education providers can reduce disruption, protect sensitive information and maintain essential services during and after a cyber incident.

In this context, cyber resilience is not simply a technical issue. It is a leadership responsibility that supports safeguarding, compliance, and the effective management of risk, helping schools and colleges assure inspectors, regulators, and parents that learning and pupil welfare can be protected even in the face of disruption.

Myles Bray is CEO of CyberSentry, visit: www.cybersentry.com

¹ Office for National Statistics (2005). Cyber security breaches survey 2025: education institutions findings. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cyber-security-breaches-survey-2025/cyber-security-breaches-survey-2025-education-institutions-findings>



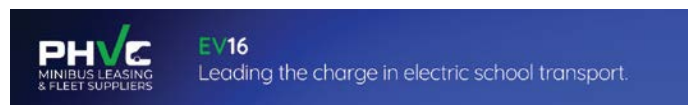
The Independent Schools Magazine online



This magazine, and back issues, are available to read online or download, visit:
www.independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk/view-issues.html

You can receive notification of future issues as soon as they are published – simply register your email address here: www.independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk
(Your email address will never be sold on or otherwise made available to third parties and you can cancel at any time.)

There is no charge for these online eMagazines, thanks to the support of:



ADVERTISE WITH US

Unrivalled Print & Digital Opportunities



Visit www.independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk for our Media Pack.

Call Sean McKeon 01242 259249 or email ads@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk



The Independent Schools Magazine

Vires per Verum – Strength through Truth

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

Editorial Advisory Board

The publishers are grateful for the interest, advice and support of a distinguished Editorial Advisory Board whose members currently include:

Elisabeth Lewis-Jones: a governor of Bloxham School, Oxfordshire; 2008 President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and Director of Liquid Public Relations, a consultancy with expertise within the education sector

Emily Roberts: Communications Officer, Independent Schools Council (ISC)

Darren O'Connor: Partner specialising in independent schools and not-for-profits at Accountants and Business Advisors James Cowper Kreston

Alex Beynon: Media Co-ordinator, Independent Schools Council (ISC)

Will Dixon: Chief Operating Officer at Lord Wandsworth College, Hampshire

Jesse Elzinga: Head, Sevenoaks School, Kent

Ceri Jones: Head, Caterham School, Surrey

Deborah Leek-Bailey OBE: Head of Independent schools, Education Development Trust; Education Advisor Child Bereavement UK; Consultant DLB Leadership

Natalie Sanderson: Managing Director of Sublime Public Relations – journalist and independent PR specialist with particular expertise in the independent education sector

Advertising Sales & Accounts:

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

Editor & Publisher, Distribution:

Angharad Jones T: 01635 201125
E: editorial@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

Design Studio/Pre-press Production, Website:

Andrew Wicks T: 01635 201125
E: studio@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

Consultant:

Kimble Earl
E: consultant@independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

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

eMagazine: Free, please register at:

www.independentschoolsmagazine.co.uk

All rights reserved. Any form of reproduction of this magazine in part or whole is prohibited without the written consent of the publisher. Any views expressed by advertisers or contributors may not be those of the publisher. Unsolicited artwork, manuscripts and images are accepted by the publisher on the understanding that the publisher cannot be held responsible for loss or damage however caused. All material, copy, and artwork supplied is assumed to be copyright free unless otherwise advised in writing. Advertisement bookings are accepted subject to normal terms and conditions – see website.

The Independent Schools Magazine is published by ISM Publishing Ltd
Reg in England No. 15757051 © Copyright ISM Publishing Ltd

Printed by Micropress Printers, Reydon, Suffolk.



English department
at Ratcliffe College.



Spaces to inspire



Our biophilic timber frame buildings are manufactured offsite for minimal disruption, using natural materials. Over 800 buildings UK-wide accommodate classrooms, SEND, SEMH, sports halls and pavilions, canteens and performing arts studios. 100% lease funding available. Fully inclusive design and build for permanent buildings that won't cost the earth.

0800 917 7726
info@tgescapes.co.uk

biophilic
by nature

 **TG ESCAPES**
modular eco-buildings

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

TAILORED, NOT UNIFORM

We work in partnership to forge strong relationships to truly understand your school's community and what sets it apart.

Creating uniforms that students are happy and proud to wear.

Call us on 0113 238 9520 or email info@perryuniform.co.uk
perryuniform.co.uk

Perry
UNIFORM